

# Notes on 2 Corinthians

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## Introduction

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

First Corinthians did not dispel the problems in the church at Corinth completely. While it resolved some of them, opposition to the Apostle Paul persisted, and Paul's critics continued to speak out against him in the church. One man in particular seems to have been the ringleader of the opposition (10:7-11). He had rallied the support of a significant minority. The issue was Paul's *apostolic authority*. His critics were claiming equal authority with Paul. This was in effect a claim to apostolic authority, on their part, and or a denial of the full apostolic authority of Paul.

News of continuing problems in Corinth reached Paul, in Ephesus, during his prolonged stay there during on his third missionary journey. He then made a brief visit to Corinth. However, his efforts to resolve the conflicts proved unsuccessful (2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). Paul apparently suffered insult and he lost face during that visit (7:12). Consequently, that was a painful visit for Paul. He then returned to Ephesus.

Paul's next step, in dealing with the situation in Corinth, was to send a "severe letter" from Ephesus by the hand of Titus and another unnamed brother (2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). He apparently directed this letter, now lost, at the party opposed to him and particularly its leader. Some commentators believe that 2 Corinthians 10—13 contains part of this letter, but the evidence for this is not convincing.<sup>1</sup>

Paul evidently intended to receive Titus' report, concerning the effects of this "severe letter," in Ephesus. However, persecution there made it expedient for Paul to leave that city earlier than he had anticipated (Acts 20:1). He found an open door for the gospel to the north in Troas. Eager to meet Titus, who was taking the land route from Corinth back to Ephesus, Paul moved west into Macedonia (2:12-13). There Titus met him and gave him an encouraging report (7:6-16). Most of the church had responded to Paul's directives, and the church had disciplined the troublemakers (2:5-11). Unfortunately, some in the congregation still refused to acknowledge Paul's authority over them (10:1—13:10).

Many scholars have tried to explain the different subject matter and tone of chapters 10—13, as compared with chapters 1—9. Some believe chapters 10—13 were a separate letter, specifically: Paul's "severe letter." Others argue that it was originally part of

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<sup>1</sup>See Richard Batey, "Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1985):139-43.

2 Corinthians, and that Paul wrote the whole book at one time. Some scholars believe chapters 10—13 were originally a different letter from chapters 1—9 and from the "severe letter": thus constituting a "fifth" letter from Paul to the Corinthians. Perhaps the best explanation is that chapters 10—13 were originally part of 2 Corinthians, but that Paul wrote these chapters after he had written chapters 1—9, and after he had met Titus.<sup>2</sup>

In chapters 10—13, Paul rejoiced at the repentance of the majority in the church. However, his concern for the unrepentant minority, and his desire to pick up the money the Corinthians had begun to collect for their poorer brethren in Jerusalem, led him to write 2 Corinthians. Along with these primary motives, Paul also felt compelled to refute the charge of fickleness leveled at him by his critics. He had changed his travel plans and had not come to see them, as he had originally said he wanted to do. The whole situation provided him an opportunity to clarify the nature of Christian ministry. Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians is an "occasional" letter: one occasioned by concrete issues.

Paul wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians from Macedonia: perhaps from Philippi, Thessalonica, or Berea, probably in the fall or winter of A.D. 56. A date a year earlier or later is possible.

Some commentators believe Paul wrote 1 Corinthians after his painful visit and after he wrote the severe letter. Others, and I, believe it is more probable that he wrote 1 Corinthians before these two events. It is very difficult to reconstruct the details of Paul's activities, since the data available to us is incomplete.

PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CONTACTS							
<i>Paul's founding visit</i>	His "former letter"	The Corinthians' letter to him	<b>First Corinthians</b>	<i>Paul's "painful visit"</i>	His "severe letter"	<b>Second Corinthians</b>	<i>Paul's anticipated visit</i>

Another view is that the "former letter" is 1 Corinthians, and "the offender" (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12) is the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5:1.<sup>3</sup>

"According to this view, there was 'no painful visit,' for the word 'again' in 2:1 does not necessarily mean that Paul made a visit between writing First and Second Corinthians. It simply means he did not want to return 'in sorrow.' The reference in 12:14 and 13:1, 2 to a 'third time' does not mean Paul was coming for his third time; it simply means that he was 'ready to come for a third time. He had planned to come (see 1 Cor. 16:5-9), evidently was ready to come (12:14), and then did not actually make the trip (1:15-17, 23)."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 430-36.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., J. H. Bernard, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:3-18.

<sup>4</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1942.

## PURPOSE

Paul's immediate purpose in 2 Corinthians was to combat the influence of Judaizers who promoted legalistic teaching. These teachers were evidently Jews, mainly from Judea, who claimed to be Christians. They may have been unbelievers or misguided believers, but they claimed to be Christians. Acts 15:1 refers to them. God's larger purpose in inspiring 2 Corinthians was to make the gospel crystal clear.

## CHARACTERISTICS

"2 Corinthians is very different from the letters between which it was written, 1 Corinthians and Romans. Whereas each of those letters is, in its own way, systematic and orderly, 2 Corinthians is, on the face of it, uneven and digressive. It is no surprise, therefore, that many scholars have suggested that 2 Corinthians is really a collection of letters put together later as a single letter."<sup>5</sup>

"Second Corinthians presents many inspiring texts and passages to the reader and teacher of God's Word. A quick survey reveals approximately eighty individual verses lending themselves to extended meditation and exposition, apart from the sixty or so constituent paragraphs of the letter. This letter is a rich lode for the edification of God's people."<sup>6</sup>

"Of all the Pauline epistles, 2 Corinthians is probably the one which presents most problems to the interpreter."<sup>7</sup>

C. K. Barrett called 2 Corinthians "... surely the most difficult book in the New Testament."<sup>8</sup> He meant the most difficult to interpret.

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-11
  - A. Salutation 1:1-2
  - B. Thanksgiving for comfort in affliction 1:3-11
    1. Thanksgiving for comfort 1:3-7
    2. Thanksgiving for deliverance 1:8-11
- II. Answers to insinuations about the sincerity of Paul's commitment to the Corinthians and to the ministry 1:12—7:16
  - A. Defense of Paul's conduct with regard to his promised visit and the offender 1:12—2:17
    1. The postponement of the intended visit 1:12—2:4

<sup>5</sup>Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 15. Cf. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup>Editor's preface to the second edition of Philip E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. xi.

<sup>8</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. v.

2. The treatment of the offender and the result of the severe letter 2:5-17
- B. Exposition of Paul's view of the ministry 3:1—6:10
  1. The superiority of Christian ministry to Mosaic ministry 3:1-11
  2. The great boldness of the new ministers 3:12—4:6
  3. The sufferings and supports of a minister of the gospel 4:7—5:10
  4. The life of a minister of Christ 5:11—6:10
- C. Appeal for restoration of the Corinthians' confidence in Paul 6:11—7:16
  1. An appeal for large-heartedness and consistency 6:11—7:4
  2. The encouraging response of the Corinthians so far 7:5-16
- III. Instructions concerning the collection for the poor saints in Judea 8:1—9:15
  - A. The example of the Macedonians 8:1-7
  - B. The supreme motive for giving 8:8-15
  - C. The delegates of the churches 8:16-24
  - D. The anticipated visit of Paul 9:1-5
  - E. The benefits of generous giving 9:6-15
- IV. Appeals concerning Paul's apostolic authority 10:1—13:10
  - A. Replies to charges made against Paul 10:1-18
    1. Reply to the charge of cowardice 10:1-6
    2. Reply to the charge of weakness 10:7-11
    3. Reply to the charge of intrusion 10:12-18
  - B. Claims made by Paul 11:1—12:18
    1. Paul's reasons for making these claims 11:1-6
    2. Freedom to minister without charge 11:7-15
    3. Paul's service and sufferings 11:16-33
    4. Special revelations Paul received 12:1-10
    5. Paul's supernatural miracles and paternal love 12:11-18
  - C. Exhortations in view of Paul's approaching visit 12:19—13:10
    1. Paul's concerns 12:19-21
    2. Paul's warnings 13:1-10
- V. Conclusion 13:11-14
  - A. The exhortation 13:11-12
  - B. The salutation 13:13
  - C. The benediction 13:14

Brommall's simple, memorable outline is worth noting.<sup>9</sup>

- I. The conciliation 1:1—7:16
- II. The collection 8:1—9:15
- III. The credentials 10:1—13:14

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<sup>9</sup>Wick Broomall, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1262-63.

## MESSAGE

The subject of 2 Corinthians is ministry: the church's work of service in the world. This is the central concept that Paul dealt with in this epistle.

What did he say about ministry? He spoke of ministry in two ways. There is ministry *per se* (how the apostles' ministries should be viewed, appreciated, and understood, i.e., philosophy of ministry), and there is ministry to the world (practice of ministry).

We will consider first what Paul revealed about the ministry of the church *per se*. This is the way Paul spoke of ministry most often in 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians there is more emphasis on the practice of ministry than on the philosophy of ministry. In both epistles, Paul dealt mainly with the doctrine of ecclesiology.

Paul had a lot to say about the *authority* of the church's ministry. Jesus Christ is the church's authority. He is the One who assigns each believer his or her particular ministry within the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 28; Eph. 4:11-13). The Corinthian church was having a major problem, because some in its company were failing to accept Paul's appointment by Christ as an apostle, and their own appointment as non-apostles. This was a practical repudiation of Jesus Christ's authority in the church. We must bow to the authority of Christ in the church by recognizing and responding appropriately to those whom He has appointed to various roles in the body. We identify these people by their gifts (divinely-given abilities) and by their offices (divinely-given positions).

Paul also had a lot to say in this epistle about the *resources* of the church's ministry. He emphasized three resources primarily.

One important resource is the "encouragement of God." Paul spoke of this in the first part of the epistle especially. We read "comfort" in many English translations, but the Greek word *paraklesis* means comfort through encouragement. The same Greek root describes the Holy Spirit as our "Paraclete" in John 14—16. Paul both taught and demonstrated in this letter that God's encouraging comfort always exceeds our discouragement and distress in ministry. The secret to finding it sufficient is taking God's view of how our ministry is really proceeding. This viewpoint Paul revealed, too.

A second resource is "divine revelation." Paul did not preach himself or a message that he had concocted. He preached what God had revealed. Thus, revelation constituted both Paul's public message and his personal encouragement. We, too, have received the same message to communicate as ambassadors of Christ. It is a message of reconciliation, and it is the source of our encouragement.

A third resource is the "prayers of the saints." Paul called for—and counted on—the prayers of God's people, to bring God's power into play through him as he ministered (1:11a). He realized that his own prayers would not move God to work as well as the concerted prayers of many of God's children (cf. James 4:2). Lack of prayer is often a sign of confidence in self rather than confidence in God.

In addition to the authority and resources of our ministry, Paul also had a lot to say in this epistle about *experience* in ministry. Three features mark experience in ministry.

First, one thing that marks ministry is "tribulation." Paul spoke extensively in 2 Corinthians about the afflictions he experienced during his ministry. Furthermore, he revealed that these are part of ministry, anyone's ministry who is carrying it out as God has directed. Some people do not welcome the gospel. To them it is a "death scent." We should expect to experience tribulation in ministry. All Christians who share the gospel with others have experienced this to some extent.

Second, another thing that marks our ministry is "hope." God has revealed the completing of our ministry. Faithful believers will all stand before Jesus Christ and receive rewards one day (5:10). This hope is a certainty. The Christian who loses sight of his or her hope is going to drift and suffer discouragement rather than "press on toward the goal" (Phil. 3:14). The end of our ministry is constantly in view in this epistle.

Third, another component of Christian ministry is "triumph." Paul revealed and illustrated, by his own attitude, that no matter how the response to our ministry may appear to us, our ministry is always triumphant. The reason for this is that God is at work through His ministers. One of the problems Paul's critics in Corinth had, and that we have, is that they were evaluating ministry superficially rather than realistically. We need to evaluate ministry on the basis of what God has revealed is happening, not what appears to be happening.

Paul not only revealed much about ministry *per se* in 2 Corinthians, but he also revealed a lot about the ministry *of the church to the world*. Three emphases predominate.

First, Paul revealed what the message of the church is: "the Word of God." Ours is a ministry of the Word. By "the Word," Paul meant the revelation that God has given us. In his day, it consisted of the Old Testament Scriptures, plus the revelations that he and the other New Testament prophets had received, that were for all Christians. Paul contrasted his message, and ours, with the message of Moses, and he exulted in its superiority. God has removed the "veil," and we can now see His glory clearly revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 1).

Second, Paul revealed the church's "equipment" to carry on its ministry to the world. We are ready to minister only when we separate from the world's sins and conform to God's will. Paul contrasts with his critics, in this letter, in both of these respects. As these characteristics mark us, we too, will be ready to minister.

Third, Paul revealed the "exercise" of the church's ministry to the world. In exercising its ministry, the church does three things, according to this epistle.

First, it exercises "discipline to restore" the erring brother to effective ministry. Paul's great concern in this epistle was the restoration of the rebellious critics in the Corinthian church to unity and usefulness.

Second, the church also is to give "no occasion of stumbling" to others. Paul's concern was that the behavior of the Corinthian Christians would be an encouragement to other

believers, and a base from which the gospel could proceed even farther into unevangelized regions beyond Corinth.

Third, the church exercises the "grace of giving." It seeks to facilitate the principle of equality that God has demonstrated throughout history, namely: that those who have should share with those who have not. This applies not only to the gospel message but also to the physical necessities of life (chs. 8—9).

From these emphases the message of the book emerges. The church needs to submit to revealed authority, to draw upon supernatural resources and equipment, and to experience triumph through tribulation—as it executes its mission. As it does so, it will effectively carry out its ministry of proclaiming the message of reconciliation to the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:131-47.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-11

Like most of Paul's epistles, this one begins with a salutation to the recipients, and then words of thanksgiving to God for His encouraging comfort.

#### A. SALUTATION 1:1-2

This salutation contains the three elements common in all of Paul's epistles and other correspondence of his day: the writer, the addressees, and a greeting.

"This salutation exhibits undoubted resemblances in form to secular letters that have come down to us from the same period. But the differences are greater, and that in three respects. There is the firm assertion of Apostolic authority, the clear indication that those whom he addresses are not ordinary people but a consecrated society, and the spiritual character of the good wishes he sends them."<sup>11</sup>

1:1 Students of Paul's epistles have suggested various explanations of why the apostle preferred to use his name "Paul" rather than his name "Saul." Some say he did so to mark the spiritual conquest of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12). Others claim he did so to show himself the least of the apostles, since "Paul" means "little" (cf. Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15). Another suggestion is that he was small in physical stature. Perhaps he did so because the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Saul" was objectionable, since it was identical with an adjective that meant "effeminate." He may have done so simply because it was customary for Roman citizens to bear a Roman name, as well as one that reflected their own nationality.<sup>12</sup>

Paul's use of the term "apostle" (lit. "one sent forth with orders") so early in his salutation sets the tone for the entire epistle. It is mainly a vindication of his apostleship. He claimed apostolic authority at once.

The Lord's title is also significant though not unusual. Paul called Him "Christ" (God's "Anointed One" sent forth as *the* apostle from heaven; v. 20; cf. Heb. 3:1; John 20:21) and "Jesus" (God in action delivering His people from their sins, Savior; 5:19; cf. Matt. 1:21).

Paul claimed that his apostleship came to him "by the will of God," not by his own or the church's initiative (cf. John 1:13; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 2:8). The gift and office of "apostle" were special in the early church. Only 12 individuals plus Paul possessed them (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 1:21-22; 9:15). However, "apostle" occurs elsewhere, in the non-technical sense, of anyone sent on God's great mission of spreading the gospel (cf. 8:23; Acts 14:4, 14; Phil. 2:25; et al.).

<sup>11</sup>Plummer, p. 5. See also W. G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, pp. 21-47.

<sup>12</sup>See Hughes, pp. 1-2.

The recipients of this epistle knew "Timothy" well (v.19, Acts 18:5). He had come to faith in Christ evidently through Paul's ministry in Lystra in Asia Minor (Acts 14:8-20; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). He had accompanied Paul on his journeys from the second missionary journey on (Acts 16:1-3), and had gone to Corinth as the apostle's emissary (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). Paul called Timothy simply a "brother."

Paul noted in passing that the church (Greek *ekklesia*, lit. "called out ones," the company of Christians) belongs to God. Even though it was "at Corinth," it was *God's* "church" ("of God"). It did not belong to the Corinthians or their teachers. Therefore its primary allegiance had to be to Him.

Corinth was an important commercial center. The city may have contained over a half-million inhabitants at this time.<sup>13</sup> It stood on the narrow land bridge (isthmus) that connected the southern part of Greece (the Peloponnesus) with the northern part. The southern part and some of the northern part comprised the Roman province of Achaia, while the province of Macedonia lay immediately to its north. Corinth was not only the chief city through which land commerce passed north and south, but it was the center for sea commerce and travelers going east and west. To the east, the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea brought ships to Corinth. From there, stevedores transferred their cargoes overland a few miles to ships in the Corinthian Gulf of the Ionian Sea. This shortcut saved merchants the long trip around the southern coastline of Greece. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and the headquarters of a Roman proconsul (governor). It had been the notorious center for the immoral worship of the goddess Aphrodite, and its population was cosmopolitan, consisting of Romans, Greeks, Orientals, and Jews.

Paul and his missionary band had established a church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Jews and Gentiles comprised it. Paul had labored in Corinth a year and a half then. Due to the influence of its culture, as well as that of false teachers, the church experienced many temptations and difficulties. I outlined Paul's dealings with this church, following its founding, in the introduction to this exposition above. In summary, Paul seems to have visited Corinth three times, and the New Testament refers to four letters he wrote to this church.<sup>14</sup>

Paul called the addressees "saints" (Gr. *hagioi*, lit. "holy ones," those set apart for God, cf. 1 Cor. 1:2).

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<sup>13</sup>Homer Kent Jr., *A Heart Opened Wide*, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup>See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:48-61; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Corinthians, Second Epistle to the," by R. Dykes Shaw; *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, s.v. "Corinthians, Epistle to the," by G. H. Clayton; *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Corinthians, Second Epistle to the," by A. Robertson; Plummer, xiii-xix; Hughes, xvi-xix; and Batey, pp. 143-6.

"All Christians are 'holy' in virtue, not of their lives, but of their calling; they are set apart in a holy Society as servants and sons of the Holy God."<sup>15</sup>

Paul intended that the Corinthian Christians would read this epistle in the church, but he also wanted all the Christians in the province of Achaia to read it. We know that at this time there was another Achaian church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), and perhaps one in nearby Athens (Acts 17:34).

1:2 This greeting expresses Paul's wish that God's "grace" and "peace" would be his readers' portion. He named these benefits in the introductions to each one of his epistles. He meant *sustaining* grace, rather than *saving* grace, and the peace *of* God, rather than peace *with* God.

"In the protocol of salvation, recognized even in a salutation, *grace* always precedes *peace*. The former is the basis and foundation of the latter; therefore, the order cannot be changed. No man can have peace who has not previously experienced divine grace (cf. 8:9)."<sup>16</sup>

"*Grace* and *peace*, the favour of God and its fruits, comprehend all the benefits of redemption."<sup>17</sup>

The combination of "grace . . . and peace" in Paul's greeting, both here and elsewhere, unites Greek and Semitic terms to form an unconventional greeting (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phile. 3; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2). Though the general structure of the salutation was typical of the day, the terms Paul used were uniquely Christian.<sup>18</sup>

The familiar language of this verse implies the deity of Jesus Christ: "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is, along with "God" the "Father," the source of grace and peace.

"This could not be so were He a created entity and not the co-eternal and consubstantial Son."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore He is "Lord." The Septuagint, which uses this title to translate the name "Yahweh" in the Old Testament, may have influenced Paul to use it also for "Jesus Christ." The contemporary religious terminology of oriental Hellenism also used this title to denote deity. Whatever the influences on Paul may have been, the term "Lord" undoubtedly implied the deity of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Plummer, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Broomall, p. 1261.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>See Judith Lieu, "'Grace to You and Peace': The Apostolic Greeting," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 68:1 (Autumn 1985):161-78.

<sup>19</sup>Hughes, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>See J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, p. 198.

## **B. THANKSGIVING FOR COMFORT IN AFFLICTION 1:3-11**

In this pericope, Paul gave thanks to God for the comfort (vv. 3-7) and deliverance (vv. 8-11) that he had experienced recently. He wanted to enable his readers to appreciate what he as an apostle had endured for Christ, and the super-abounding comfort God supplies to compensate for all the afflictions suffered for His sake.

"It [this section] is no mere amiable preamble intended only to cushion the sterner matters which the Apostle is shortly to broach. On the contrary, it is very much of a piece with the major theme of the opening portion of this epistle, namely, Paul's vindication of his own integrity."<sup>21</sup>

Paul's main concern in this section was that his readers learn the values of his experiences, not just the facts concerning what had happened to him. Consequently he dealt with these first. He shared the effects of his experiences (vv. 3-7), and then told them of one experience (vv. 8-11).

Paul's almost invariable practice of following salutation with thanksgiving, in his epistles, was a common feature of secular letters in his day.<sup>22</sup> Compared with his other epistles, however, there is some difference in this thanksgiving.

"St. Paul usually thanks God for some grace bestowed on those whom he addresses, and hence his omission of the Thanksgiving in the stern letter to the Galatians; here and in 1 Tim. 1:12 he gives thanks for benefits bestowed on himself. But his readers are not forgotten (vv. 6, 7); it is largely on their account that he is so thankful."<sup>23</sup>

### **1. Thanksgiving for comfort 1:3-7**

1:3 The Greek word translated "blessed" (*eulogetos*) occurs eight times in the New Testament, mostly in Paul's writings. It always occurs with the person of "God." It expresses both gratitude and adoration (cf. Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3).

"Adored be God! is the expression of the highest veneration and thankfulness."<sup>24</sup>

To "Jesus Christ," God is both "God" and "Father" (cf. John 20:17). In His humiliation as a man, Jesus related to God as His "God" (cf. Mark 15:34). However, within the Godhead, God was Jesus' "Father" (cf. Heb. 10:7). In other words, God was the "God" of the dependent Jesus in His human nature, but He was the "Father" of the infinite Christ in His divine nature (cf. 11:31).

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<sup>21</sup>Hughes, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup>Plummer, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Hodge, p. 4.

"In His eternal being, God was always His Father; in His incarnation as the Messiah, God was His God."<sup>25</sup>

God is the "Father of mercies" in two senses. He is their Source; all "mercies" we enjoy come from Him. Moreover, He is the Father characterized by mercy: the *merciful* Father. The Greek construction permits both senses, and Paul probably intended both.

"Comfort" (Gr. *paraklesis*) is the key word in this section (vv. 3-7), occurring 10 times as a noun or a verb. It also appears in 2:7, 8; 5:20; 6:1; 7:4, 6, 7, 13; 8:4, 6, 17; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8, 18; and 13:11. Thus 2 Corinthians truly is a letter of encouragement. This Greek word means much more than mere sympathy. It communicates the idea of one person standing alongside another to encourage and support his friend. The same root word also describes the Holy Spirit ("Paraclete"), who strengthens and guides us (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Christ, too, provides encouragement and support as our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and Helper (Heb. 2:18). Here it is "the Father" who comforts and consoles the afflicted.

"There are two things of which God is said to have the monopoly: He is 'the God of *all* grace' and He is 'the God of *all* comfort.' All grace comes from Him, all lasting comfort comes from Him."<sup>26</sup>

The double designation of God as the "Father of mercies" and the "God of all comfort" was very appropriate to Paul's situation. This description really sets the tone for the first nine chapters of this epistle. This verse has a chiasmic structure.

"The effect of this rhetorical device is to emphasize that the God who is here 'praised' is both (1) Father of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) Father (= source) of mercies."<sup>27</sup>

1:4 Paul's idea here seems to be as follows: No matter what variety of ("all"; "any") "affliction" we may be experiencing, and no matter what its intensity, God will provide strength and encouragement ("comfort") that is adequate for our need (cf. 12:9). He will bestow more comfort than we have affliction.<sup>28</sup>

"The present tense of the verb shows that this God of ours comforts us constantly and unfailingly, not spasmodically and intermittently; and He does so in all our affliction, not just in certain kinds of affliction."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Kent, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup>Harry Ironside, *Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>Barnett, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup>See the appendix at the end of these notes for a chart of the difficulties that Paul said he faced, in this epistle, and how he responded to them.

<sup>29</sup>Hughes, p. 12.

Nevertheless God does not intend for this encouragement and strength to end with our personal benefit. Its further purpose is to enable us to become God's agents in extending God's comfort to others in their afflictions ("those who are in any affliction"). As God "comforts" us in "all" our afflictions, we are to "comfort" others in "any" and every one of theirs.

"There is no exception on God's side (Ps. xciv. 19), and there must be none on ours."<sup>30</sup>

"That is the very genius of Christianity. Everything received is received on trust. Everything that you and I have from God we have on behalf of others—the comfort of God, the strengthening of God, the upholding of God, the revelation that God is able to make alive from the dead, and then presently salvation from that death which he had feared, on which he had looked with so much trembling."<sup>31</sup>

"A life of ease is commonly stagnant. It is only those who suffer much and who experience much of the comfort of the Holy Ghost, who live much. Their life is rich in experience and in resources."<sup>32</sup>

Similar experiences enable us to sympathize with others, and thus to become effective encouragers and comforters. Yet we would be exaggerating to say that only those who have suffered greatly know how to comfort the afflicted.

1:5 Paul personally experienced many ("our in abundance") afflictions and sorrows ("sufferings"), to which he began to refer here. However, note that it is a particular kind of suffering to which he referred: "the sufferings of Christ" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20). *These* were the sufferings Paul was experiencing: because he belonged to Christ, and because he stood up for Christ in a hostile environment.

"Suffering which is the consequence of disobedience and selfishness has no blessing in it and cannot possibly be described as 'of Christ.'"<sup>33</sup>

"Samuel Rutherford wrote to one of his friends, 'God has called you to Christ's side, and the wind is now in Christ's face in this land: and seeing ye are with Him ye cannot expect the lee-side or the sunny side of the brae [hill].'"<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Plummer, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 228.

<sup>32</sup>Hodge, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup>Hughes, p. 14. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:20.

<sup>34</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 190.

Paul's point in this verse was this: Regardless of how great our sufferings for Christ may be, God will not only match them, but *exceed* them—with His comfort, strength, and encouragement.

- 1:6 Later in this letter, we shall see that the Corinthian Christians lacked appreciation for the afflictions Paul had been enduring in his ministry for them. Some of them had even concluded that such experiences were not appropriate for one who was an apostle. They believed that their participation or association with Paul's afflictions and "sufferings" somehow made his *apostleship* open to question. Therefore Paul began to deal with this unsympathetic attitude and the incorrect thinking behind it.

Paul had endured sufferings for the "comfort and salvation [deliverance]" of his brethren in Corinth. These sufferings enabled him to "comfort" them better ("which is effective"), so that they would patiently bear up under ("in the patient enduring of") their afflictions for Christ's sake. They could do so until God would grant them deliverance. Paul absorbed the many sufferings he did so that the Corinthians might not have to endure them ("for your comfort").

- 1:7 The attitude of the Christians in Corinth could have caused Paul to despair, but he said he was confident that they would continue to function and grow ("our hope for you is firmly grounded") as genuine *fruits* (or plants) of God's grace (cf. Phil. 1:6). The basis for his confidence was the fact that they were suffering for Christ as he was ("you are sharers of our sufferings"). They were representing Christ in the world. More than that, they would flourish because God's super-abounding "comfort" (strength, encouragement) would cause them to stand ("firmly grounded") and to withstand (patiently endure) the affliction they were experiencing.

## **2. Thanksgiving for deliverance 1:8-11**

Paul's thanksgiving continues, but its focus shifts from the reason for thanksgiving to details of the situation that provided the occasion for it.

- 1:8 We cannot identify with certainty the precise "affliction . . . in Asia" to which Paul referred. This text, and others in the New Testament, do not give us enough information. The fact that Paul did not explain exactly what caused his affliction is significant. Evidently he wanted the Corinthians and us to focus on the intensity of the "affliction" as he was feeling it. This is what he emphasized here, rather than the specific cause of his suffering. He spoke of his affliction as though the Corinthians knew about it, so probably they had more information about it than we do.

Commentators have conjectured what the specific problem may have been, and have come up with many different possibilities. Perhaps Paul was referring to fighting "wild beasts" at Ephesus, during the uproar at Ephesus instigated by Demetrius, or to a later outbreak of hostility against

him at Ephesus. Paul may have had in mind various unspecified trials and plots against his life, a succession of persecutions in Asia, or an attempt to lynch him. Perhaps Paul was referring to a shipwreck, followed by a night and a day in the sea, anxiety over the state of the Corinthian church, a deadly sickness, or Paul's thorn in the flesh.<sup>35</sup> What we can say with certainty about Paul's affliction, is that the Corinthians failed to appreciate its intensity.

"Hence Paul writes to tell them not *what* it was, but *how* it had oppressed him beyond endurance."<sup>36</sup>

It occurred in the Roman province of "Asia" (the western part of modern Turkey), and it would have been a fatal affliction ("we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength") had God not intervened. Furthermore it was a suffering "of Christ" (v. 5), connected somehow with Paul's ministry to the Corinthians (v. 6).

"Whatever this *thlipsis* [affliction] may have been, he hints that it was far worse than what the Corinthians had to endure."<sup>37</sup>

1:9-10      The "sentence of death" was the conclusion that Paul had reached, during the affliction, that he was going to die as a result of this affliction.

"The great lesson of this overwhelming affliction which had befallen him was that he (and all who are Christ's) should trust, not in self, but in God, 'the Raiser of the dead.'

". . . in the wake of this trying experience that was tantamount to death there followed a further experience that was tantamount to resurrection."<sup>38</sup>

"This is, indeed, a theme which provides a key to the whole epistle. Is Paul assailed by anguish of spirit? It is God who always leads him in triumph in Christ (3:13ff.). Do we have the treasure of divine glory in earthen vessels? It is that it may be seen that the exceeding greatness of the power is of God, and not of self (4:7ff.). Is the Apostle always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake? It is that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in his mortal flesh (4:10ff.). Is the outward man decaying? Yet the inward man is renewed

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<sup>35</sup>See Hughes, pp. 17-18, for evaluation of some of these theories.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>37</sup>Plummer, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup>Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 322.

day by day (4:16). . . . The climax is reached in the twelfth chapter where Paul explains how through the endurance of a 'thorn in the flesh' he was taught that God's grace is all-sufficient and that His power is made perfect in weakness (12:7ff.). This was a principle to which even our Lord submitted in providing our salvation, for He was crucified through weakness, but is alive through the power of God (13:4). It is a theme, therefore, which points to the unity of the epistle, and which in particular links the concluding to the opening chapter."<sup>39</sup>

Some translations (e.g., AV) render verse 10, "delivered . . . does deliver . . . will deliver" (past, present, future). The better rendering (e.g., NASB, NIV) is, "delivered . . . will deliver . . . will yet deliver" (past, future, more distant future). In either case, the meaning is clear. God "delivered" Paul from this past affliction, would continue to deliver ("will deliver") him from the same or similar afflictions in the future, and would always and forever deliver ("will yet deliver") him in the far future.

"He says 'death' rather than 'peril of death,' because he had regarded himself as a dead man."<sup>40</sup>

"When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and His eye on the thermometer (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Peter 1:6-7)."<sup>41</sup>

Paul teaches us, then, that affliction does four things for us: (1) It makes us more sympathetic. (2) It gives us a greater appreciation for God's super-abounding comfort and encouragement, which He brings to us with the affliction. (3) It causes us to trust in God more, and (4) it gives us greater confidence in God's power—along with greater hope for the future.

1:11 Paul seems to have had no doubt that his brothers and sisters in Corinth would continue to pray for him.

". . . the Apostle is as secure of the intercession of the Corinthians as he is of God's protection, and the one will contribute to the other."<sup>42</sup>

"Joining in helping" is the translation of a Greek word used only here in the New Testament: *synypourgounton*. It consists of three words meaning "with," "under," and "work." It paints a picture of laborers bowed down under some heavy burden that they are working hard together to lift.

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<sup>39</sup>Hughes, pp. 20-21.

<sup>40</sup>Plummer, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:630.

<sup>42</sup>Plummer, p. 20.

"Intercessory prayer has great power, otherwise Paul would not so often solicit it on his own behalf, and enjoin the duty on his readers."<sup>43</sup>

"There is no limit to the power of intercessory prayer; and though the display of God's mercy does not depend on it, we may be sure that He desires nothing more than that His people should be united in mutual intercession offered in the name of His Son. When such prayer is answered, it results in an outburst of praise and thanksgiving which redounds greatly to God's glory."<sup>44</sup>

"In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence."<sup>45</sup>

"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."<sup>46</sup>

"Persons" (Gr. *prosopon*) is literally "faces." A literal rendering presents the attractive picture of "many faces" turned upward toward heaven, offering thanks to God, for His answers to the united prayers of Paul and his readers. This is doubtless the figure Paul wanted us to visualize in this verse.

From this introduction, hopefully we have learned a greater appreciation of the comfort from God, which more than compensates for the afflictions He allows us to experience in our service for Him.

"The Arabs have a proverb, 'All sunshine makes a desert.'"<sup>47</sup>

"In this beautiful introduction Paul found occasion to be thankful in the most trying circumstances. Even suffering has benefits. It provides the occasion to experience God's comfort, to watch Him answer prayer, and to observe how believers can be strengthened in their Christian walk and witness by another's circumstances."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Hodge, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup>R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 44.

<sup>45</sup>Hughes, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup>Ironside, pp. 33-34.

<sup>47</sup>Barclay, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup>Kent, p. 34. See also Stanley D. Toussaint, "Suffering in Acts and the Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 184-88.

"Comfort is the great word, comfort from God, comfort for others. So he prepared for whatever he had to say presently of rebuke, by a revelation of great tenderness. He called them to sympathize with him, and he assured them that God had sympathized with him, and that He would sympathize with them as they are asked to sympathize with him. It is the sympathy of sharing the activity of God, Who is the God of all comfort."<sup>49</sup>

## **II. ANSWERS TO INSINUATIONS ABOUT THE SINCERITY OF PAUL'S COMMITMENT TO THE CORINTHIANS AND TO THE MINISTRY 1:12—7:16**

Second Corinthians is a rather difficult book to outline, because it is a very personal letter that flowed from Paul's heart.

"Traditionally, Paul's two letters to Timothy and one to Titus are called 'the Pastorals.' But 2 Corinthians has a strong claim to be recognized as the Pastoral Epistle *par excellence*, because it contains not 'pure' but 'applied' *pastoralia*."<sup>50</sup>

The same has been said of 1 Thessalonians. Paul's purpose in writing was not to teach doctrine primarily, though he did so to a considerable extent. It was primarily to answer the criticisms of opponents who were seeking to undermine his ministry, especially in Corinth.

"Here it is his strong feeling rather than any deliberate arrangement that suggests the order of his utterances. Nevertheless, although exact analysis is seldom possible owing to digressions and repetitions, yet some divisions are fairly clear, and the letter becomes more intelligible when they are noted."<sup>51</sup>

### **A. DEFENSE OF PAUL'S CONDUCT WITH REGARD TO HIS PROMISED VISIT AND THE OFFENDER 1:12—2:17**

In 2 Corinthians, Paul was addressing a situation in which his own "children" in the faith doubted his sincerity and motives. He, too, had doubts about *their* commitment to Jesus Christ and to himself as the Lord's apostle. At the same time, Paul also voiced some strong convictions in this epistle, and sought to move his doubting readers to a condition of greater faith. This section of the epistle introduces this tension.

"Part of the achievement of effective communicators lies in their persuading their audiences that stepping-stones (warrants) do exist by which they can move from doubt to conviction."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Morgan, *The Corinthian . . .*, p. 229.

<sup>50</sup>Harris, p. 314.

<sup>51</sup>Plummer, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup>David M. Hay, "The Shaping of Theology in 2 Corinthians: Convictions, Doubts, Warrants," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 137.

### **1. The postponement of the intended visit 1:12—2:4**

In the present section (1:12—2:4), Paul sought to clarify the motives that led him to change his plans to visit the Corinthians. He did so to refute false accusations concerning him that were circulating in Corinth.

#### **The sincerity of Paul's conduct 1:12-14**

In this first sub-section, which is transitional, Paul's intention was to convince the Corinthians that his recent actions arose from sincere motives.

1:12 He first claimed, generally, that his actions did not arise from the motives that drive unbelievers, namely: self-serving ambition ("fleshly wisdom"). This motivation seems "wise" to the carnal mind, but Paul's motives resulted from God's "grace" at work in his life. He viewed all of life from the perspective of God's grace, seeking not to advance *self*, but rather the cause of Christ. He could say what he did unashamedly (with "proud confidence"), and with the "testimony" of a clear "conscience." His motives had been in "holiness" and "godly sincerity" (not a mixture of proper and improper motives). Some feel there is better support here for "simplicity in the sense of singlemindedness."<sup>53</sup> The reason for this preference is that this is the only occurrence of *hagiotēs* (sanctity, holiness) in Paul's epistles (cf. Heb. 12:10). Such had been his motivation toward all people and especially toward the Corinthians.

"The derivation of the word *eilikrinia* [*sic*], translated here and in ii. 17 by *sincerity*, is uncertain. It may refer to the cleansing process of rolling and shaking in a sieve, so that what is purged and winnowed in this way may be regarded as unadulterated (cf. the only other mention of the word by Paul in 1 Cor. v.[*sic* 5:]8). Or it may denote what is found to be unstained when examined in the sunlight. This latter connotation would convey the suggestion in this passage that Paul's character would stand the test of the searching gaze of God."<sup>54</sup>

"What Paul means here to say is, that the virtues which distinguished his deportment in Corinth were not merely forms of his own excellence, but forms of the divine life; modes in which the Spirit of God which dwelt in him manifested itself."<sup>55</sup>

"We might well add a new beatitude to the list, 'Blessed is the man who has nothing to hide.'"<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup>David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 556.

<sup>54</sup>Tasker, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup>Hodge, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup>Barclay, p. 194.

1:13 Paul seems to have alluded to a criticism of himself in this verse, too. Evidently some were saying that, in order to understand Paul's letters to them, his readers had to read between the lines. They implied that he actually intended to "say" something different than what he had written, or that he was being deliberately obscure.<sup>57</sup> The apostle's claim here was that what he had intended was self-evident in his correspondence: "we write nothing else . . . than what you read . . ." There were no hidden meanings or messages. Paul wrote some things that were hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:15-16), true enough, and sometimes he was ironical, but he did not write one thing and mean another.

The second part of this verse probably goes with verse 14 rather than 13. Put a semicolon in the middle of verse 13, after "understand," and a comma at the end of the verse. There was no punctuation in the original Greek text. "The end" in the text refers to the end of the Corinthians' lives.

1:14 Even though Paul's correspondence with them had been straightforward (direct, honest, and firm), they had not grasped ("you . . . partially did understand us") the greatness of his love for them, and how "proud" he was of them (1 Cor. 4:14; cf. 1 Thess. 2:19-20). They had a legitimate right ("reason") to be "proud" of Paul as their spiritual father, as he had a right ("reason") to be "proud" of them as his spiritual children (1 Cor. 4:15).

"This affirmation of affection not only corroborates the complete genuineness of his own attitude towards them, but attests his confidence regarding the authenticity of their profession of faith in the Gospel."<sup>58</sup>

"The day of our Lord Jesus" is the day when their joy would be complete, namely, when they saw the Lord and stood before Him (5:10-11; cf. Phil. 2:16).

### **The consistency of Paul's conduct 1:15-22**

Having claimed singleness of purpose in his dealings with the Corinthians, Paul proceeded to help them appreciate the fact that his behavior had been consistent with his Spirit-led purposes.

"Long-range plans may need to be modified as time goes by. In Paul's case, his original plans were made in good faith with the best information he had at the time. Circumstances had altered, however, and it was necessary to revise those plans."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup>Hughes, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup>Kent, p. 37.

1:15-16 In 1 Corinthians 16:5, Paul had told the Corinthians he planned to visit them after he had passed through Macedonia. Evidently he was not able to make that trip. There is no evidence in the New Testament that he ever followed this itinerary.

Here we have another plan that Paul evidently sent the Corinthians after he wrote 1 Corinthians. He says he intended to visit Corinth on his way to Macedonia ("to pass your way into Macedonia"), probably from Ephesus, his headquarters during this period of his ministry. He then planned to come back through Corinth as he traveled from Macedonia ("by you to be helped on my journey") "to Judea." This would enable him to see the Corinthians twice, a double visit and a double blessing. Paul referred to this plan as his original intention ("I was not vacillating when I intended to do this," v. 17), not counting what he had written in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:2-8, his projected itinerary had been: Ephesus, Macedonia, Corinth, and then possibly Jerusalem. However, Paul was now, at this time of writing the epistle, in Macedonia, having traveled there from Ephesus by way of Troas, not Corinth (2:13; 7:5; 8:1; 9:2, 4).

We can see why some, in Corinth, had concluded that since Paul had not followed through with his plans, they could not count on his word—and doubted his love for them.

1:17 Both rhetorical questions in this verse expect a negative answer, as the Greek text makes clear.

"Paul finds it incredible that any at Corinth could really have thought that a change in plan pointed to a change in character."<sup>60</sup>

In making his plans, Paul claimed not to have "vacillated," or to have followed his "flesh" (his sinful human nature) rather than the Holy Spirit.

"Ancient literature regularly condemns fickleness and unreliability while praising those who keep their word even under duress."<sup>61</sup>

"The charge that he is rebutting is probably that of blowing hot and cold with the same breath, and always having a retraction of what he says in reserve. . . . St. Paul contends that, though his plans changed, yet his principles did not; he was always loyal to the Gospel and to his converts."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Hughes, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup>Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, p. 159.

<sup>62</sup>Plummer, p. 34.

"There is a strong likelihood that Paul was actually quoting some of the phrases used against him. The articles with 'lightness' ["vacillating" in NASB], 'yes, yes,' and 'no, no' can be understood as 'the lightness of which I am accused,' and 'the contradictory yesses and nos which you fault me for.'"<sup>63</sup>

"Preaching is always 'truth through personality.' And if a man cannot trust the preacher he is not likely to trust the preacher's message. Amongst the Jewish regulations regarding the conduct and character of a teacher, it is laid down that a teacher must never promise anything to a class which he cannot or will not do. To do so is to accustom the class to falsehood."<sup>64</sup>

1:18 Paul associated himself with "God" to reinforce his argument: "as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no."

"The argument is one from 'ethical congruity.' God is faithful in the fact that the Gospel which is proclaimed by His messengers is not a Gospel of duplicity, full of misleading statements and of promises which are not fulfilled."<sup>65</sup>

"When God speaks His positive does not carry a hidden negative. And so it is also with His chosen Apostle: his word to the Corinthians is not a mixture of yea and nay at the same time, but a faithful yea—sincere, honest, unambiguous."<sup>66</sup>

"Apparent inconsistency or fickleness may be consistency on the highest level."<sup>67</sup>

1:19 Consistency is not only a trait of God the Father, but also of God "the Son."

"The truth asserted is that Christ, the Son of God, had not been manifested among them, or experienced by them to be unsatisfying or uncertain; but *in him* was *yea*. That is, he was simple truth. *In him*, i.e., in Christ, was truth. He proved himself to be all that was affirmed of him."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Kent, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup>Barclay, p. 197.

<sup>65</sup>Plummer, p. 35.

<sup>66</sup>Hughes, p. 35.

<sup>67</sup>Morgan, *The Corinthian . . .*, p. 230.

<sup>68</sup>Hodge, p. 21.

"Nothing could be more incongruous than to suspect of insincerity the Apostle whose entire being was dedicated to the service and proclamation of Him who is the Truth and the Same yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>69</sup>

"Silvanus" was another name for Silas, who, along with "Timothy," had joined Paul in Corinth shortly after his arrival there, and helped him found the church, along with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 17:14-15; 18:1-2, 5).

1:20 "The promises" referred to here are evidently the ones that have found their fulfillment in Christ. God was completely trustworthy, not 90 percent—or even 95 percent reliable—in fulfilling these promises. Therefore the "promises of God" (cf. v. 18), as well as of the Son of God (v. 19), demonstrate consistency.

In view of the faithfulness of God, the only proper response is "Amen!" ("Let it be so!"). The early Christians commonly spoke this word in unison, in their meetings, to affirm the truthfulness of what someone had said (1 Cor. 14:16). They addressed God through (in the name of) Jesus Christ.

"How illogical, then, while by their 'Amen' attesting the trustworthiness of God, to suspect the trustworthiness of the apostle who taught them to do so! Any charge of inconsistency must be leveled at them, not him."<sup>70</sup>

"In short, Paul has argued in vv. 18-20 that as God is faithful, so, too, is Paul's 'word.' His personal 'word' is subsumed within his kerygmatic 'word.' God's faithfulness is to be seen (1) in the Son of God preached in Corinth as God's unambiguous, unretracted, and now-eternal 'Yes,' and (2) in the fact of all the promises of God having been kept in the Son of God, as proclaimed by the apostles. Likewise 'faithful' is the 'word' of Paul, the minister of the God who speaks unambiguously (cf. 1:13) and who keeps his promises. Their very existence is predicated on it."<sup>71</sup>

1:21-22 The corporate vocal "Amen" draws attention to the unity of believers with one another, as well as with God. Paul had developed this idea of "sharing" with the Corinthians, in order to help them appreciate God's consistency, as well as his own consistency in harmony with God's. Now he did so also to stimulate their own consistency to be in harmony with his and God's consistency.

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<sup>69</sup>Hughes, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>71</sup>Barnett, p. 110.

God had "establish[ed]" them together in Christ. Paul cited three evidences of their spiritual unity: First, they had experienced "anoint[ing]," as had Christ (the "Anointed One"). This took place when they trusted Christ as their Savior. God had poured out the Holy "Spirit" on them, equipping them to serve acceptably to the glory of God (1 Cor. 12:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).

Second, they had all experienced "seal[ing]." A seal in the Roman world signified ownership, authentication, and security. God stamps His own invisible mark on every believer (i.e., the Holy Spirit), and guarantees his or her preservation as God's child and servant (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; cf. John 6:27). Thus the seal of God, in addition to the promise of God, guarantees the believer's eternal security.<sup>72</sup>

Third, they had received the Holy "Spirit" as a down payment of the inheritance God has promised. The "pledge" was earnest money, put down as a deposit, that guaranteed the consummation of the contract (cf. Gen. 38:17-18). The Greek word (*arrabona*) also occurs in the Greek papyri (all kinds of common contemporary non-biblical writings in New Testament Greek) meaning an "engagement ring." Such a pledge guarantees that the marriage will take place.<sup>73</sup>

These three acts of God, uniting us in Christ, build to an emotional climax, and reinforce the solidarity that we believers have with our consistent God.

"We should not overlook the references to the Trinity in 1:18-22: (1) the certainty given by God (v. 18); (2) the centrality found in Christ (vv. 18-20); (3) the certification established by the Spirit (vv. 21, 22)."<sup>74</sup>

By way of review, Paul's point in this section (vv. 15-22) was that Christians normally behave like Christ. Yet we all know Christians who do not behave consistently. Why did Paul think that this appeal would make the Corinthians conclude that he had been consistent? He was not relying on this argument alone, but was simply affirming his own consistency, and proving it to be consistent with the character of the One who had appointed him as an apostle.

"Paul has been showing how the accusation of insincerity and fickleness is entirely incompatible with the Corinthians' own personal knowledge of him and his word, as well as with the character of one to whom God has given stability, anointing, sealing, and the earnest of the Spirit. Now he

<sup>72</sup>See Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63.

<sup>73</sup>Tasker, p. 49. See also Barclay, p. 197.

<sup>74</sup>Broomall, p. 1265.

explains why it was that he had found it desirable to make an alteration in his plans: it was to spare them—and the explanation is fortified by a solemn oath."<sup>75</sup>

### The loving motivation of Paul's conduct 1:23—2:4

1:23 Paul's use of an oath ("I call God as witness to my soul") should not disturb us.

"Our Lord's prohibition of swearing in Matt. 5:33ff. is directed against the casuistry that was prevalent among the Jews of His time, in accordance with which not only was swearing frequent in ordinary speech, but also oaths were regarded as not binding provided the Divine Name had not been invoked and even lies were condoned if unaccompanied by an oath. Such a situation was a grave scandal in the name of religion and truth."<sup>76</sup>

"Swearing" in the Bible refers to using an oath, not to using "dirty" words. Paul staked his "soul" on the truthfulness of his claim here. He made the decision to postpone his visit, because he believed a visit right then would not be in the Corinthians' best interests.

"The gravity of his words indicates that Paul's absence from Corinth remained a matter of deep hurt."<sup>77</sup>

1:24 The preceding statement indicates that Paul took on himself much of the responsibility for the Corinthians' welfare. He hastened to clarify that it was as an apostle ("workers with you"), "not" their "lord," that he regarded himself, and behaved toward them as he did (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1, 3). Furthermore, Paul recognized that they needed no human "lord," because they were comparatively solid in their faith. The word "joy" (Gr. *chara*) occurs as often in this epistle (1:24; 2:3; 7:4, 13; 8:2) as it does in Philippians (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1).

2:1 This chapter division is artificial. Paul now clarified what he meant in 1:23: "to spare you I did not come again to Corinth." When had Paul come to them "in sorrow"? There is no valid basis for describing his first visit to Corinth, during which he established the church, as a sorrowful one. He had experienced some hard times during the 18 months (Acts 18:11) he was there, but generally this visit was pleasant. Paul later referred to his next visit to Corinth as his "third" (12:14; 13:1). Consequently we have reference here to a *second visit* not recorded in the Book of Acts. The

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<sup>75</sup>Hughes, p. 46.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Barnett, p. 114.

commentators disagree over whether it took place before or after the writing of 1 Corinthians. I believe the evidence indicates it took place after that writing.<sup>78</sup>

Note that Paul "determined" not to come *again* in sorrow. This is not the language of a vacillator.

2:2 Who could make Paul "glad" if he came to them and made them "sorrowful"? No one could. The Corinthians certainly could not since he would have made them sorrowful. Paul's point was that, if he came to them and made them sorrowful again, he himself would be sorrowful—since they were his source of joy. Consequently he had decided to postpone his visit. Evidently, if Paul had come to them as originally planned, he would have had to severely rebuke and or discipline them for some situation that existed in the church. Instead of doing this—and producing sorrow—he decided to wait and give them an opportunity to deal with the problem themselves.

2:3 Now Paul referred to a previous letter in which he said he told them he would "not come to" them again "in sorrow again": "the very thing I wrote you." Is this a reference to 1 Corinthians? Some commentators believe it is.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of an explicit reference to "not coming to them again in sorrow," in that epistle, throws some doubt on this interpretation.

Consequently other commentators have posited the existence of another letter, and this seems to be the best option. They believe it was similar to the former letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9, in that it is no longer extant, and that Paul referred to it here.<sup>80</sup> This missing letter is a fairly recent suggestion by the commentators. Traditionally interpreters have understood the reference to be to 1 Corinthians. However, the problem with that view, as mentioned above, is significant (cf. 7:8).

A third view is that the letter referred to here is actually what we now have in 2 Corinthians 10—13, which, it is argued, was originally a separate document.<sup>81</sup>

The identification of the "unknown" letter referred to here, does not affect the interpretation of Paul's words here, however important it may be for other reasons. His reference to this "former letter" simply strengthens his point made in verse 2, that when he came to visit them again, he wished to be a source of their "joy," not their and his "sorrow." He wanted them to make him joyful, too: "that my joy would be the joy of you all".

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<sup>78</sup>Cf. F. F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 183-84.

<sup>79</sup>Bernard, 3:47; Hughes, p. 56.

<sup>80</sup>E.g., Tasker, p. 51; Harris, pp. 5-6; Barnett, pp. 10-11; Martin, p. 36; Harris, p. 311.

<sup>81</sup>E.g., Plummer, pp. 44, 49-50.

"This does not mean merely that it would give them pleasure to see him happy, but also that obedience on their part, and the consequent purity and prosperity of the church, were as necessary to their happiness as to his."<sup>82</sup>

2:4 Paul's "affliction" was probably the one referred to above (1:8-11). His "anguish of heart" doubtless arose from both his affliction and the condition of the Corinthian church. This verse is one of several in this epistle that gives us a window into the heart of the great apostle. Second Corinthians is one of the most personal of Paul's epistles.

"The chief element of value in this ep. [epistle] is the revelation it gives of the apostle himself."<sup>83</sup>

Clearly Paul claimed that "love for" the Corinthians ("you") moved him to write the severe letter. He wanted to make them repentant and consequently joyful, not oppressed and sorrowful. He wept over them ("I wrote to you with many tears"). Doubtless he wept again, when he learned that his readers had misunderstood his best intentions.

"This passage, as Denney says, 'reveals, more clearly perhaps than any passage in the New Testament, the essential qualification of the Christian minister—a heart pledged to his brethren in the love of Christ. . . . 'Depend upon it,' he counsels, 'we shall not make others weep for that for which we have not wept; we shall not make that touch the hearts of others which has not first touched our own.'"<sup>84</sup>

"When the offender is made to feel that, while his sin is punished, he himself is loved; and that the end aimed at is not his suffering but his good, he is the more likely to be brought to repentance. Every pastor must see in the apostle's love for the Corinthians, and in the extreme sorrow with which he exercised discipline, in the case of offenders, an instructive example for his imitation."<sup>85</sup>

"In a manner that calls to mind Jesus' forgiveness of those who caused him pain at the time of the crucifixion (Luke 23:34), Paul responded with a deep expression of overflowing love for those who had failed him."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Hodge, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup>Shaw, 2:720.

<sup>84</sup>Hughes, p. 54.

<sup>85</sup>Hodge, p. 33.

<sup>86</sup>Barnett, p. 122.

Paul had a special affection for the Corinthian believers.

"His love for them was more abundant, or greater, than that which he had for any other church. This view is borne out by numerous other passages in these two epistles, which go to show that Paul's love for the Corinthian church was, for some reason, peculiarly strong."<sup>87</sup>

Paul's example helps Christian leaders learn how to rebuke when they must. He used severity and rebukes very reluctantly. When he did rebuke, he did it without domineering. He did it with love in his heart, and a desire to see the best in those whom he rebuked. In any event, he did it when it was necessary.<sup>88</sup>

It is often difficult to give up our plans, especially if much prayer and deliberation have gone into the planning. What makes this even harder is the possibility of our being misunderstood by others when we make changes. At any rate, God often leads us just one step at a time. We must be willing to alter our plans if it is in the best interests of others and the gospel's to do so.

"If you live to please people, misunderstandings will depress you; but if you live to please God, you can face misunderstandings with faith and courage."<sup>89</sup>

## **2. The treatment of the offender and the result of the severe letter 2:5-17**

Paul, in this pericope, explained his perspective on the encouraging and discouraging experiences of his recent ministry. He did so to let the Corinthians know how he felt about them, and to encourage his readers to adopt his attitude toward ministry. "Ministry" was a favorite term of Paul's. He used it 51 times in its verb and noun forms, and 20 of these occur in 2 Corinthians. Its six appearances in chapters 8 and 9 refer to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, a particular form of ministry. So its meaning is not uniform.

### **The treatment of the offender 2:5-11**

"Particularly apparent here is Paul's sensitivity as a pastor: He avoids naming the culprit (vv. 5-8); he recognizes that Christian discipline is not simply retributive but also remedial (vv. 6, 7); he understands the feelings and psychological needs of the penitent wrongdoer (vv. 6-8); he appeals to his own conduct as an example for the Corinthians to follow (v. 10); and he is aware of the divisive operation of Satan within the Christian community (v. 11)."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Hodge, p. 34.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Barclay, pp. 199-200.

<sup>89</sup>Wiersbe, 1:634.

<sup>90</sup>Harris, p. 328.

- 2:5 The person who "caused sorrow" to Paul and the Corinthians seems to have done so by insulting Paul, either when Paul had last been in Corinth, or since then. He was probably either the incestuous person referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1-8,<sup>91</sup> or, more likely, he was someone who had been rude to Paul, probably by challenging his apostolic authority.<sup>92</sup> It was probably out of consideration for this man's feelings that Paul did not name him.
- 2:6-8 Paul commended his readers for disciplining the offender, warned them against overreacting ("sufficient for such a one is this punishment"), and urged them to convince him of their love for him ("forgive and comfort him"). He "urged" this action, not ordered it, because true Christian love must be spontaneous and unforced, or it ceases to be what it professes to be. The "majority" may refer to the whole church (Gr. *hoi pleiones*). The minority apparently held out for more severe discipline of this person. Thus Paul threw the whole weight of his apostolic authority behind forgiving, as he had previously thrown it behind disciplining.<sup>93</sup>
- By accepting the offender, after he repented, the church would be confirming the Lord's forgiveness of him (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Luke 17:3; John 20:23).
- "Discipline which is so inflexible as to leave no place for repentance and reconciliation has ceased to be truly Christian; for it is no less a scandal to cut off the penitent sinner from all hope of re-entry into the comfort and security of the fellowship of the redeemed community than it is to permit flagrant wickedness to continue unpunished in the Body of Christ."<sup>94</sup>
- 2:9 This action would also show that the church accepted Paul's apostolic authority. This was a "test" of their obedience to his authority ("whether you are obedient in all things"). The reference to a previous letter seems to be another allusion to the severe letter (vv. 3-4).
- 2:10-11 Paul united in spirit with his readers. Indeed, he had taken the initiative and "forgiven" the offending Corinthian *before* the other Corinthian Christians had. Paul deliberately understated the seriousness of the offense, so that no one would imagine that he (Paul) considered himself virtuous for granting forgiveness readily.<sup>95</sup> This is the strongest evidence that the offense was not incest.

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<sup>91</sup>Hughes, pp. 63-64, 70.

<sup>92</sup>Plummer, p. 54; Harris, p. 328; Tasker, p. 52; Barnett, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup>See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:12:8-9.

<sup>94</sup>Hughes, pp. 66-67.

<sup>95</sup>Harris, p. 329.

Paul had forgiven the offender "in the presence of Christ," namely, with the awareness that Jesus Christ was observing him. Jesus had taught that forgiveness of one another is a condition for receiving family forgiveness from the heavenly Father (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35; cf. Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32). The apostle had also forgiven to preserve the unity that he enjoyed with this church ("I did it for your sakes"). Third, he had forgiven the offender to frustrate Satan's desire to create discord in the church ("we are not ignorant of his schemes"), and between the church and Paul ("that no advantage by taken of us by Satan"). The major emphases in these verses are: unity, moderation, and encouragement in the face of the "offender" problem.

### **Paul's recent journey to Macedonia 2:12-13**

The reason Paul included the information in these transitional verses, appears to have been to help his readers appreciate his anxious concern for their welfare—which Titus was going to report to him. It was, further, to explain the reason for his movements. Paul did not leave Troas because he was acting on the emotions of the moment, but because he had a deep concern for the Corinthians. This is the last of Paul's explanations of his recent conduct in this epistle.

Paul had returned to Ephesus from Corinth, following his "painful visit" to the Corinthian church. He then dispatched Titus to Corinth with the "severe letter." Paul may have originally left for Troas because of the riot that Demetrius provoked in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). Evidently he had planned to leave Ephesus anyway, since he had arranged to meet "Titus" in Troas or Macedonia. The apostle left "Troas," and moved west into the province of "Macedonia," because he felt distressed over the opposition in Ephesus, the situation in Corinth, and his concern for Titus (7:5-7).

### **Thanksgiving for a share in Christ's triumph 2:14-17**

"The passage that follows (2:14—7:4) is the longest coherent section within 2 Corinthians and is, arguably, the centerpiece of the entire letter. Nonetheless, it is not freestanding, but continuous with what precedes it."<sup>96</sup>

Paul's recollection of his happy reunion with Titus in Macedonia, and the good news his friend brought from Corinth, triggered the following "great digression," which was "a noble digression of irrepressible gratitude."<sup>97</sup> The Corinthians, Paul learned, had responded favorably to the "severe letter." The apostle viewed their response as a divine vindication of his apostleship and a triumph of divine grace in the Corinthians' hearts.

". . . 2.14-7.4 is a lengthy digression on Paul's part, caused by the contrast between the agitation of mind which he has just described and his present sense of relief and rejoicing."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup>Barnett, p. 137. See also Carson and Moo, pp. 436-38.

<sup>97</sup>Plummer, p. 67.

<sup>98</sup>Bruce, p. 187.

". . . one thought leads on to another in an outpouring of spiritual wealth unsurpassed in any other of his epistles."<sup>99</sup>

2:14 This outburst of praise sprang from Paul's deep-seated conviction that God's working in and through him, regardless of the appearance of the setback just mentioned, proceeded on triumphantly. This viewpoint is one of the great emphases of this epistle. Jesus Christ is, without exception, continuing to advance His work. He is building His church, and the gates of hell are not prevailing against it (Matt. 16:18). Because Paul and the Corinthians were in Christ, they shared in this triumph.

"The major objection to the hypothesis that 2 Cor. 2:14 is the beginning of a new letter, one of several said to have been combined to create 2 Corinthians, is the fact that such a letter has no clearly defined ending. . . .

"The thesis of this article is that it was the resonances of the term 'Macedonia' in 2.13 that switched Paul's thoughts into the channel evidenced in 2.14-17."<sup>100</sup>

Paul compared the irresistible advance of the gospel, in spite of temporary setbacks, to a Roman "triumph."

"Christ undertook a battle not rightly his; we share in a triumph not rightly ours."<sup>101</sup>

Paul compared the wafting of fragrant incense ("sweet aroma"), as the triumph proceeded through the streets of Rome, to God disseminating "the knowledge of Himself (Him)" through the apostles.

"The metaphor is at the same time triumphal and antitriumphal. It is as God leads his servants as *prisoners of war* in a victory parade that God spreads the knowledge of Christ everywhere through them. Whereas in such victory processions the prisoners would be dejected and embittered, from this captive's lips comes only thanksgiving to God, his captor. Here is restated the power-in-weakness theme (cf. 1:3-11) that pervades the letter."<sup>102</sup>

2:15-16 Paul also compared the apostles ("we") to the "aroma" ("fragrance") of the incense. Those who preach the gospel are pleasing to God ("fragrance of Christ to God"), regardless of the response of those who hear it. "From death to death" probably means from the *death of Christ*, that the apostles

<sup>99</sup>Hughes, p. 77.

<sup>100</sup>Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Paul and Macedonia: The Connection Between 2 Corinthians 2.13 and 2.14," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985):99, 100.

<sup>101</sup>Harris, p. 332.

<sup>102</sup>Barnett, p. 150.

preached in the gospel, to the *eternal death* of those who reject it. "From life to life" probably means from the *resurrection of Christ*, that they preached in the gospel, to the *eternal life* of those who believe.<sup>103</sup> The role of "herald of Christ" is a high calling, and no one is sufficient in himself or herself for the task. We all need the grace of God.

"Verses 14 to 16 are difficult to understand by themselves, but when they are set against the background which was in Paul's thoughts they become a vivid picture. Paul speaks of being led in the train of the triumph of Christ; and then he goes on to speak of being the sweet scent of Christ to men, a perfume which to some is the perfume of death and to others the perfume of life.

"In Paul's mind there is the picture of a Roman *Triumph* and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honour which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph. Before he could win it he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war. In an actual Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First, there came the state officials and the senate. Then there came the trumpeters. Then there were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shew-bread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then there came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the wretched captives, the enemy princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then there came the lictors [minor judicial officials] bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres. Then there came the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. And then there came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses.

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at the top of it, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him there rode his family, and finally there came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *Io triumphe!* their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the shouting, cheering crowds, it was a tremendous day, a day which might happen only once in a lifetime. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He sees the conquering Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in that conquering train. It is a triumph which, Paul is certain nothing can stop. We have seen how in that procession there were the priests swinging the incense-filled censers. Now to the general and to the victors the perfume from the censers would be the perfume of joy and triumph and life; but to the wretched captives who walked so short a distance ahead it was the perfume of death, for it stood for the past defeat and their coming execution. So Paul thinks of himself and his fellow apostles preaching the gospel of the triumphant Christ. To those who will accept it, it is the perfume of life, as it was to the victors; to those who refuse it, it is the perfume of death as it was to the vanquished. Of one thing Paul was certain—not all the world could defeat Christ. He lived not in pessimistic fear, but in the glorious optimism which knew the unconquerable majesty of Christ."<sup>104</sup>

The day of Christ's triumph that Paul envisioned was His return to the earth at His Second Coming. After the Roman Republic ended and the Roman Empire began, in 27 B.C., only emperors received triumphs.<sup>105</sup>

2:17 Many itinerant teachers and philosophers in Paul's day adulterated the Word of God ("peddling the word of God"). All was not well in Corinth in this respect.

"Here we have for the first time in the Epistle a passage that is manifestly polemical [i.e., involving strongly critical speech]."<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless Paul claimed absolute "sincerity" (cf. v. 12). His only desire was the glory of God, the advancement of the gospel, and the progress of

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<sup>104</sup>Barclay, pp. 204-6. See also Josephus' description of the Triumph of Vespasian and Titus in Rome after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, in *The Wars of the Jews*, 7:5:4-6.

<sup>105</sup>Keener, p. 164.

<sup>106</sup>Plummer, p. 73.

His people. The proofs of his sincerity were his divine ("as from God"; God-originated or God-sent) commission, his sense of divine dependence and responsibility, and his divine authority and power. As a spiritual physician, Paul did not dilute or add other ingredients to the medicine that brings life, the Word of God.<sup>107</sup>

"How is Paul able confidently to attribute such negative motives to these men, while expecting his own claim 'of sincerity' to be accepted? It appears that he is appealing to the known fact that these men have received some material benefit from the Corinthians (cf. 11:20), whereas Paul deliberately refused payment from them (11:7-12; 12:13-16)."<sup>108</sup>

We must grasp today Paul's perspective on the unfailing success of God's work in the world, and of those of us who participate in it. We must do so to see life as it really is, and to avoid the discouragement caused by the apparent failure of many of our best intended activities (cf. Isa. 55:10-11).

## **B. EXPOSITION OF PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MINISTRY 3:1—6:10**

The apostle proceeded to explain his view of Christian ministry further, so his readers would appreciate and adopt his viewpoint, and not lose heart.

### **1. The superiority of Christian ministry to Mosaic ministry 3:1-11**

Paul contrasted the ministry of Christians with the ministry of Moses. He did so to enable his readers to understand and appreciate the glory of their ministry, and its superiority over that of the Mosaic economy.

"The countermissionaries in Corinth are, in some significant way, exponents of the Mosaic ministry. They are, to use the term imprecisely, 'Judaizers.'"<sup>109</sup>

#### **Testimonial letters 3:1-3**

3:1 The preceding verses could have drawn offense from the Corinthians, because Paul told them things about himself that they already knew and should have remembered. He mentioned these things as though they were new. He explained that his intention was not to introduce himself to them again in a self-commending fashion ("beginning to commend ourselves"). Letters written with pen and ink for this purpose were superfluous, since they had already received a much better letter of commendation. He had lived his life among them as an open book.

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<sup>107</sup>Harris, p. 332.

<sup>108</sup>Barnett, p. 157.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-61.

"Evidently one of the charges brought against him was that he was always asserting himself and singing his own praises,—of course because nobody else praised him. A man who has often to speak with authority is open to this kind of criticism, and there are passages in I Cor. which would lend themselves to such a charge: ii. 6-16, iii. 10, iv. 3, 14-21, ix. 1-6, xi. 1, xiv. 18."<sup>110</sup>

Representatives of the Jewish authorities in Judea carried "letters of commendation" (recommendation) to the synagogues of the Dispersion (cf. Acts 9:2; 22:5). The early Christians evidently continued this practice (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1). Paul contrasted himself with the legalistic teachers of Judaism and early Christianity, who believed that observance of the Mosaic Law was essential for justification and sanctification (cf. Acts 15:5).

3:2 The Corinthian Christians, too, were such letters ("you are our letter") that God had "written" ("in our hearts"). God's method of commending the gospel to others is through the supernatural change that He writes on the lives of believers by His Holy Spirit. In this instance, the transformation of the Corinthians' lives was the strongest proof ("known and read by all men") of the genuineness of Paul's apostleship. For Paul to offer other letters, written on paper, would have been insulting and unnecessary. What God had said about Paul—by blessing his ministry with fruit in Corinth—spoke more eloquently than any letter he could have carried with him.

"Proof of Paul's genuineness was to be found not in written characters but in human characters."<sup>111</sup>

"Professing Christians are the Bible that men read and know."<sup>112</sup>

3:3 Paul's ministry, and the ministry of all Christians, consists of being the instruments through whom Christ writes the message of regeneration ("letter[s] of Christ") on the lives ("tablets of human flesh") of those who believe the gospel. He does this by the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of the living God").

"The Corinthian church is a letter of which Christ is the author; Paul is either the messenger by whom it was 'delivered' (Gk. *diahonetheisa*, 'ministered' or 'administered') or perhaps the amanuensis who took it down; it was 'written not with ink but with the Spirit of the

<sup>110</sup>Plummer, p. 76.

<sup>111</sup>Harris, p. 334.

<sup>112</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:220.

living God.' This contrast between 'ink' and 'Spirit' reminds Paul of the contrast between the old covenant and the new, but in view of the material on which the Decalogue, the old covenant code, was engraved, he thinks not of parchment or papyrus (which would have been suitable for 'ink') but of 'tablets of stone' as contrasted with 'tablets of human hearts' (lit. 'tablets, hearts of flesh') on which the terms of the new covenant are inscribed."<sup>113</sup>

### The old and new covenants 3:4-11

- 3:4 Jesus Christ had given Paul "confidence" that the changes that the gospel had produced in the Corinthians validated his apostolic credentials. That confidence was not merely the product of Paul's imagination.
- 3:5 Paul did not want his readers to confuse this "Spirit"-inspired confidence with the fleshly human confidence that comes from feeling adequate or self-sufficient. Our service is actually God working through us, rather than our serving Him. God is the One who makes us adequate servants. Paul was contrasting *God*-confidence with *self*-confidence.
- 3:6 Paul proceeded to identify seven contrasts between the New Covenant (agreement, Gr. *diatheke*), under which Christians serve God, and the Old Covenant, under which believing Israelites served God. He did so to heighten understanding of, and appreciation for, the ministry of Christians. The Old Covenant in view is the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant is the covenant that Jesus Christ ratified by His death (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 9:21; 11:25; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 13:20).<sup>114</sup>

The New Testament uses *diatheke* exclusively for "covenant." It always refers to an arrangement that one person makes, as in a last will and testament, which another party may accept or reject but cannot alter. The Greek word *syntheke* describes a mutual agreement reached between two parties.

The Old Covenant was very specific concerning human responsibilities. It was essentially an objective, external standard that God revealed for His people Israel, without any special enabling grace. However, the New Covenant rests on promises that include the indwelling and empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to obey (John 14:17; 16:13; Acts 1:4-5, 8; Rom. 8:4). It is also more general in its demands.

<sup>113</sup>Bruce, pp. 189-90. Cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26.

<sup>114</sup>See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305; 608 (October-December 1995):431-56.

The outcomes or results of each covenant differ, too. The Old Covenant "slew" people, in the sense that it showed how impossible it was to measure up to God's requirements. Moreover, it announced a *death sentence* on ("kill[ed]") all who fell short (cf. Rom. 7:9-11; Gal. 3:10). The New Covenant, on the other hand, leads to fullness of "life," because God's Spirit helps the believer do God's will (cf. Rom. 7:6; 8:3).

Paul used "Spirit" in this passage in a double sense. On the one hand, he contrasted the "letter" (exact wording) of the Old Covenant with the "spirit" (true intention) of the New Covenant. On the other hand, he contrasted the *non-enabling, external words* of the Old Covenant with the *enabling, internal Holy Spirit* of the New Covenant (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 7:6).<sup>115</sup> The second of these senses is more primary.

"'The letter' is a Paulinism for the law, as 'spirit' in these passages is his word for the relationships and powers of new life in Christ Jesus. Here in ch. 3 is presented a series of contrasts between law and spirit, between the old covenant and the new. The contrast is not between two methods of interpretation, literal and spiritual, but between two methods of divine dealing: one, through the law; the other, through the Holy Spirit."<sup>116</sup>

". . . experience has taught St Paul that the embrace of the Law has now become deadly. It is effete and cannot adapt itself to the new conditions. It is purely external; 'Thou shalt not do this overt act,' 'Thou shalt do this overt act.' It has no power to set free and strengthen the moral elements in man. It makes heavy demands, but it gives nothing. It commands and imposes a punishment for disobedience; but it gives no power or encouragement to obey. The spirit of Christianity is the opposite of this. It is a living force. Instead of pressing the man down from without, it lays hold of him from within; it supplies, not slavish rules, but emancipating principles. It enriches and quickens those who welcome it, and it makes them both desirous and able to follow its inspirations."<sup>117</sup>

3:7-8            Another contrast between the two covenants concerns the medium God used to carry them to His people. He employed stone tablets ("stones") for the Old Covenant, but His Holy "Spirit" for the New Covenant. These

<sup>115</sup>See Paul R. Thorsell, "The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant According to Paul," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):397-413.

<sup>116</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1254.

<sup>117</sup>Plummer, pp. 87-88.

vehicles represent the nature of each covenant: "hard and unbending" compared to "personal and friendly."

Another contrast is the relative glory of the ministries that marked the economies that the covenants created. "Glory" is a key word in this section of the epistle. It occurs 19 times in chapters 1—8, and 15 of these references appear in chapters 3 and 4. "Glory" appears as a noun and a verb 10 times in verses 7-11. Both covenants involved ministry to God that resulted in glory for God. However, the glory of the New Covenant far surpasses the glory of the Old Covenant. Here Paul began to think about the glory that appeared on Moses' "face" when he descended from Mt. Sinai, after he had communed with God for 40 days and nights (Exod. 34:29-35). The "glory" (i.e., the manifest evidence of God's presence) was so strong when Moses reentered the camp, that the Israelites "could not look" at him for very long ("intently"). The evidence of God's presence was very strong during the economy when a covenant leading to death governed God's people ("ministry of death . . . came with glory"). How much stronger, Paul argued, will be the manifestation of God's glory ("be even more with glory")—in an age when His life-giving "Spirit" inhabits His people?

3:9 The New Covenant is also "much more" glorious ("abound[ing] in glory") than the Old, in that it manifests the character and purposes of God more fully and finally. Similarly, the dawning of the sun transcends and supersedes the illumination of the moon. Greater glory attends the proclamation of the gospel than was true when God gave the Mosaic Law.

The purpose of the New Covenant is to produce "righteousness." The purpose of the Old Covenant was to show that humans stand condemned ("ministry of condemnation"), because we cannot please God by obeying Him completely. Both covenants had both purposes, but their primary characteristics are what Paul contrasted here. This is Paul's sixth contrast.

3:10 The New Covenant glorifies God so much more than the Old Covenant did ("surpasses it"), that by comparison Paul could say the Old Covenant had "no glory."

3:11 Paul's seventh and last contrast is between the temporary character of the Old Covenant and the permanent character of the New. The New will remain (cf. Heb. 13:20). The Old has passed away (cf. Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:1; Heb. 7:12). Paul compared the fading glory on Moses' face with the fading glory of the Old Covenant.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>See Duane A. Garrett, "Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:4 (December 2010):729-72.

"These verses (7-11) show what a revolution had taken place in the mind of St Paul since he had exchanged the Law for the Gospel. Christianity is so superior to Judaism that it has extinguished it. Even in its best days, when it also was a Divine revelation to the human race, Judaism had a glory which was infinitesimal compared with that which was inaugurated by Christ."<sup>119</sup>

The New Covenant went into effect and replaced the Old Covenant when Jesus Christ died. Some of its benefits began to bless all people immediately (vv. 6-11; cf. Heb. 10:1-18). However, its other benefits, specifically those on Israel, will not take effect until God resumes dealing with Israel as a nation (Jer. 31:31-34). This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and restores Israel as her Messiah.

<b>SUMMARY OF CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS</b>				
1.	<i>economy</i>	(old)	new	v. 6
2.	<i>type</i>	letter	spirit	v. 6
3.	<i>results manward</i>	death	life	v. 6
4.	<i>vehicle</i>	stone	Spirit	v. 7
5.	<i>results Godward</i>	some glory	greater glory	vv. 7, 8, 10
6.	<i>purpose</i>	condemnation	righteousness	v. 9
7.	<i>duration</i>	temporary	permanent	v. 11

"The thrust of these covenantal contrasts is that the New Covenant provides divine enablement and has replaced the Old Covenant. In this way Paul firmly established the superiority of his apostolic ministry over that of his Judaizing opponents."<sup>120</sup>

Paul was not saying the Old Covenant involved laws but the New Covenant does not. Both covenants include both laws and grace, though there were more laws in the Old Covenant, and there is more grace in the New. His purpose was to contrast the spirit, emphasis, and primary characteristics of each covenant.

"In II Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul makes the comparison between what is ministered through Moses and what is ministered through Christ. That which Moses ministered is called a ministration of death and it is specifically said to have been written and engraved in stones. The only part of the Mosaic Law which was written in stones was the Ten Commandments—that category which some designate as the moral part of

<sup>119</sup>Plummer, p. 92.

<sup>120</sup>Randall C. Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts in 2 Corinthians 3:1-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:613 (January-March 1997):78.

the law. Thus, this passage says that the Ten Commandments are a ministration of death; and furthermore, the same passage declares in no uncertain terms that they are done away (vs. 11). Language could not be clearer, and yet there are fewer truths of which it is harder to convince people."<sup>121</sup>

The best explanation for the Christian's relationship to the "Ten Commandments" that I have found is as follows: God has terminated the whole Mosaic Code, of which the Ten Commandments were a part, *as a code*. We are now under a new code (covenant), the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), which contains nine of the Ten Commandments.<sup>122</sup>

## **2. The great boldness of the new ministers 3:12—4:6**

The superiority of Christian ministry should produce great openness and encouragement within Christ's ministers. Paul developed these qualities in this section to enable his readers to understand his behavior and to respond in like manner in their own ministries.

### **The openness of Christian ministry 3:12-18**

"If the keyword in vv. 7-11 is 'glory,' the keyword for vv. 12-18, of which vv. 12-15 form the first part, is 'veil'; 'veil'-related words occur six times in these verses."<sup>123</sup>

3:12 The "hope" to which Paul referred was the confidence that he, and the other apostles and Christians, served God under a covenant that God would not supersede (set aside or replace).<sup>124</sup> Another view is that Paul resumed his thought from verse 4, and that this hope is the same as the confidence that he spoke of there.<sup>125</sup> The "boldness" (Gr. *parrhesia*) to which Paul referred is plainness of speech, that has within it our concept of fearlessness (7:4; cf. Rom. 1:16). This word originally meant fearless candor in speech, but came to mean confidence or openness in action as well as in word.<sup>126</sup> We can be confident and certain in our mission as well as in our message, though here Paul was speaking specifically of his speech.

<sup>121</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):243-44. See also Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

<sup>122</sup>See also Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 68-97.

<sup>123</sup>Barnett, p. 188.

<sup>124</sup>Plummer, p. 95; Hughes, p. 107.

<sup>125</sup>E.g., Hodge, p. 64.

<sup>126</sup>Harris, p. 339. See also W. C. van Unnik, "The Christian's Freedom of Speech in the New Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 44:2 (1962):466-88; and idem, "'With Unveiled Face,' and Exegesis of 2 Corinthians iii 12-18," *Novum Testamentum* 6:2-3 (1963):153-69.

3:13 One meaning of *parrhesia* ("boldness") is barefacedness. Paul could be *barefaced* in his confidence because of the permanent character of the covenant under which he ministered. "Moses," in contrast, could not. He ministered with a literal "veil over his face" much of the time (Exod. 34:29-35). He removed the veil when he spoke with the people (Exod. 34:33) and when he spoke with God in the tabernacle. He wore it at other times, evidently to teach the Israelites' their unworthiness to behold God's glory. Paul used this difference in ministry to illustrate the superior nature of the New Covenant.

Moses also put a veil over his face so the departure of his fading glory ("end of what was fading") would not discourage the Israelites. The Old Testament does not say that was his reason. It implies that Moses covered his face so the Israelites would not see the glory that was there. Perhaps Paul meant that the consequence of Moses' putting the veil over his face was that the Israelites could not see the fading of his facial glory.<sup>127</sup> Paul's implication, therefore, was that Christians can behold God's glory more fully in the New Covenant, and it will not fade away.

3:14-15 Paul said that the inability ("hardened," i.e., obtuseness, blindness) to perceive God's revealed glory persists to the present day among the Jews (cf. Rom. 11:7).

"The Israelites' inability to see the glory shining from Moses' face, fading though that glory was, is treated as a parable of their descendants' present inability to realize the transitory character of the Mosaic order and to recognize the unfading glory of the gospel dispensation."<sup>128</sup>

"This is always the result of refusing and suppressing the revelation of divine truth. A veil of intellectual darkness hides the glory which has been deliberately rejected."<sup>129</sup>

The "Old Covenant" (v. 14) probably refers to the Mosaic Law, and "Moses" (v. 15) probably refers to the whole legal system that Moses gave. This use of "Moses" is a common figure of speech called metonymy, in which the name of one thing is used for that of another associated with or suggested by it—as in "the White House has decided" instead of "the President has decided."

3:16 Only when the light of the glory of God from Jesus Christ shines on a person (i.e., he or she perceives the gospel), can that individual fully understand that revelation. Before God Himself removes that veil, that

<sup>127</sup>J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 4 vols., vol. 3: *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner, p. 144.

<sup>128</sup>Bruce, p. 192.

<sup>129</sup>Hughes, p. 111.

person cannot perceive it clearly. This applies to all people, but in the context Paul was speaking of Jews particularly. Whenever a person comprehends that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4), that one then understands that the dispensation of grace has superseded the dispensation of the law (John 1:17).<sup>130</sup> "Turns to the Lord," means conversion to Jesus Christ.

- 3:17 This verse explains the former one. The Holy Spirit (vv. 3, 6, 8) is the member of the Trinity who causes (helps) a person to understand and believe that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Paul here described the Spirit's function and equated Him with Christ (cf. v. 14). Believing in Jesus liberates one from sin, death, and the Mosaic Law—but not from the obligation to respond obediently to God's new revelation in Christ, of course. Even though "the Spirit" is "Lord" (God), His presence liberates the believer rather than enslaving him or her (cf. Rom. 8:15).

"Christian freedom is not license; it is the free acceptance of the ties of affection instead of the enforced acceptance of bonds of fear."<sup>131</sup>

- 3:18 In conclusion, Paul referred to Christian experience in general. All Christians, not just the Israelites' leader, Moses, experience transformation daily as they contemplate the glory of God revealed in His Word, and especially in the living Word, Jesus Christ. The perception of that revelation is still indirect. Paul's point was that the "image" of God, that we see in the Word, accurately reflects God, though we do not yet see God Himself. What we see in the "mirror" of God's Word is the Lord, not ourselves. We experience gradual transformation. As we observe Christ's glory, we advance in Christ-likeness and reflect His glory, not in our faces but in our characters (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18). This glory will not fade away, but will increase over time ("from glory to glory"), providing we continue to contemplate the Lord. The "Spirit," who is "the Lord," is responsible for this gradual transformation.<sup>132</sup> Another interpretation is that Christ, as Divine Wisdom, is the "mirror" in view.<sup>133</sup>

"Moses *reflected* the glory of God, but you and I may *radiate* the glory of God."<sup>134</sup>

". . . Paul may also have in mind the Semitic idiom in which 'to uncover the face (head)' means 'to behave boldly (frankly).' If so, then 'with unveiled face' has practically the

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<sup>130</sup>Harris, p. 338.

<sup>131</sup>Plummer, p. 104.

<sup>132</sup>See Robert A Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):141-54.

<sup>133</sup>Keener, p. 170.

<sup>134</sup>Wiersbe, 1:640.

same meaning as 'with boldness' (Gk *parrhesia*) and may help to explain Paul's use of the latter expression in verse 12."<sup>135</sup>

### The encouragement of Christian ministry 4:1-6

4:1 Paul now returned to the theme of being a minister of the New Covenant (3:6). "Since we have a (this) ministry," in which the Spirit opens people's eyes and transforms their characters, we can be encouraged. Our job is not simply to lay God's high standards on people, as Moses did, but to provide God's grace to them as the Holy Spirit's agents. Paul acknowledged that God has given us this privilege in His "mercy," not because we deserve to be the ministers of a superior covenant.

". . . since the glory of the new covenant ministry 'remains' (3:11), as opposed to the old that is 'abolished' (3:11), it is appropriate that the new covenant minister 'remains,' that is, 'perseveres,' 'does not give up.'"<sup>136</sup>

"It is difficult to decide whether the 1st pers. plur. ["we"] includes Timothy or anyone else. Apparently the Apostle is thinking mainly of himself."<sup>137</sup>

4:2 In view of our inevitable success, we do not need to resort to disgraceful subtleties and subterfuge. Paul's critics in Corinth were apparently accusing him of deceitful behavior (cf. 7:2; 12:16). He continues here his self-defense from 2:17. Paul did not need to trick his hearers ("not walking in craftiness"), because the Spirit would enlighten them concerning the "truth," and transform their characters. Some of the Corinthians may have concluded that because Paul did not require obedience to the Mosaic Law, he was thus watering down the gospel to make it more acceptable. They apparently accused him of preaching "easy believism."

"In any self-defense, self-commendation must play some part. But Paul's self-commendation was distinctive. He commended himself, not by self-vindication at every point, but simply by the open declaration of the truth (in particular, the gospel and its implications). His appeal was not directed to a partisan spirit or the prejudices of men but 'to every man's conscience.' His self-commendation was undertaken with God as onlooker."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Bruce, p. 193.

<sup>136</sup>Barnett, p. 212.

<sup>137</sup>Plummer, p. 110.

<sup>138</sup>Harris, p. 340.

4:3-4 By "veiled" here, Paul meant "obscure." The reason some people did not immediately understand and appreciate the gospel, was that Satan had blinded (obscured) their minds. It was not because *Paul* had sought to deceive his hearers by making the gospel obscure. The gospel is obscure to the lost until the Spirit enlightens their minds (3:16-17; cf. John 16:8-11; 1 Cor. 2:14-16).

"Apparently, Paul is responding to criticism that, to some, his gospel is no revelation at all, in other words, it is 'veiled.' . . . From whom, according to them, would his gospel be 'veiled'? Their reply would be, 'It is veiled from fellow Jews because Paul's message is unacceptable to them.'"<sup>139</sup>

The "god of this age" is not God the Father, but Satan (cf. Matt. 4:8-9; John 12:31; 16:11; Gal. 1:4). He is the one whom this world has made its "god."

"During the time—believed by St Paul to be short—which would elapse before the Coming of the Lord, Satan reigned wherever there was opposition to the will of God, and this was an enormous sphere."<sup>140</sup>

"It was because they [i.e., the unbelieving] refused to believe that Satan had power to blind them. They resisted the influence of light until they lost the power of appreciating it."<sup>141</sup>

Jesus Christ is the "image (Gr. *eikon*) of God," in the sense that He visibly and accurately represents the invisible God (cf. John 1:18; Col. 1:15). The personality and distinctiveness of God are especially in view whenever this Greek word describes Jesus in relation to God.<sup>142</sup>

"The glorified Christ is the ultimate and eschatological revelation of God. There is nothing more that can or will be seen of God."<sup>143</sup>

4:5 Even though Paul occasionally needed to commend himself "to every man's conscience" (v. 2; 6:4), he never promoted himself. Instead, he proclaimed ("preached") Jesus Christ, just like a faithful slave announces his master rather than himself. This is what he had done in Corinth. He did

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<sup>139</sup>Barnett, p. 216.

<sup>140</sup>Plummer, p. 114.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>142</sup>Harris, p. 340.

<sup>143</sup>Barnett, p. 219.

not conduct himself as the spiritual overlord ("ourselves as your bond-servants") of these Christians (1:24). A herald draws attention to himself only to promote the one he or she announces. This is also what Jesus did in the Incarnation. Both Paul and Jesus took the role of a servant and bound themselves to fulfill God's mission for them, which involved serving others.

"What humbler view of himself could a messenger of the gospel take than to regard himself not only as a bondservant of Jesus Christ (as Paul delights to call himself; cf. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1) but even as the bondservant of those to whom he ministers?"<sup>144</sup>

"It would be hard to describe the Christian ministry more comprehensively in so few words."<sup>145</sup>

Paul in his preaching presented Jesus as the sovereign God ("as Lord") to whom everyone must submit in faith. He did not make total submission to the Lordship of Christ a condition for salvation, however. Voluntary submission to the Lordship of Christ was a message that he reserved for believers (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2). When Paul preached Christ to the unsaved, he presented Him as *God*, who, by virtue of His deity, is sovereign over all people (cf. Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Col. 2:6).

"The implication here is that lordship equates with deity. 'LORD' regularly translates 'Yahweh' in the LXX, and there are numerous NT references to Jesus as 'Lord' that echo OT (LXX) passages that refer to Yahweh."<sup>146</sup>

To become a believer, an unsaved person must submit to Christ's Lordship, at least to the extent that he or she acknowledges that Jesus is God, and is therefore over him or her in authority. Trusting in the person and work of Christ is submission to His Lordship to that extent. However, when one becomes a believer, and appreciates what God has done for him or her in salvation, yielding every area of one's life to Christ's control becomes a voluntary act of worship (Rom. 12:1). To make what is *voluntary* for the Christian, a *necessary requirement* for the unsaved to obtain justification, is adding to what God requires for justification.

4:6 Why had Paul conducted himself as he did? It was because God had dispelled the "darkness" in his heart, by illuminating it with the "knowledge" of Himself ("of the glory of God"), that comes through understanding Jesus Christ ("in the face of Christ"). Individual

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<sup>144</sup>Hughes, p. 131.

<sup>145</sup>Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 134.

<sup>146</sup>Barnett, p. 222.

regeneration is a work of God as supernatural and as powerful as the creation of the cosmos (Gen. 1:3). Now Paul wanted to share that "Light" with others. In the physical Creation, God spoke directly, but in the spiritual creation of new life, He usually speaks indirectly through His servants. Nevertheless it is His Word that creates new life.

"Like the earth of Genesis 1:2, the lost sinner is formless and empty; but when he trusts Christ, he becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). God then begins to *form* and *fill* the life of the person who trusts Christ, and he begins to be fruitful for the Lord. God's, 'Let there be light!' makes everything new."<sup>147</sup>

Paul was probably alluding to his own conversion experience on the Damascus road when he wrote this verse (cf. Acts 9:3, 8-9; 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13; Gal. 1:15-16). It was then that the apostle saw God's glory in the unveiled face of Jesus Christ.

The sincerity, simplicity, and steadfastness of Paul that surfaces in this passage can and should distinguish all ministers of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:1-12).

### **3. The sufferings and supports of a minister of the gospel 4:7—5:10**

Paul proceeded to explain further the nature of ministry under the New Covenant, so his readers would understand his ministry and theirs better. The nature of Christianity is paradoxical. Second Corinthians explains more of these paradoxes than any other New Testament book.

In writing this epistle, Paul wanted his readers to realize that his ministry was not faulty, as his critics charged, but that it was solidly within the will of God. To do this, he described his own ministry as a projection or extension of Jesus' ministry. As Jesus had died and been raised, Paul was similarly dying, but he was also experiencing the benefits of resurrection. He used the death and resurrection of Jesus, metaphorically, to describe his own ministry. This becomes most evident in 4:7-15, but also in 5:14-21 and in chapters 8—9, where the metaphor describes the ministry of giving.<sup>148</sup>

#### **The contrast between the message and the messenger 4:7-15**

Paul presented many paradoxical contrasts, involved in the sufferings and supports of the Christian, in order to clarify for his readers the real issues involved in serving Jesus Christ.

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<sup>147</sup>Wiersbe, 1:642.

<sup>148</sup>See Steven J. Kraftchick, "Death in Us, Life in You," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 156-81.

"This passage, which is about suffering and death (vv. 7-12), stands in stark contrast with the theme of 'glory' so brilliantly developed by Paul in 3:7—4:6, to which he also will return in vv. 16-18."<sup>149</sup>

4:7 The "treasure" that every Christian possesses is "the knowledge of the glory of God" (v. 6, i.e., the gospel). Even though *this* is what dispels spiritual darkness, God has deposited this precious gift in every clay Christian ("earthen vessels"). This is a paradox, consequently the "but."

". . . it is not impossible that here the *skeuos* ["vessel"] is the whole personality. It was in the man as a whole, and not in his body in particular, that the Divine treasure which was to enrich the world was placed to be dispensed to others."<sup>150</sup>

"A vessel's worth comes from what it holds, not from what it is."<sup>151</sup>

God has done this so all may see that the transforming "power" of the gospel is supernatural ("of God"), and not just human (cf. Judg. 7:19-20).

"The pottery lamps which could be bought for a copper or two in the Corinthian market-place provided a sufficient analogy; it did not matter how cheap or fragile they were so long as they showed the light."<sup>152</sup>

Paul was not disparaging the human body by calling it an "earthen vessel," nor was he saying that it is only a vehicle for the soul. Paul viewed man as a unity of material and immaterial parts (monism), rather than as having higher and lower elements (dualism).<sup>153</sup> He was contrasting the relative insignificance and unattractiveness of the *light-bearers*, with the surpassing worth and beauty of the *Light* (i.e., God's glory).<sup>154</sup>

"It is precisely the Christian's utter frailty which lays him open to the experience of the all-sufficiency of God's grace, so that he is able even to rejoice because of his weakness (12:9f.)—something that astonishes and baffles the world, which thinks only in terms of human ability."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Barnett, p. 227.

<sup>150</sup>Plummer, p. 127

<sup>151</sup>Kraftchick, p. 172.

<sup>152</sup>Bruce, p. 197.

<sup>153</sup>See D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, pp. 31-44.

<sup>154</sup>Harris, p. 342.

<sup>155</sup>Hughes, p. 137.

4:8-9 Paul pointed out four specific ways in which the weakness of his earthen vessel contrasted with God's power (cf. 1:5, 10). He may have been thinking of himself as a gladiator or a soldier, in view of what he wrote. He had been on the ropes ("afflicted in every way")—but not trapped in a corner ("not crushed"). He was without proper provision ("perplexed")—but not completely without resources ("not despairing"). He was a hunted man ("persecuted")—but "not" totally "forsaken." Finally, he felt "beaten (struck) down"—but "not destroyed." In these respects his life, representing all believers who herald the gospel, was very like our Lord's. Paul's numerous escapes from defeat and death were signs of Christ's power at work in him.

"To be at the end of man's resources is not to be at the end of God's resources; on the contrary, it is to be precisely in the position best suited to prove and benefit from them, and to experience the surplus of the power of God breaking through and resolving the human dilemma.

"As death is the culminating moment of the Christian's weakness, so also it is the point at which the all-transcending power of God is most marvellously [*sic*] displayed."<sup>156</sup>

"Verses 8-9 represent the first of the 'tribulation lists' (*peristaseis*) found within 2 Corinthians (see also 6:3-10; 11:23b-33; 12:7-10; cf. 1:5-11; 2:14-17)."<sup>157</sup>

4:10 Paul summarized the four preceding contrasts with another paradox. He was in one sense "always . . . dying," but in another sense never lifeless. Paul's use of *nekrosis* ("dying," v. 10), rather than *thanatos* ("death"), shows that what he had in mind was not our identification with Jesus in His death. Instead, Paul meant our sharing in His sufferings by being exposed to danger and death for His sake daily (cf. 1:5-6; 1 Cor. 15:31; Phil. 3:10). The next verse makes this clearer.

4:11 Paul faced threats to his life daily ("constantly"; "always," v. 10) for his witness to Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:30-31). This seems clearly to be what he meant by "the dying of Jesus." There are three other ways that the New Testament associates us with Jesus' death, but these are not in view here. They are our identification with His death in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), our daily mortification of the flesh (Gal. 5:24), and our physical debilitation as we serve Christ.

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-39, 140.

<sup>157</sup>Barnett, p. 232.

Paradoxically, the death ("dying") and the "life of Jesus" were simultaneously obvious in Paul's experience (cf. 1:4-5). Though living, Paul was always in danger of dying, because enemies of Jesus were constantly rejecting him and trying to kill him. However, even though his body ("mortal flesh") was in the process of aging and dying, God kept giving him life ("the life of Jesus"), just as He had provided resurrection life to Jesus, in order that Paul could continue to serve Him.

4:12 There is another paradox. While Christ's ministers suffer ("death works in us") because of their testimony for the Savior, those to whom they minister experience new and greater spiritual "life" because of those ministers' faithfulness (cf. 1:3-7). The more faithful that Paul and his companions remained to God's will, the more they suffered and the more the Corinthians prospered spiritually.<sup>158</sup>

4:13-14 Why did Paul continue to serve God faithfully, even though it meant suffering for him? First, Paul believed, as the psalmist did, that inner conviction about the truth must result in outward confession of that truth (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16). Paul quoted the Septuagint translation of the Psalms, which represents the spirit of the original Hebrew here. The psalmist also spoke from a context of deliverance from suffering. He had trusted in ("believed") "God," and God had vindicated him (Ps. 115:1-11). "Therefore" he expressed ("spoke") his devotion to the Lord (Ps. 115:12-19).

Second, Paul believed that physical death was not the end of existence, but that the power of God, presently at work in him, would continue working in him after death. When the apostle could serve God no longer due to death, God's power would raise him from the dead ("He who raised the Lord Jesus . . . will raise us"). The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of believers in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:23). God's power would unite Paul with his readers ("He who raised the Lord Jesus . . . will present us with you"), whom God would also resurrect (cf. Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 4:14). Paul's reference to reunion with the Corinthians in heaven likely suggests his genuine love for them.

4:15 This concluding statement also reflects the apostle's sincere desire for the Corinthians' welfare. "All" the "things" Paul had been experiencing would result in the Corinthians' good ("for your sakes") and God's "glory." He gladly endured suffering for the gospel in view of this prospect. Paul had brought God's "grace" to Corinth, and now the Corinthians were taking that grace to other people in other places ("spreading to more and more people"). Gratitude ("giving of thanks") is always the proper response to God's "grace."

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<sup>158</sup>See Toussaint, pp. 190-91.

"As God's grace expanded in their hearts and through them reached ever-increasing numbers, so too, the volume of thanksgiving to God for the receipt of illumination (cf. 4:6) would increase and promote the glory of God."<sup>159</sup>

So far Paul gave three reasons for his refusal to become discouraged as he served the Lord: (1) In the past, he had received a divine commission to proclaim a new and better covenant (v. 1). (2) In the future, he looked forward to sharing Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead (v. 14). (3) And in the present, he had the opportunity to promote the Corinthians' spiritual welfare and the glory of God (v. 15).

### The contrast between outward deterioration and inward renewal 4:16-18

4:16 In view of the reasons just cited, the apostle restated that he did "not lose heart" (cf. v. 1). However, Paul's sufferings, while not fatal, were destroying his body. Nevertheless, even this did not discourage him, for even though physically ("our outer man"), he was "decaying," spiritually he was still developing ("our inner man is being renewed"; cf. Eph. 3:16). In this verse, Paul resumed the thought he began in verse 1.

"We are, in fact, on the threshold of one of the most important eschatological passages of the New Testament."<sup>160</sup>

4:17 Paul introduced another paradox. Suffering now will result in glory later. He could consider the afflictions he had undergone as a servant of Christ as "light," only in comparison with the heavy ("eternal") "weight of glory" he would receive at Christ's judgment seat (cf. 11:23-27).

"His choice of the expression 'the weight of glory' may be influenced by the fact that in Hebrew 'weight' and 'glory' come from the same root *kbd*. It is because the coming 'glory' is so 'weighty' that the present 'affliction' seems so 'slight' (Gk *elaphron*, 'light'), just as the eternity of the coming 'glory' makes the 'affliction' seem 'momentary.' It is not simply that the 'glory' is the compensation for the 'affliction' [cf. Rom. 8:18] . . . rather, the 'glory' is the product of the 'affliction,' produced in measure 'beyond all comparison' . . ."<sup>161</sup>

Paul spoke of the "glory" as something that he could *increase*, by continuing to suffer—the result of following God faithfully. He was referring to his eternal reward.

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<sup>159</sup>Harris, p. 344.

<sup>160</sup>Hughes, p. 152.

<sup>161</sup>Bruce, p. 199.

"No more [i.e., Neither] does the Apostle mean that all suffering is productive of glory, as though it were an infallible means to this end. The history of the Church has shown that such a concept leads to an unscriptural self-interest and to a misconception of the true character of Christian suffering. Paul is concerned here with suffering *for Jesus' sake* (v. 11; cf. Acts 9:16), which means suffering in which there cannot possibly be any self-interest. It is precisely as the 'I' decreases that Christ increases (Jn. 3:30)."<sup>162</sup>

4:18 Another irony is that the physical ("temporal") "things," that "are seen" now, appear to be permanent, but in fact the spiritual ("eternal") "things," that we cannot see ("which are not seen"), are permanent (cf. Heb. 11:1). What we can see now is only temporary. The present, momentary, visible things of life, *paled* for the apostle as he considered the future, eternal, invisible things on ahead. These things included his fullness of joy, his completed salvation, and his heavenly inheritance. By keeping these unseen realities in view, Paul could avoid discouragement when the troubles he saw tempted him to feel discouraged (cf. Col. 3:1-2).

### **The contrast between our present and our future dwellings 5:1-10**

Paul continued to give reasons why we need not lose heart. The themes of life in the midst of death and glory, following as a result of present suffering, also continue.

"Few chapter divisions are more unfortunate than this one since what follows (5:1-10) details the thought expressed in 4:16-18. Failure to appreciate this fact unduly complicates these already difficult verses by removing their contextual constraints."<sup>163</sup>

What about the believer who dies before he or she has followed God faithfully for very long? Will such a person experience no glory in the future? Paul explained that there are three bases for comfort in such a case. All Christians who die will receive an immortal body (v. 1). This is by itself a substantial gift of glory. Second, all Christians, including those who die soon after becoming believers, presently possess the Holy Spirit—who is God's pledge of our future complete glorification (vv. 4-5). Third, death begins a new phase of existence for all believers, that will be far superior to what we experience now (vv. 7-8).

5:1 "For" (NASB) or "Now" (NIV, Gr. *gar*) continues the contrast between things presently seen and things not yet seen (4:18). Here Paul contrasted our present and future bodies.

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<sup>162</sup>Hughes, p. 157.

<sup>163</sup>Lowery, p. 565.

"The 'clothed upon' and 'swallowed up by life' imagery (vv. 2-4), when read alongside 1 Cor 15:53-54, leaves little doubt that this 'house' is the individual's resurrection *body*."<sup>164</sup>

As a tentmaker, Paul compared the human body to a "tent" ("our earthly tent"). Jesus referred to His body as a temple, and He predicted that God would raise it up (Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22). Since God had raised up Jesus' "temple," Paul believed that He would also raise our "tents." In ancient times, a "tent" was a familiar symbol of what was transitory.<sup>165</sup> Our physical bodies are only temporary structures, but God is preparing new bodies for us, that are far superior to anything that human hands can produce and maintain.

"The general meaning is that life here is only a pilgrimage. Christians are citizens of a realm that is in heaven, and on earth they are only sojourners . . ."<sup>166</sup>

Paul earlier indicated that he expected that the Lord would probably return before he died (1 Thess. 4:15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51). Here he said that he might die before Jesus Christ returns for His own. Perhaps his recent brush with death in Ephesus made this possibility fresh in his mind (1:8-11). No Christian can ever be sure which will come first, the Rapture or death. These statements indicate that Paul believed in Jesus' imminent return to take Christians to heaven (John 14:1-3).

Imminent means overhanging. The doctrine of imminency does not teach that Jesus Christ *will* come soon, but that He *could* come soon—even before we die. If the Tribulation must precede the Rapture, the Rapture must be at least seven years away, years that will be full of terrible trouble for believers and the whole world. This is not the picture that Paul's references to the Rapture present.

5:2-3

Paul changed his metaphor slightly. God will "clothe" us with a new and better garment. Until then, "we groan" because we feel the pains associated with our mortality, namely: our physical limitations, sickness, and the increasing disability that accompanies advancing age. This new covering ("dwelling from heaven") apparently awaits us immediately after death and before our resurrection. It is therefore probably an intermediate body.

Even though there is no specific instruction in Scripture concerning an "intermediate body," and its characteristics, its existence seems beyond doubt. References to believers—after death and before resurrection—

<sup>164</sup>Barnett, pp. 257-58. Cf. Keener, p. 179.

<sup>165</sup>Hughes, p. 162.

<sup>166</sup>Plummer, p. 142.

suggest that they have bodies (cf. Lazarus, Luke 16:19-25; Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17:1-3, et al; the martyred dead in heaven, Rev. 6:9-11 and 7:13-17).<sup>167</sup> These bodies evidently will not be suitable for eternal existence, since God will replace them with resurrection bodies.<sup>168</sup>

Another view sees this "building" or "dwelling from heaven" as our heavenly home.<sup>169</sup> God has also prepared a "dwelling *place*" for our resurrection bodies, but that does not seem to be in view here.

Verse 3 is parenthetical. Paul clarified that believers who die are not disembodied spirits ("found naked") until the resurrection of their bodies. Another interpretation sees believers as unclothed (without an intermediate body) between their death and resurrection.<sup>170</sup> Those who hold this view understand Paul to be saying that he did not look forward to his disembodied condition. He anticipated the time when God would clothe him with an immortal body (at his resurrection).

"Greeks celebrated exercise in the nude, though even they regarded nakedness as shameful in some situations (Polybius 14.5.11). Although Romans favored nakedness less than Greeks (Juvenal *Sat.* 1.71), they had adopted the custom of nude bathing from Greeks (Plutarch *Marcus Cato* 20.5-6; *Roman Q.* 40, *Mor.* 274A), and Corinth had notable public baths (as well as public latrines). For most Jews, however, nudity remained scandalous."<sup>171</sup>

I believe that one of the strongest arguments that we will never be disembodied spirits is that the Bible consistently views humans as unified beings. It does not describe the body as merely the house that the real person lives in. That is a Platonic concept that the early Gnostics and other anthropological dualists held. Rather, the Bible describes people as consisting of both material and immaterial parts. If we were to lack material substance (either mortal or immortal), we would seemingly be less than complete human beings.

5:4 This verse expands verse 2. The Christian does not "groan" in his or her present body because he or she wants to get rid of it. At least that was not what Paul meant here. We groan because we long to receive the immortal bodies that God will give us ("want . . . to be clothed"). God's promises of

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<sup>167</sup>See Larry J. Waters, "The Believer's Intermediate State after Death," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:675 (July-September 2012):283-303.

<sup>168</sup>John F. Walvoord, ed., *Lewis Sperry Chafer's Systematic Theology*, abridged ed., 2:506-7. See also Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:414-15.

<sup>169</sup>See Hodge, pp. 107-28; Plummer, p. 145; and Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>170</sup>E.g., Barnett, pp. 262-63; Plummer, p. 149; and Martin, p. 106.

<sup>171</sup>Keener, p. 180.

something better make us dissatisfied with what we have now. We long for the time when immortal "life" will, in a sense, consume "what is mortal" and dies. This is another paradox. Paul was confident that if death would destroy his present body, he would certainly receive a glorious future body that God would provide. Paul's purpose in verses 1-4 seems to have been to contrast our mortal state and our immortal state, not to introduce the idea of an intermediate body.<sup>172</sup>

5:5 The hope of an immortal body is not just wishful thinking. We already have the down payment of our inheritance in the Holy "Spirit." In modern Greek, the word translated "pledge" (NASB) or "deposit" (NIV) here, *arrhabona*, elsewhere describes an engagement ring (cf. 1:22). Our present possession of the Holy Spirit is God's *guarantee* that He will provide all that we need in the future.

The Spirit may not seem like a very convincing guarantee, since we cannot see Him. However, we can see what His presence in us produces, namely: our character and conduct transformation (cf. John 3:8). This should give us confidence that God will transform us completely in the future.

5:6-8 Verses 6-8 bear the same relation to each other as do verses 2-4. Verses 2 and 6 make a statement. Verses 3 and 7 are parenthetical, and verses 4 and 8 expand verses 2 and 6 respectively.

Statement	verse 2	verse 6
Parenthesis	verse 3	verse 7
Explanation	verse 4	verse 8

Since we have the promise that we will obtain a glorified body (v. 1), and since we have a pledge of that promise in our present transformation (v. 5), we can feel consistently confident.

However, because we are "absent from the Lord," while we are living in our mortal bodies, we desire to leave these bodies, and to take up our new residence in the Lord's presence. Note that there are no additional alternatives for the believer. We are either in our mortal bodies and absent from the Lord, or we are with the Lord and absent from our mortal bodies. This is a strong guarantee that, when we leave our mortal bodies, we will go immediately into the Lord's presence. There will be no purgatory. Being "at home with the Lord" implies a closer fellowship with Christ than we experience now, as well as closer proximity to Him (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17; Phil. 1:23).

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<sup>172</sup>See Lowery, pp. 565-66, for a helpful summary of the views.

We need never despair, therefore, when we walk by faith, believing what God has revealed He has in store for us. Nevertheless, the fact that we now walk by faith, and not by sight, reminds us that the fellowship that we enjoy with the Lord now, while genuine, is inferior to what we will experience.

"Heaven was not simply a *destination* for Paul: it was a *motivation*."<sup>173</sup>

5:9 As we look forward to the realization of these good things, our "ambition" must be to please God—come life or death ("whether at home or absent"). The prospect of face-to-face fellowship with Jesus Christ should motivate us to please Him out of love (cf. Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:20; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1). Paul did not mean that we can perform acts after we die that will please God (cf. v. 10), though we can. "At home or absent" is a figure of speech (merism) for "always." In a merism, two parts represent the whole (e.g., "heaven and earth" means "the universe").

"To be well-pleasing to Christ is, indeed, the sum of all ambition which is truly Christian."<sup>174</sup>

". . . one always wishes to please the one he or she loves."<sup>175</sup>

5:10 It is not only the hope of God's positive provisions that should motivate the Christian, however. We must also bear in mind that we will have to account for our works when we meet the Lord. Then He will reward His children on the basis of their "deeds." This is not a judgment to determine whether Christians will enter heaven, but a judgment that decides to what extent God rewards those who enter heaven (cf. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 9:24-27).<sup>176</sup>

"The imagery used here for the future moment of eschatological revelation is that of the forensic process whereby the Roman governor sat on his tribunal to hear accusation and defense of an accused person standing before him. If he judged the accused guilty, the governor would order immediate punishment. Paul's use of this language to the Corinthians may have been calculated; he himself had stood accused before the Roman governor Gallio in the Corinthian *agora* some years earlier (Acts 18:12, 16-17), as the original members of the Corinthian church doubtless remembered."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Wiersbe, 1:645.

<sup>174</sup>Hughes, p. 178.

<sup>175</sup>Barnett, p. 273.

<sup>176</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*; and Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 25-34.

<sup>177</sup>Barnett, p. 275.

"The term for 'judgment seat' [Gr. *bema*] is a normal one for the raised platforms from which governors could issue decrees or judgments, including the particularly impressive one excavated in Corinth (Acts 18:12)."<sup>178</sup>

The Greek word translated "bad" (*phaulos*) really means "worthless." The idea is not that God will reward us for the good things we did, and punish us for the bad things we did. Rather, He will reward us for the *worthwhile* things we did, and not reward us for the *worthless* things we did (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Cor. 9:24-27). The worthwhile ("good") things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. Worthless ("bad") deeds are those that make no contribution to the fulfillment of God's good purposes (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

"The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward."<sup>179</sup>

". . . believers do not face condemnation at Christ's tribunal (see Rom 5:16, 18; 8:1) but rather *evaluation* with a view to the Master's commendation given or withheld (1 Cor 3:10-15)."<sup>180</sup>

"Judgment on the basis of works is not opposed to justification on the basis of faith. . . . Yet not all verdicts will be comforting. The believer may 'suffer loss' (1 Cor. 3:15) by forfeiting Christ's praise or losing a reward that might have been his."<sup>181</sup>

"The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>Keener, p. 181.

<sup>179</sup>John F. Walvoord, "The Church in Heaven," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:490 (April-June 1966):99. Cf. Hughes, p. 182.

<sup>180</sup>Barnett, p. 276.

<sup>181</sup>Harris, p. 349. Cf. 1 John 2:28.

<sup>182</sup>Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:546 (April-June 1980):131. See also idem, "The Judgment Seat of Christ and Unconfessed Sins," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:545 (January-March 1980):38-39.

". . . because much is required of those to whom much has been given, the thought of the judgment seat of Christ has for the Christian a peculiar solemnity. It is not meant to cloud his prospect of future blessedness, but to act as a stimulus, as strong a stimulus as the most imperious of human ambitions; for the word *philotimoumetha*, translated *we labour* (RV 'we make it our aim'), means literally 'we are ambitious'."<sup>183</sup>

Another notable feature of this verse is that Paul ascribed the role of Judge to Jesus "Christ," whereas in Jewish depictions of the judgment day, *Yahweh* is the Judge (cf. John 5:22; Rom. 14:10).

Though Paul did not specify when this evaluation will take place—at death, at the Rapture, or at some other subsequent time—"he seems to imply that the requital will follow immediately upon the manifestation [of Christ to the believer, i.e., at death or, if the believer does not die, at the Rapture]."<sup>184</sup>

Throughout this section, contrasts between the Spirit-imparted viewpoint on life and the natural viewpoint stand out. Some of the Corinthians were criticizing Paul because they were looking at his activities from the human viewpoint, and were projecting that point of view onto him. They were concluding that he viewed life as they did. For their benefit, he drew these contrasting views of life clearly.

The extent to which we view life from Paul's spiritual viewpoint will be the extent to which we do not lose heart in our ministry.

#### **4. The life of a minister of Christ 5:11—6:10**

The greater section of this epistle, that expounds the glory of the Christian ministry (2:14—6:10), builds to a climax in the following verses (5:11—6:10). Here Paul clarified the driving motive, the divine mission, the dynamic message, and the diverse ministries of the New Covenant. He did this to inspire the Corinthians: to recognize his ministry as Spirit-led, and to follow his example in their ministries.

#### **The constraining love of Christ 5:11-15**

5:11            Respect for the Lord, since He would be his Judge ("the fear of the Lord," v. 10), motivated Paul to carry out his work of persuading people to believe the gospel. A healthy sense of our accountability to God should move us to fulfill our calling as Christians (Matt. 28:19-20).

<sup>183</sup>Tasker, p. 82. See also Wall, pp. 31-38, for a fine popular explanation of judgment at the *bema*.

<sup>184</sup>Plummer, p. 159.

"According to II Cor. 5:11, the judgment seat is the place where the 'terror of the Lord' will be manifested. The word 'terror' in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *phobos*, referring to 'that which causes fear,' 'terror,' 'apprehension.' This is the same word translated 'fearful' in Heb. 10:31 . . . another reference to events at the judgment seat."<sup>185</sup>

Paul had a double purpose. The NEB translates "we persuade men" as "we address our appeal to men." Paul tried to persuade people of the truth of the gospel, but also of the truth about himself, which seems to be the main point here.<sup>186</sup> His motives were pure (1:12), and his conduct had been consistent with his apostleship (cf. 3:1-6; 4:1-6). Paul's knowledge that his life was an open book ("manifest") "to God," led him to voice the hope that it would be transparent to all the Corinthians ("manifest also in your consciences"), too.

"The ministry is ultimately responsible to God. Christian ministers are servants of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:5), attendants of Christ and stewards of God (1 Cor. 4:1); they discharge their ministry 'in the sight of God' (2 Cor. 4:2; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5) as 'knowing the fear of the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:11)."<sup>187</sup>

5:12 Paul insisted that he had "bared his soul" to his readers, in the previous verses, in order not to boast (cf. 3:1). He had written what he had, in order to give his allies in Corinth ammunition to combat his critics, whose judgments were wrong. He was simply reminding his original readers of things they should have remembered. The external appearances, that Paul's critics admired, included: physical relationship to Jesus during His earthly ministry (5:16), their Jewish orthodoxy (11:22), and their visions and revelations (12:1-7). The "heart" reality, that Paul considered more important, was the testimony of his clear conscience before God and people. This is what the false apostles lacked.

"His anomalous position as an apostle who was called directly by Christ and who did not belong to the college of the twelve disciples meant that he had no option but to appeal to that call. But this laid him open to the accusation that he was *self*-commended. In consequence, whenever he affirms his ministry—in this case that he evangelizes ('we persuade men')—he must disclaim self-commendation (see on 3:1 and 6:4). Nonetheless, his ministry did commend

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<sup>185</sup>Chitwood, p. 31.

<sup>186</sup>Plummer, p. 169.

<sup>187</sup>Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):138.

him, as the Corinthians should have recognized (12:11; cf. 4:2, 10:18)."<sup>188</sup>

5:13 All of Paul's ministries to and for the Corinthians had been for God's glory and their welfare.

What Paul meant by the charge of being "beside" himself ("ourselves"), and its opposite, being "of sound mind," could and probably does include all of the following possibilities: Some critics apparently attacked him for his teaching that differed from mainstream Judaism, his ecstatic experiences, and his ceaseless service. To this his response was, "That is for God to judge" (cf. vv. 9-11). Other critics may have thought him crazy for speaking in tongues and having visions (cf. Acts 22:17-21). For Paul, that was a matter between him and God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:2). Occasionally Paul may have appeared to be carried away with his emotions, but that conduct only resulted in God's glory. His self-commendation may have looked like lunacy to some in Corinth, but Paul was only defending God's cause. In Paul's culture, people considered self-commendation inappropriate except in certain particular circumstances.<sup>189</sup> To the Jews, the apostle's conversion marked him as a madman, but that change of mind was a totally rational decision.<sup>190</sup> Jesus' critics had misjudged Him, too.

5:14-15 The primary reason Paul could not "live for" himself, however, was God's "love" for him. The Greek construction is probably a subjective genitive.<sup>191</sup> God's love extended to Jesus Christ in His dying on the cross. Jesus provided the example that all His disciples must follow: He gave (voluntarily sacrificed) His life for others. Yet Jesus' death was much more than an example. Paul had come to appreciate the widespread effects of that death (as being "for all") and the essence of that death (as a Substitute).

"Paul is not suggesting that, irrespective of their response and attitude, all men know forgiveness of sins or experience selfless living. There is universalism in the scope of redemption, since no man is excluded from God's offer of salvation; but there is a particularity in the application of redemption, since not all men appropriate the benefits afforded by this universally offered salvation."<sup>192</sup>

The apostle had also become aware that such love merited complete devotion (i.e., making the fulfillment of God's desires, not one's selfish desires, the goal of life). In the context, "controls us" may refer to Christ's

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<sup>188</sup>Barnett, p. 282.

<sup>189</sup>Keener, p. 166.

<sup>190</sup>Harris, p. 351.

<sup>191</sup>See Martin, p. 128; Bernard, 3:69-70.

<sup>192</sup>Harris, p. 352.

love restraining Paul from self-praise.<sup>193</sup> We "all died" (v. 15) in the sense that all believers died in the Person of their representative, Jesus Christ.<sup>194</sup>

". . . Christ's death was the death of all, in the sense that He died the death they should have died; the penalty of their sins was borne by Him; He died in their place . . ." <sup>195</sup>

". . . One died on behalf of all (not only, for the *benefit* of all . . . but *instead of* all . . .). . ." <sup>196</sup>

Moreover, as Jesus died to His own desires, and rose to life to continue serving us, so we should die to our own selfish interests, and live to serve others. Paul himself modeled what he observed in Jesus' experience, and called on his readers to duplicate his own example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1).

"Thus there emerge from v. 11 and v. 14 two motives for apostolic evangelism, the 'fear of the Lord' and the 'love of Christ.' . . . The one relates to Jesus' role as Judge, the other to his role as Savior." <sup>197</sup>

In this section, Paul identified two motives for Christian service: an awareness of our accountability to God (v. 11), and the example of Jesus Christ (v. 14). Jesus is both our Judge and our Savior, and His two roles should have an impact on how we live.

### **The new creation 5:16-17**

Paul now illustrated how Christ's love had changed his viewpoint.

5:16 Since his conversion, Paul had stopped making superficial personal judgments based only on external appearances (cf. v. 12). Previously he had looked at people on a strictly physical basis, in terms of their *ethnicity* rather than their spiritual status—which was the merely human perspective. Now, whether a person was a believer or a non-believer, was more important to him than whether he or she was a Jew or a Gentile.

"The differences between king and clown, rich and poor, master and slave, genius and dunce, do not come into the estimate; what counts is the person's character as a Christian." <sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Plummer, p. 173.

<sup>194</sup>See Hodge, p. 136; and John V. Dahms, "Dying with Christ," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):15-23.

<sup>195</sup>Tasker, p. 86.

<sup>196</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 2:663.

<sup>197</sup>Barnett, p. 288.

<sup>198</sup>Plummer, p. 176.

Paul had also (as Saul) formerly concluded that Jesus could not be the divine Messiah, in view of His lowly origin, rejection, and humiliating death. "Now" he "recognize[d]" (knew) Him for who He really was, and what He really had done (cf. vv. 14-15). Probably Paul was not claiming in this verse to have known Jesus personally during His earthly ministry ("we have known Christ according to the flesh"), though he may have met Him. However, after his conversion on the Damascus Road, Paul saw (recognized or knew) Christ in a new light (i.e., *according to the Spirit*), from the divine perspective.<sup>199</sup>

5:17 Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (vv. 14-15) had had another effect besides altering Paul's viewpoint (v. 16). Verses 16 and 17 each begin with the same Greek word, *hoste*: "therefore" or "so." Whenever a person experiences conversion, as Paul did, he or she really becomes "a new person (creation)." It is not just his or her viewpoint, that should change and can change, but many other things also change. Certain old conditions and relationships no longer exist (Gr. *parelthen*, aorist tense), and others take their place and continue (Gr. *gegonen*, perfect tense).

Obviously there is both continuity and discontinuity that takes place at conversion (justification). Paul was not denying the continuity. We still have the same physical features, basic personality, genetic constitution, parents, susceptibility to temptation (1 Cor. 10:14), sinful environment (Gal. 1:4), etc. These things do not change. He was stressing the elements of discontinuity ("old things passed away"): perspectives, prejudices, misconceptions, enslavements, etc. (cf. Gal. 2:20). God adds many "new things" at conversion, including: new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, the righteousness of Christ, as well as new viewpoints (v. 16).

The Christian is a "new creature" (a new man, Rom. 6) in this sense: Before conversion, we did not possess the life-giving Holy Spirit, who now lives within us (Rom. 8:9). We had only our sinful human nature. Now we have both our sinful human nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit. This addition makes us an essentially "new" person, since the Holy Spirit's effects on the believer are so far-reaching. We also possess many other riches of divine grace that contribute to our distinctiveness as believers. Lewis Sperry Chafer listed 33 things that the Christian receives at the moment of justification.<sup>200</sup>

### **The ministry of reconciliation 5:18-21**

This section, with the first two verses of chapter 6, constitutes the crux of Paul's exposition of the apostolic office (2:14—7:4), and of the entire letter.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>199</sup>J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 53.

<sup>200</sup>*Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65. See Robert A Pyne and Matthew L. Blackmon, "A Critique of the 'Exchanged Life,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):131-57.

<sup>201</sup>Barnett, p. 300.

5:18-19 The basis of this total change (new attitudes, v. 16, and new creation, v. 17) is God's gracious provision of "reconciliation" in sending His Son to die for us. He has brought people to Himself by dealing with our sins in Christ. God is the Reconciler, and He has "reconciled" everyone ("the world") to Himself, the elect and the non-elect alike (cf. Rom. 5:10-11; Col. 1:20-22).<sup>202</sup> He has brought everyone into a *savable* relation to Himself, by sending His Son, who paid the penalty for sin, which separates people from God. The fact that God has reconciled *everyone* does not mean that everyone is justified, however. People still need to respond to the offer of salvation by believing the gospel to receive justification (v. 20). Reconciliation removes a barrier to our salvation, but it does not by itself accomplish our salvation.

God has "committed" the message ("word") of this provision to those who have experienced reconciliation, and our (the church's) "ministry of reconciliation" is to present it to all people (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul was probably speaking primarily of his own ministry of bringing people back to God, as well as the ministry of his fellow apostles. However, all believers clearly share this ministry, since God has reconciled us all. The word of reconciliation is the gospel message.

5:20 This ministry makes us God's "ambassadors" ("for Christ"), one of the most exalted titles the Christian can claim.

"The ambassador has to be *persona grata* with both countries (the one that he represents and the one to which he goes)."<sup>203</sup>

"In the Roman Empire, there were two kinds of provinces, the senatorial and the imperial. The senatorial provinces were generally peaceful and friendly to Rome. They had submitted to Roman rule and were under the control of the Senate. The imperial provinces, however, had been acquired later, and were not as peaceful. These provinces were under the authority of the emperor himself. Syria, including Judea, was such an imperial province. To these provinces, the emperor sent ambassadors to govern and maintain peace."<sup>204</sup>

"The ambassador, before acting, receives a commission from the power for whom he acts. The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of

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<sup>202</sup>See Gary L. Shultz Jr., "The Reconciliation of All Things in Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):442-59.

<sup>203</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . . , 4:233.

<sup>204</sup>*The Nelson* . . . , p. 1952.

his sovereign. Lastly, the ambassador's duty is not merely to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but he is obligated to watch opportunities, to study characters, to cast about for expedients, so that he may place it before his hearers in its most attractive form. He is a diplomatist."<sup>205</sup>

Ambassadors authoritatively announce messages for others and request, not demand, acceptance. The Christian ambassador ("ambassador for Christ"), moreover, announces and appeals for God ("as though God were making an appeal through us").

". . . when Christ's ambassador entreats it is equivalent to the voice of God entreating through him."<sup>206</sup>

"When I was a young pastor, it used to embarrass me somewhat to make visits and confront people with the claims of Christ. Then it came to me that I was a privileged person, an ambassador of the King of kings! There was nothing to be embarrassed about. In fact, the people I visited should have been grateful that one of Christ's ambassadors came to see them."<sup>207</sup>

However, the stakes involved require an urgent appeal. We should never present the gospel to the lost with a "take it or leave it" attitude. Our presentation should communicate the urgency of their believing the message. Full reconciliation only takes place when a person trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior (John 3:16). Consequently, it may be helpful to think of reconciliation as objectively provided by God in the past, but needing subjective appropriation by the unsaved in the present.

We could understand the word "you," in "we beg (or implore) you," as a specific reference to the Corinthians, or as a general reference to all people. Paul was probably not appealing to his Corinthian readers to be reconciled to God. They had already been reconciled (v. 18) and had trusted in Christ. While there may have been a few unbelievers in the Corinthian congregation, Paul was clearly writing to believers. If his appeal was to the unbelievers in the city of Corinth to get saved, he probably would have made a more specific appeal, and identified that segment of his audience in his appeal. He was explaining his ministry of reconciliation in general, to the unsaved ("the world," v. 19). Alternatively, Paul may have, at the same time, been addressing the many carnal believers in the Corinthian church, who, although "reconciled" in

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<sup>205</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *Ordination Addresses and Counsels to Clergy*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>206</sup>Hughes, p. 210.

<sup>207</sup>Wiersbe, 1:650. Cf. Rom. 1:16.

the basic sense of "saved," nonetheless needed to "be reconciled to God" in their family relationship to Him. They were attending church but were "out of fellowship," and needed to "get right with" (be reconciled to) God.

5:21 Verse 21 condenses the grounds for Paul's appeal, and expresses it in another paradox. This verse explains the "how" of full reconciliation and takes us to the very heart of the atonement.

"In these few direct words the Apostle sets forth the gospel of reconciliation in all its mystery and all its wonder. There is no sentence more profound in the whole of Scripture; for this verse embraces the whole ground of the sinner's reconciliation to God and declares the incontestable reason why he should respond to the ambassadorial entreaty. Indeed, it completes the message with which the Christian ambassador has been entrusted."<sup>208</sup>

Paul probably intended that we understand what he wrote about Jesus Christ becoming sin in three ways: First, God treated Jesus as if He were a *sinner*, when He poured out His wrath on Him, and He bore the guilt and penalty for all people's sins. Jesus' sinlessness is a clear revelation of Scripture (Isa. 53:9; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Second, Jesus Christ became a sin-offering (Lev. 4:24; 5:12), the perfect and final one. Some Hebrew words mean both "sin" and "sin-offering" (i.e., *hatta't* and *'asam*; Isa. 53:6, 10). Third, Christ became the locus (central location; focus) of sin under the judgment of God, the place in time and space where God judged sin.

"So complete was the identification of the sinless Christ with the sin of the sinner, including its dire guilt and its dread consequence of separation from God, that Paul could say profoundly, 'God made him . . . to be sin for us.'"<sup>209</sup>

Jesus Christ was the *target* of God's punishment of sinners, God having imputed the sin of all humankind to Him (cf. Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:3). Now God makes us the targets of His righteousness, and imputes *that* to us (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9). The amazing effect from God's imputing His righteousness to believers, is that now God sees us as He sees His righteous Son, namely: fully acceptable to Him.

"Paul has chosen this exceptional wording ["made sin for us"] in order to emphasize the 'sweet exchange' whereby sinners are given a righteous status before God through the righteous one who absorbed their sin (and its judgment) in himself."<sup>210</sup>

<sup>208</sup>Hughes, p. 211. Cf. Broomall, p. 1272.

<sup>209</sup>Harris, p. 354.

<sup>210</sup>Bruce, p. 211.

"Here, then is the focal point to which the long argument has been building up. Paul, having himself been reconciled to God by the death of Christ, has now been entrusted by God with the task of ministering to others that which he has himself received, in other words, reconciliation. Verse 20 then follows from this as a dramatic double statement of his conception of the task . . . That is to say, when Paul preaches, his hearers ought to hear a voice from God, a voice which speaks on behalf of the Christ in whom God was reconciling the world. Astonishingly, the voice of the suffering apostle is to be regarded as the voice of God himself, the God who in Christ has established the new covenant, and who now desires to extend its reconciling work into all the world. The second half of the verse should not, I think, be taken as an address to the Corinthians specifically, but as a short and pithy statement of Paul's whole vocation: 'On behalf of Christ, we make this appeal: "Be reconciled to God!'"

"What the whole passage involves, then, is the idea of the covenant ambassador, who represents the one for whom he speaks in such a full and thorough way that he actually *becomes* the living embodiment of his sovereign—or perhaps, in the light of 4:7-18 and 6:1-10, we should equally say the *dying* embodiment."<sup>211</sup>

### Paul's example as an ambassador of Christ 6:1-10

". . . the first ten verses of this chapter are a continuation of the Apostle's self-vindication from another point of view; they set forth his conduct and his experiences as God's ambassador, and as a minister to whom has been entrusted the message of reconciliation. . . . He is addressing weak believers, who were in danger of a lapse into heathen laxity, through making so poor an attempt to reach a Christian standard of holiness."<sup>212</sup>

- 6:1            Since God appeals to the unsaved through heralds of the gospel (5:20), the herald is in that sense a partner ("working together") with God in His work of bringing people into final reconciliation. Another, less likely view, is that Paul meant that he labored together with the Corinthians (cf. 5:20; 1 Cor. 3:9). The words "with Him" are not in the Greek text. In this case, the objects of their entreaty would be the unsaved. Evangelism is a joint effort of the Lord and His human ambassador. Paul went beyond that specific function of an ambassador and, for God, also appealed to his Christian readers. In addition to responding to the call to be reconciled to God, they also needed to respond to another call. They needed to make sure that they were responding to God's "grace" as well: "not to receive the grace of God in vain."

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<sup>211</sup>N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 205, 206.

<sup>212</sup>Plummer, p. 189.

Paul's readers had received God's grace when they had heard the gospel message. Now Paul urged them to respond to it so God's gracious bestowal would not have been in vain. God gives grace to all people throughout their lives, but He gives more grace at the moment of conversion and from then on. It is not clear which manifestation of grace Paul had in mind, the grace the Corinthians received at conversion or the subsequent grace. I think he probably had both in mind, and was speaking of their response to divine grace generally, since he did not clearly identify the past or the present manifestation. Receiving God's grace "in vain" would mean not allowing it to have its divinely intended result in their lives. Paul occasionally wrote of receiving God's grace in vain, in which cases he meant failing to persevere (cf. 1 Cor. 15:2, 10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16). In the context here, a conflict between some of the Corinthians and Paul, resulting in the discrediting of the gospel ministry, seems to be in view (v. 3). More generally, disunity among believers frustrates God's desire and His provision of grace (help). Most broadly, any disobedience to God's will frustrates His grace (cf. 7:1; 11:4; 12:20-21).

"The explanation which in our judgment is most satisfactory, and which seems best to fit the broad context in which this verse is found, is that Paul is here thinking in terms of the judgment-seat of Christ, before which the works of every Christian will be made manifest (5:10)."<sup>213</sup>

6:2 As he had begged unbelievers to receive God's reconciling grace (5:20), Paul now urged his readers to respond quickly ("now is the . . . [right] time") and positively to God's grace to them. Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8 to stress the importance of responding immediately. The "acceptable time" will not last forever. On the other hand, "now" can be understood as emphasizing that the prophesied time of salvation had finally arrived, and Paul and his readers were enjoying it and should enjoy it.<sup>214</sup>

"His point here is not (as it is often represented) that the only day of grace which we can reckon on is the present (gravely true though this is), but that the Christian dispensation is the one spoken of by the O.T. prophet in familiar words."<sup>215</sup>

In the context of the Isaiah quotation, God addressed His Servant, whom the nations had despised, promising eventual vindication and urging Him to restore His people. The parallel with Paul and the Corinthians' ministry is obvious. Rather than squabbling among themselves over Paul, the readers needed to get on with the ambassadorial work that God had given them to do.

<sup>213</sup>Hughes, p. 218. Cf. Martin, p. 166.

<sup>214</sup>Plummer, p. 191.

<sup>215</sup>Bernard, 3:74.

6:3 The Corinthians should not, and Paul tried not, to give any cause for others to stumble ("giving no cause for offense") because of their "ministry," lest it be "discredited." Obviously we cannot prevent all criticism of our ministry, because there may be some who take offense without good reason. Still we should do everything we can to make sure we do not give anyone cause for justifiable criticism.

6:4-5 Paul proceeded to positively describe how he had conducted himself, to prove that his own reception of God's grace had not been in vain. He "commended" and defended his ministry, in order to provide the faithful Corinthians with more ammunition to rebut his critics. Note that he referred to his actions rather than his words. He cited three groups of trials, and there are three kinds of trials in each group. These he prefaced with a claim to patience ("steadfast [(much)] endurance"), an extremely important quality in an ambassador of Christ.

"Writers often used affliction lists to emphasize their integrity (although, unlike Paul, Stoics also used them to underline their impassivity); sufferings were tests of character (Seneca *Dial.* 1.4.5). The rhetorical emphasis in such lists is not so much on the individual components (inviting a modern lexical focus) but the total effect."<sup>216</sup>

### **Trials of a general nature**

"Afflictions" or "troubles" are oppressive experiences that put various kinds of pressure on one.

"Hardships" are difficulties that one cannot diminish.

"Distresses" are calamitous situations from which one cannot escape. The Greek word pictures a person trapped in a confining place.

### **Sufferings inflicted by other people**

"Stripes" or "beatings" are punishments delivered with a whip or lash (cf. 11:24-25).

"Imprisonments" in Paul's day involved confinement and extreme discomfort (cf. 11:23).

"Tumults" are "riots" (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:15; 16:19; 19:29; 21:30).

### **Hardships inflicted on self for the furtherance of the gospel**

"Labors" or "hard work" encompasses all the strenuous activities of life including manual labor.

"Watchings" are "sleepless nights."

"Fasting" or "hunger" refers to missed meals.

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<sup>216</sup>Keener, p. 188. See also Toussaint, pp. 191-92.

- 6:6-7a Paul now named various graces (positive character qualities) that God had produced within him, mainly in and through these trials. He moved from external circumstances to internal qualities.
- "Pureness" ("purity") means single-mindedness, as well as moral uprightness.
- "Knowledge" or "understanding" includes understanding of the Christian faith, insight, and sensitivity to God's will (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).
- "Patience" is longsuffering with difficult people without retaliation.
- "Kindness" reflects a generous and sympathetic disposition that manifests itself in good actions (cf. Luke 6:35).
- Perhaps Paul used "the Holy Spirit" here in the same sense that he did in Galatians 5:16. We should walk "in the Spirit," just as we walk in purity, knowledge, etc. The Spirit as a *gift*, rather than as a person, may be in view.
- "Genuine love" is the honest desire to do what is best for those in view.
- "The word of truth" probably refers to "truthful speech" or perhaps the message of truth (cf. 5:19).
- "The power of God" was the power that God manifested when His ambassadors followed Him faithfully and proclaimed His Word.
- 6:7b Paul next described some of the conditions under which he ministered, and some of the methods he used.
- "Weapons" may refer to the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) and the shield of faith (cf. Rom. 6:13; Eph. 6:11-17; 1 Thess. 5:8). The "right hand" normally attacked with a sword, and "the left" defended with a shield. However, these are "weapons of righteousness," the spiritual weapons that God supplies. Another possibility, not necessary mutually exclusive, is that "weapons of righteousness" may refer to the weapons that come from doing right: personal integrity. Righteousness often refers to right conduct in the New Testament. "The right hand and the left" may then be a figurative expression (merism) for "all acts."
- ". . . one so equipped is prepared to meet attack from any quarter . . ." <sup>217</sup>
- 6:8-10 These contrasts probably give us some indication of the charges that Paul's critics were leveling at him (cf. Rom 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13). Human responses to Paul's preaching evidently varied greatly (v. 8), but God's estimate was positive regardless of the opinions of people. These contrasts may be between human responses, or between the human and the divine responses. Regardless of people's estimates of him, the great apostle continued to fight the good fight of faith (v. 7, 9). Moreover, regardless of how he appeared to be doing, in reality God was preserving and blessing him (vv. 9-10).

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<sup>217</sup>Hughes, p. 231.

**C. APPEAL FOR RESTORATION OF THE CORINTHIANS' CONFIDENCE IN PAUL**  
**6:11—7:16**

The apostle now turned to a direct appeal: for the Corinthians to reconcile with him in their hearts.

"The call for reconciliation with Paul, therefore, stands in parallel with the call for reconciliation with God [5:20]. While it would be too much to say that these two forms of reconciliation are equally important, for Paul they are directly linked with one another."<sup>218</sup>

". . . in Roman politics and ancient Mediterranean culture in general, friendship included accepting the friend's friends as one's friends and his enemies as one's enemies (e.g., Iamblichus *Pyth. Life* 35.248-49). How then can the Corinthians be reconciled with God if they mistrust his agent (cf. 6:14-16; Matt 10:40; Ex 16:8)?"<sup>219</sup>

Paul made this appeal to stimulate the Corinthians to accept him and his ministry, so that they would continue to experience all the blessings that God wanted them to have.

**1. An appeal for large-heartedness and consistency 6:11—7:4**

"Centuries of speechmaking had taught ancients the value of an emotional appeal (*pathos*) at the climax of arguments; Paul likewise clinches his appeal to be reconciled in 6:11—7:4, emphasizing both affection (6:11-13; 7:2-4) and indignation (6:14—7:1). Letters were not speeches, but their very informality invited even more natural expressions of emotion (Seneca *Lucil.* 75.1-3; Demetrius *On Style* 4.227)."<sup>220</sup>

"This section is the high point of emotion for the whole epistle. It begins and ends with Paul asking the Corinthians to open their hearts to God."<sup>221</sup>

**The appeal stated 6:11-13**

On the basis of his preceding unreserved openness with the Corinthians ("our mouth has spoken freely"), Paul tenderly exhorted them, on the ground of fair play, to respond toward him as he had behaved toward them ("open wide *to us* also"). His open speech (cf. 3:12; 4:2) reflected his open heart ("our heart is opened wide"). They had shown reserve, not because Paul had put them under bondage, but because they doubted his integrity. He urged them to become unrestrained in their affection toward him, just as he had demonstrated that he was unrestrained in his affection toward them.

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<sup>218</sup>Beverly R. Gaventa, "Apostle and Church in 2 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 193-94. This essay points out the strong connection that bound Paul as an apostle to the Corinthian church, his children in the faith.

<sup>219</sup>Keener, p. 186.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., pp. 190-91.

<sup>221</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1953.

Rarely did Paul address his readers by name in the body of his epistles. He did so only when he felt very emotionally involved in what he was saying (cf. Gal. 3:1; Phil. 4:15). Here it was his extreme candor in sharing the painful experiences of his ministry, with his dear friends, that moved him (vv. 4-10): ("O Corinthians"). Many students of this book have felt that Paul's openness with the Corinthians, that comes through so strongly here, is a distinctive mark of this epistle. One scholar therefore entitled his good commentary *A Heart Opened Wide*.<sup>222</sup>

Paul appealed strongly for his readers to reciprocate his openness and love completely. However, he knew that he could not demand this, but only request it, as a parent requests the love of his or her children.

### **The counter-balancing caution 6:14—7:1**

The Corinthians had a tendency to respond to Paul's teachings by first resisting them, and then going overboard in applying them inappropriately. They had done this in dealing with the incestuous man, for example (1 Cor. 5). Consequently, Paul immediately explained what he did *not* mean by his appeal, so his readers would not become dangerously openhearted to all people, as well as to himself. This section of text summarizes 1 Corinthians 10:1-22, where Paul had previously warned the Corinthians about idolatry.

"Paul is quite capable of digressing, and it may be argued that while he is pleading for mutual openheartedness he reflects that the reason for the restraint which he deprecates on his readers' part is their uneasy awareness that they have not made the complete break with idolatrous associations which he had earlier urged upon them (1 C. 10.14ff.); hence this exhortation."<sup>223</sup>

6:14-16a      Some of the Corinthians were not openhearted toward Paul, because they were doing things they knew he disapproved of. This evidently included maintaining inappropriate relationships with unbelievers. Various interpretations of the identity of the "unbelievers" identify them as: untrustworthy persons in contrast to Paul, Gentile Christians who did not observe the Mosaic Law, the immoral within the church, and the false apostles.<sup>224</sup>

Paul was not saying that Christians should break off all association with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 10:27). He had previously encouraged the saved partner in a mixed marriage to maintain the marriage relationship as long as possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16). He had also urged his fellow Christians, as ambassadors of Christ, to evangelize the lost (5:20). Rather, here Paul

<sup>222</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr.

<sup>223</sup>Bruce, p. 214. See also Carson and Moo, pp. 438-40.

<sup>224</sup>See William J. Webb, "Who Are the Unbelievers (*apistoi*) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):27-44.

was commanding that Christians form no binding interpersonal relationships with non-Christians, *that resulted in their spiritual defilement*. This is an extension to human beings, of the principle underlying the prohibition against breeding or yoking an ox and a donkey together, in Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:10. Such alliances can prevent the Christian from living a consistently obedient Christian life. The fulfillment of God's will must be primary for a believer. Obviously some relationships with pagans do not pose a threat to our faithfulness to God. Where they do, the Christian must maintain his or her relationship with Christ, even if it means forfeiting relationships with unbelievers. There is a conceptual parallel here with what Jesus (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25), Paul (Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2), and Peter (1 Pet. 2:13-17) taught about the believer's relationships with God and the state. We should obey both authorities unless they conflict, in which case we must obey God.

"Urban Roman colonies understood quite well the custom that one could not be friends with a friend's or patron's enemies."<sup>225</sup>

Paul set forth the folly of such behavior by pointing out five contrasts. Each contrast, in the form of a question, expects a negative answer. All of them point out the incompatibility and incongruity of Christian discipleship and heathenism. Paul supported the last of these with quotations from the Old Testament (vv. 16b-18).

Christians should follow God's will, which results in righteous behavior, but pagans have no regard for God's laws. Christians are children of the "light," but unbelievers are children of "darkness" (cf. Col. 1:13). "Belial" (v. 15) is the personification of Evil (cf. Deut. 13:13; 2 Sam. 22:5-6), and he is the antithesis of Christ. "Belial" was a recognized name for "Satan" in Paul's day.<sup>226</sup> It may have come from combining the Hebrew word for "worthlessness" with the name of the pagan god "Baal."<sup>227</sup> "Believers" have little in common with "unbelievers" when it comes to things that are peculiar to unbelievers. Obviously we share many things, such as food, clothing, houses, sun, air, and rain. Christians, who are "temple[s] of the living God," are quite different from the heathen, who worship "idols" in temples *made with hands*.<sup>228</sup> Some believe that the church, rather than individual Christians, is what Paul compared to a temple, since the "we" is emphatic in the Greek text.<sup>229</sup> But it seems to me that either view could be correct.

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<sup>225</sup>Keener, p. 193.

<sup>226</sup>Hughes, p. 248.

<sup>227</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.318. Cf. Keener, p. 194.

<sup>228</sup>See William J. Webb, "What Is the Unequal Yoke (*hetepozygountes*) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:594 (April-June 1992):162-79.

<sup>229</sup>E.g., Plummer, pp. 208-9.

6:16b The main reason for Paul's prohibition is that Christians belong to Christ. We already have a binding relationship with Him, and we must not be unfaithful to Him by going after another.

Paul quoted several Old Testament passages to support his contention. The first is a gracious promise that God gave the Israelites in the wilderness ("I will dwell in them and walk among them"), with the consequence that they were to be holy (Lev. 26:11-12; cf. Exod. 25:8; 29:45). Paul had taught the Corinthians that they were the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Therefore it was only appropriate that they be set apart to God too since He inhabited them.

The second quotation is from Exodus 6:7 and Leviticus 26:12 (cf. Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27). The essential relationship between God, and the people whom He has chosen for special blessing, requires that those so blessed remain faithful to Him: "I will be their God, and they will be My people."

"In our present passage Paul's language indicates the corporate figure, but the responsibility of the individual to keep himself pure is both implicit and later emphasized (7:1)."<sup>230</sup>

6:17 Third, Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11, where God called His people to "separate" (depart) from Babylon and its idolatry. He applied this to the Corinthian situation in which unbelievers practiced idolatry. The contexts, both in Isaiah and here, have nothing to do with separation (division) caused by doctrinal differences between Christians. Both passages are speaking about pagan idolatry ("do not touch any unclean thing"). The promise of fellowship with Himself ("I will welcome you"), in return for separation (Ezek. 20:34, 41), should motivate us to be obedient.

"There was a grave danger that, through carelessness and compromise, the Corinthian believers would be carried away, as it were, into a Babylonian captivity of the soul."<sup>231</sup>

6:18 This final mosaic of quotations (2 Sam. 7:14, 27; Isa. 43:6) advances the revelation concerning the Christian's relationship to God. He is not only our God (v. 16) who is holy (v. 17), but He is our "Father." God has a right to demand loyal allegiance from His children ("sons" and "daughters"). Since He is the Almighty, we must remember that to disregard His Word means to incur divine discipline. Paul compared the church, here, first to a temple (v. 16), and then to a family (v. 18).

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<sup>230</sup>Hughes, p. 252.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

7:1 "Having these promises" of intimate fellowship with God as an incentive for obedience, Christians should avoid certain probable sources of spiritual contamination. These sources of contamination ("defilement") may be external or internal, in relation to other people or in relation to God. "Flesh (or body, Gr. *sarx*) and spirit" here is a figure (merism) for the whole person (cf. 5:9; 1 Cor. 7:34). Instead of living contaminated lives, we should press on in our continual struggle against sin, all the while fearing God (cf. 5:11). This verse stresses what we must do ("cleanse ourselves") to progress in practical sanctification ("perfecting holiness"), and it reminds us that this process is continuous.

"Paul is probably implying that the Corinthians had become defiled, perhaps by occasionally sharing meals at idol-shrines or by continuing to attend festivals or ceremonies in pagan temples (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22), or even by maintaining their membership in some local pagan cult. If they made a clean break (cf. *katharisomen*, aorist) with pagan life in any and every form, they would be bringing their holiness nearer completion by this proof of their reverence for God."<sup>232</sup>

"This passage [6:14—7:1] is a specific call for separation from the temple cults of Corinth, in direct continuity with the holiness-separation theme of 1 Corinthians, and is located here as the climax of the apologia for Paul's apostolate."<sup>233</sup>

#### **Restatement of the appeal 7:2-4**

7:2 Paul returned to his appeal for the Corinthians' full affection (6:11-13), claiming no fault toward the Corinthians on three counts (v. 2): He had: (1) done no wrong to anyone ("wronged no one"), (2) had not led anyone astray ("corrupted no one"), (3) nor had he deceived anyone for his own advantage ("took advantage of no one"). Paul used the literary devices of *anaphora* (beginning each of the three clauses with the same word in Greek) and *homoiopoton* (using verbs that have the same ending, here *amen*). This wordplay added emotional force to his affirmation.

7:3 Paul did not say what he did in order to pass the blame for bad conditions off on his readers ("condemn" them). He was not implying that everyone in the Corinthian church blamed him like his critics did, either. He explained that they had a secure place in his affections. Neither death, nor the trials of life, including charges against him, would alter his love for this church: "you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." There was no reason they should feel restraint in their dealings with him.

<sup>232</sup>Harris, pp. 360-61.

<sup>233</sup>Barnett, p. 341.

Regardless of their reaction, he promised he would never exclude them from his love. This is a good example of unconditional love.

"The caveat that one was writing something not to stir negative emotion but to demonstrate affection (7:3; 1 Cor. 4:14) was an appropriate way of showing love (Cicero *Fam.* 2.4.2)."<sup>234</sup>

7:4 Nevertheless Paul was confident that the Corinthians would respond to his defense and exhortation properly ("great is my confidence in you"). Even though conditions were far from ideal in this church, Paul was proud of his converts there ("great is my boasting on your behalf"). God had "filled" his heart with encouraging "comfort" (cf. 1:3-4). In spite of much "affliction," some of which the Corinthians produced, Paul felt an overriding ("overflowing") sense of "joy." His explanation of the reason for these positive feelings follows.

"The idea of receiving joy in the midst of affliction strongly suggests that Paul wrote this part of the epistle while enduring suffering."<sup>235</sup>

This paragraph is transitional. It summarizes Paul's appeal for large-heartedness and consistency (6:11—7:4), and resumes his personal narrative that he left behind temporarily in 2:13.

## **2. The encouraging responses of the Corinthians so far 7:5-16**

Here Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians' recent reception of Titus, and their response to Paul's previous letter, evidenced a proper response to him (cf. 1 Thess. 3:1-9). He said this to encourage his readers to follow through and become completely openhearted toward him.

### **Paul's encouragement at their response 7:5-13a**

Paul returned to the subject of his meeting with Titus in Macedonia (2:13), which he had postponed in order to expound new covenant ministry (2:14—6:10), and to urge acceptance of his ministry (6:11—7:4).

7:5 When he had arrived in "Macedonia," Paul could not find Titus. Consequently, he continued to experience affliction from conflicts with unbelievers ("conflicts without"), and from his concern ("fears within") for Titus and the Corinthians' response to his "severe letter" (cf. 2:12-13). His reference to "flesh" emphasizes "the weakness of human nature which is so much influenced by external circumstances and internal moods."<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup>Keener, p. 197.

<sup>235</sup>Martin, p. 222.

<sup>236</sup>Bruce, p. 217.

Paul evidently used "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*) here, as he used "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) in 2:13, to refer to his whole person.

- 7:6-7 Paul had felt *disheartened* (Gr. *tapeinos*, not clinically "depressed") by this syndrome of circumstances. However, he felt greatly encouraged ("comforted") when Titus found him, and "reported" to Paul that the Corinthians had responded to his severe letter properly (cf. 2:3-4). Paul evidently wrote that letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians.<sup>237</sup> Three things turned his spirits around: the arrival of Titus after some delay, Titus' report of his positive experience at Corinth, and the Corinthians' positive attitude toward Paul. The Christians felt affection for Paul and wanted to see him again ("longing"), and they were very sorry ("mourning") that they had been disloyal to him. Moreover, they strongly supported Paul against his critics ("zeal"), and sought to obey him. The more Titus told Paul, the more the apostle's spirits revived ("I rejoiced even more").
- 7:8-9 Paul admitted that he had regretted sending the severe "letter" after he had done so. He had subsequently thought that it was too harsh. Fortunately his readers responded to it as he had hoped they would, though it had "caused" them some pain ("sorrow") at first. Fortunately it had not led the church into excessive discouragement but genuine "repentance." The Christians had changed their thinking and their behavior. Evidently the church had decided to defend Paul against a vocal critic of his (v. 12). The church's failure to take this stand would have resulted in ultimate loss at the judgment seat of Christ, if not immediately. Therefore Paul presently did "not regret" sending the severe letter ("I now rejoice").
- 7:10 The apostle then added a somewhat philosophical reflection on two possible responses to criticism and their consequences. The proper response, God's will, results in a change of mind ("repentance"), which leads to deliverance from the bad situation ("salvation" in the temporal sense here), "without" later "regret." The improper response, the world's typical superficial response, does not result in a change of mind (repentance), but leads to resentment and bitterness (ultimately "death" in the temporal sense). Suffering in itself does not necessarily benefit us. It proves to be a good thing for us only as we respond to it properly (cf. James 1:2-4).
- 7:11 Paul identified several good things that had come to his Corinthian readers, because they had responded properly (with "godly sorrow") to his recent rebuke. Their response had yielded "earnestness" (seriousness of purpose), the desire to prove themselves worthy ("what vindication of yourselves"), and righteous "indignation" at the affront to Paul. It had further resulted in: concern (godly "fear") over their behavior and its effects, a "longing" to see Paul again, a determination ("zeal") to make

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<sup>237</sup>See the chart in the introduction section of these notes.

things right, and a correction of their error ("avenging of wrong"). The church had now put itself in the right, having been in the wrong: "you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter."

"He [Paul] acquits them of all responsibility for the offense which was committed. At first they had been to blame. By not protesting against the outrage they had seemed to acquiesce in it, but all this had been put right by their reception of Titus and submission to Paul's letter."<sup>238</sup>

Another interpretation is that by their response, the Corinthians showed that they had always been guiltless in the matter. This seems unlikely, since the church had mourned (Gr. *odyrmos*, indicating deep sorrow, v. 7).

7:12-13a The value of Paul's letter turned out to be, primarily, the good effects it produced in the Corinthians as a whole ("your earnestness on our behalf"). This final outcome, which had been Paul's hope when he had originally written the severe letter, was now a reality. It did not just produce a change in "the offender" (probably Paul's critic), or even in the Corinthians' response to "the one offended" (Paul himself). Paul had wanted them to realize, "before (in the sight of) God," how devoted they were to him as their spiritual father (cf. 2:9). That loyalty would fortify them against future tests to depart from his teaching. Paul rejoiced that this was what had happened ("we have been comforted"), and that they had not responded improperly.

"Many opinions have been expressed as to the identity of the wrongdoer and the nature of his act of injustice toward Paul. Most likely, in our view, is the suggestion that this event should be linked with a public disturbance during the second visit (12:20) when Paul confronted those who had not relinquished their former sexual practices (12:21—13:2), connected as these probably were with ongoing temple attendance (6:14—7:1). The most consistent reconstruction of Paul's scattered remarks on the subject throughout 2 Corinthians is that this man publicly opposed, and to some degree thwarted, Paul's attempt at discipline during that fateful visit."<sup>239</sup>

### **Titus' encouragement at their response 7:13b-16**

7:13b-14 Titus, who had observed the Corinthians' repentance, had increased Paul's joy further ("we rejoiced even much more") by reporting that to him ("for the joy of Titus"). Paul's words of praise for his readers, before he had sent

<sup>238</sup>Plummer, p. 223.

<sup>239</sup>Barnett, pp. 380-81.

Titus to them ("if in anything I have boasted to him about you"), had "proved worthy (to be true)," in view of their response to Paul's messenger and his message.

"Paul's relief stemmed from the fact that his generous assurances to Titus about the Corinthians had not proved unfounded and therefore embarrassing (v. 14). On the contrary (*alla*), just as his own truthfulness had been vindicated at Corinth (cf. 1:18-20), so also his boasting about them had now proved fully justified."<sup>240</sup>

"Paul's attitude shows how excellent a director of their spiritual interests he is: not hesitating to reprove what is amiss, but yet warmly and sympathetically encouraging them in the true emotions of those whose hearts are regenerate, which is the best way of ensuring that their past errors will not be repeated."<sup>241</sup>

7:15 The Corinthians' submissive response ("obedience") to Titus, even though initially they feared him ("received him with fear and trembling"), had endeared these Christians to Titus greatly ("his affection abounds all the more toward you"). Their speedy acquiescence constituted both the basis of Paul's appeal to them, to open their hearts wider to him, and the basis for his confidence that they would do so.

7:16 Paul was now completely confident of the Corinthians' continuing submissive obedience to him ("in everything I have confidence in you") as their spiritual father and apostle. Consequently he proceeded to appeal to them again (8:1—9:15).

"This brief verse, indeed, provides a perfect transition to all that follows. It is the delicate pin around which the whole of the epistle pivots."<sup>242</sup>

### **III. INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JUDEA 8:1—9:15**

The New Testament reveals that Paul was actively collecting money for "the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26) for about five years (A.D. 52-57). He solicited funds from the Christians in Galatia (Acts 18:23; 1 Cor. 16:1), Macedonia (Acts 19:22; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:2, 4), Achaia (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8—9), and Asia Minor (Acts 20:35; cf. Acts 24:17).<sup>243</sup> Delegates from most of these regions accompanied Paul when he took the gift to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

<sup>240</sup>Harris, p. 365.

<sup>241</sup>Hughes, p. 280.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>243</sup>See the excursus on Paul's collection in Martin, pp. 256-58.

The recipients were Hebrew Christians, who were poor for several reasons: Conversion to Christianity, and particularly baptism, resulted in social and economic ostracism in Jerusalem society where Judaism dominated all of life. The communal sharing of goods, that the early Christians in Jerusalem practiced, did not solve their economic problems (cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35). All Palestinian residents suffered from lack of food, due to a famine that descended during the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 46, Acts 11:27-30). Being the mother church of Christianity, the Jerusalem church probably had a larger number of teachers, missionaries, and visitors to support than its daughter churches did. Finally, Jews, including Jewish Christians, who lived in Palestine—had to pay double taxes, to Rome and to the Jewish authorities.

Why did Paul devote so much of his time and energy to raising and delivering this collection? Undoubtedly, love for his needy Christian brethren was a primary motivation (Rom. 12:13; 13:8; Gal. 6:10). He also believed this gift would honor Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:19). It would help equalize (balance) God's provision for His people's physical needs, too (2 Cor. 8:13-15). Moreover, it provided a visual demonstration of the equality that exists between Gentile and Jewish Christians (Eph. 2:11-22). It was something that God might use to allay Jewish suspicions of Christianity and of Paul's mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 11:2-3). It also illustrated the spiritual indebtedness that the Gentiles owed to their Jewish brethren (Rom. 15:19, 27; 1 Cor. 9:11). For Paul personally, it was one way that he could compensate in part for his earlier persecution of the Jerusalem saints (Acts 8:3; 9:1; 26:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13).

Paul wrote as he did in the following two chapters of 2 Corinthians to facilitate the collection and to set forth a philosophy of Christian stewardship. This is not the first that the Corinthians had heard about this collection. Paul's abrupt introduction of "the collection for the saints" in 1 Corinthians 16:1 and his subsequent discussion of it in that chapter suggest that he had spoken to them about it previously. Evidently they began to participate but then dropped the project. Probably the controversy concerning Paul that developed contributed to that decision (2:5-11; 7:12). However, now that Paul had learned that the Corinthian congregation was responding more positively to him again, he could reintroduce the subject and press for its completion.<sup>244</sup>

#### **A. THE EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIANS 8:1-7**

Paul was not only proud of the Corinthians, but he also rejoiced over the Christians in Macedonia, the Corinthians' neighbors to the north. This joy connects the present section with the former one.

8:1-2 Paul tactfully began his appeal by referring to the good example of others, rather than to the duty of his readers. The behavior of the Philippian, Thessalonian, Berean, and perhaps other Christians, manifested "the grace of God." These believers were both poor and persecuted (cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; Acts 16:20; 17:5): "deep poverty . . . great ordeal of affliction." Even so, they demonstrated "joy" and generosity ("liberality"; cf. Rom. 12:8; Phil. 4:15).

<sup>244</sup>See Carson and Moo, pp. 440-42, for discussion of the integrity of these chapters.

"In 8:1 a similar pattern to that of 4:7-15 is used to describe the Macedonian participation in the collection. Out of their affliction and depth of poverty comes a wealth of liberality. Just as life has come from death in Paul's ministry, so here the Macedonians give liberally from their scarce monetary resources."<sup>245</sup>

"The paradox of Paul's expression, 'the abundance . . . of their extreme poverty' (v 2) lies at the heart of this section; and it invites the present-day reader to see how Paul regarded the meaning of Christian commitment in the most practical area of stewardship."<sup>246</sup>

". . . the contribution of the Macedonian Christians was really comparable to the giving of the widow's mite (Mark xii. 44). It is noteworthy that no warnings against the temptations of wealth occur in 1 and 2 Thess. or Phil."<sup>247</sup>

"Liberality" means generosity that is free of any self-serving motive. Paul did not mention the size of their gift. Their attitude and their sacrifice were more important (cf. Mark 12:41-44).

"Christian giving is estimated in terms not of quantity but of sacrifice."<sup>248</sup>

The first of ten occurrences of the word "grace" (Gr. *charis*) in chapters 8 and 9 occurs here. Paul used it to refer to God's enablement to participate in the collection here (cf. 9:8, 14). Elsewhere it refers to the honor and opportunity of giving, which God gives (v. 4), and God's lavish display of His generosity (v. 9). It also refers to the offering itself as an expression of goodwill (vv. 6, 19). Paul further referred to grace as a generous, virtuous act of helping by sharing (v. 7). He also used it as a synonym for thanks (v. 16; 9:15). Thus the range of meanings of *charis* is quite broad.

8:3-5 Three characteristics marked the giving of these Macedonian brethren:

First, they gave sacrificially, "beyond their ability" (v. 3a). They gave more generously than their limited means and their difficult circumstances might have warranted.

"The meaning of this paradox is that, because of their extreme poverty, the amount collected by them was not huge in quantity; a man possessing only ten pounds cannot

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<sup>245</sup>Kraftchick, p. 177.

<sup>246</sup>Martin, p. 255.

<sup>247</sup>Bernard, 3:85.

<sup>248</sup>Hughes, p. 288.

be expected to contribute a hundred pounds, for ten pounds is the absolute limit of his ability. In this sense, the Macedonians had given 'according to their ability'. But the proportion of his goods which a person gives is generally determined by a twofold consideration: (i) a reckoning of the basic necessities for his own immediate existence, and (ii) prudence in setting aside at least something as a measure of security against future needs and emergencies. Such circumspection is justifiable and reasonable. The Macedonians, however, poor though they were, had shown a complete disregard of their own requirements, both present and future. It is in this sense that, impelled by love and compassion for brethren in Christ whom they had never seen, they had given 'contrary to their ability'. And this was a noteworthy token of their refusal to take anxious thought for the morrow because of their confident dependence on God, who as the Heavenly Father, knows His children's needs even before they ask Him and will not fail to supply those needs from the boundless storehouse of His grace (12:9; Mt. 6:8, 25ff.; Phil. 4:19)."<sup>249</sup>

Second, they gave on their own initiative ("of their own accord"), before receiving any suggestion or pressure from others that they should give (vv. 3b-4). They wanted to extend "gracious fellowship" (Gr. *koinonia*) to the poorer saints. This is a better translation of the Greek *hendiadys* rendered "the favor of participation" in the NASB. *Hendiadys* is a figure of speech in which the writer expresses a single complex idea, by joining two substantives with "and," rather than by using an adjective and a substantive. Having received grace from God (v. 9) as needy sinners, they desired to extend grace to their needy brethren by sending them material assistance. Evidently Paul had not pressed the Macedonians, in view of their economic condition, to contribute—since we learn they had begged him for that privilege.

Third, they gave as a part of their larger personal dedication, primarily to the Lord but also to Paul ("they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us"), for any service he might request of them (v. 5). When people give themselves totally to the Lord and to His servants, their hearts are already open toward others in need. Meeting the needs of others is really service for Christ (Matt. 22:39).

8:6 Titus had begun to lead the Corinthians in assembling their gift sometime before his recent visit to Corinth. He had made this earlier visit a year before the time Paul wrote this epistle (cf. v. 10, 9:2). The Corinthians were not facing persecution, nor were they facing financial constraints, as

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid., pp. 290-91.

the Macedonians were. Nevertheless they had not yet assembled their offering, even though Titus had been with them again recently.

8:7 Paul now called on them to remember the vastness of their spiritual resources, and to make sure liberality (generosity; "see that you abound in this gracious work") marked them as a congregation, as did so many other gifts of God's Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 1:5, 7; 12:31; 14:37).

"The Corinthians were strong in activities that are local to and centered upon them (miracle-working faith, charismatic speech, and theological understanding), but weak on those that are for the benefit of those outside, in this case the 'saints of Jerusalem.'"<sup>250</sup>

This verse elevates giving to the status of a spiritual gift—on the same level as faith, speech, knowledge, zeal, and even love.

"An ungenerous Christian is far from being a complete Christian."<sup>251</sup>

"I have met pastors and missionaries who have argued that, since they devote their whole time in serving the Lord, they are not obligated to give. Paul argued just the opposite: since you are wonderfully gifted from God, you ought to want to give even more!"<sup>252</sup>

### **B. THE SUPREME MOTIVE FOR GIVING 8:8-15**

Paul cited the example of Jesus Christ's gift of Himself for needy humanity, to further motivate his readers to finish their work of assembling the collection.

8:8 Paul wanted his readers to understand that he did not want them to take the following exhortation incorrectly. It was not an apostolic "command," since obedience to a command is an inferior motive for giving to others. Rather, he hoped that the good example ("as proving through the earnestness") "of others" would motivate them. The "others" in view are: the Macedonians, the Corinthians' themselves in their initial efforts, and Jesus Christ.

Paul claimed full apostolic authority (cf. 10:8; 13:10), which his critics challenged, but he generally chose, as here, not to use it. It is usually wiser and more effective to appeal for change by citing positive examples rather than by making authoritative demands.

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<sup>250</sup>Barnett, pp. 403-4.

<sup>251</sup>Tasker, p. 114.

<sup>252</sup>Wiersbe, 1:656.

"Paul uses the conventional rhetorical strategy of comparison (*synkrisis*), in this case competition, to spur the Corinthians to action (8:1-8, esp. 8:8)."<sup>253</sup>

8:9 The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the greatest example of self-sacrificing generosity. He gave up the riches of glory in heaven, when He became a man and died on the cross, so that we might share His riches of glory in heaven (cf. Phil. 2:1-11). Gratitude to Him for His condescending grace should be the supreme motive for Christian giving.

"Paul depicts the glory of heavenly existence as wealth, in comparison with which the lowliness of earthly existence amounts to 'poverty.' Thus it is not possible [i.e., proper], from this verse alone, to deduce that Christ's life on earth was one of indigence. In the context the stress is on his voluntary surrender of glory contrasted with the spiritual wealth derived by others (Eph. 1:3) through his gracious act of giving."<sup>254</sup>

". . . there is nowhere in St. Paul a more definite statement of his belief in the pre-existence of Christ before His Incarnation (cf. John xvii. 5)."<sup>255</sup>

Paul frequently used doctrine to appeal for proper conduct (cf. Rom. 15:2-3; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:9-10).

The Macedonians gave when they were very poor, but Christ gave when He was immensely rich. The Corinthians were between these two extremes. These two examples leave no question that giving is a grace which both the rich and the poor should manifest.

8:10-11 Though he did not command his readers, Paul advised them strongly to complete ("finish") their collection. They had, after all, both desired to begin a collection, and had actually begun their collection, before the Macedonian churches had taken either of those steps. A better understanding of "a year ago" is "as long ago as last year."

"Therefore in all three cases [whether Paul was thinking of a Macedonian, an Olympiad, or a Jewish year] a person writing in November might speak of the previous January-April as 'last year.'"<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup>Keener, p. 203.

<sup>254</sup>Harris, p. 368.

<sup>255</sup>Bernard, 3:87.

<sup>256</sup>Plummer, p. 243.

8:12 The standard by which God would judge their contribution would be how much they gave *in relation to* how much they had ("what a person has"), not simply how much they gave (cf. Mark 12:41-44). God does not expect us to give what we do not have. The apostle assumed their giving sprang from proper motivation.

"Paul's sentiment here is entirely in line with the OT prophets' teaching that the right attitude to Yahweh is more important than the sacrifice itself."<sup>257</sup>

8:13-14 The objective in view was not making the Judean Christians rich and the Corinthian Christians poor. It was that there should be more "equality" than presently existed. In the future, the Corinthians might be in need of help from other Christians who had more than they did. Then it would be their turn to receive. Paul viewed Christians as being brothers and sisters in a large family. As a family, we have a responsibility to care for each other.

". . . the Scriptures avoid, on the one hand, the injustice and destructive evils of agrarian communism, by recognising [*sic*] the right of property and making all almsgiving optional; and on the other, the heartless disregard of the poor by inculcating the universal brotherhood of believers, and the consequent duty of each to contribute of his abundance to relieve the necessities of the poor. At the same time they inculcate on the poor the duty of self-support to the extent of their ability. They are commanded 'with quietness to work, and to eat their own bread.' Could these principles be carried out there would be among Christians neither idleness nor want."<sup>258</sup>

Some people see any financial demand—placed upon them by church leaders, governmental leaders, or others—as an evidence of discrimination. Their argument is that they should not have to give, since others do not give as much as they are being asked to give. It was this attitude that Paul addressed in these verses. Paul did not legislate equality; he appealed for it.

8:15 Paul illustrated the fact that God wants all of His people to have enough, by citing the Israelites' situation in the wilderness (Exod. 16:18). Some of the Israelites gathered more ("much") manna, and some gathered less ("little"), for various reasons. Nevertheless they all had their needs met ("not . . . too much . . . had no lack"). God saw to that, though the Old Testament does not explain exactly how He did it. Now the Corinthians

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<sup>257</sup>Barnett, p. 412.

<sup>258</sup>Hodge, p. 206.

needed to see to it, that what God had provided them in abundance, reached those who did not have enough. As they did this, they would become God's agents in maintaining sufficiency for all.

God has always wanted all of His people to have enough, and for them to share with their brethren who have less when they have more. We should implement this principle of relative equality in our giving. God's desire is the same today as it has been throughout history. This is clear from Paul's appeal to the past (v. 15). There are no easy answers as to how we can effect this relative equality in our world, with its gigantic population and complex socio-economic-political problems. Moreover, God's will is not exactly the same for every Christian. Paul appealed, implying that the Corinthians could decide what they wanted to do (vv. 10-12). Nevertheless our responsibility is clear. A pastor posted the following notice on his church marguerite: "Give God what's right, not what's left."

### **C. THE DELEGATES OF THE CHURCHES 8:16-24**

Having motivated his readers to finish the collection, Paul proceeded to explain the practical steps he had taken to pick up their gift. He wanted the Corinthians to know what to do and what to expect. He wrote a "letter of commendation" (cf. 3:1) in the following verses, in which he set forth the credentials of the three delegates who would visit them soon.

8:16 One of Paul's representatives, whom he was sending to Corinth to pick up their gift, was "Titus." Paul's readers had met Titus, received ministry from him, and would see him again shortly. Paul again affirmed Titus' love ("heart") for the Corinthians so that they would receive him happily. The apostle also expressed "thanks" to God for working in Titus to give him his good attitude ("earnestness"). Titus, like Paul, felt concern for the Corinthians personally, not just for their money (cf. 12:14).

"The Corinthians might think that the zeal of Titus for the relief-fund was zeal on behalf of the Jerusalem poor; but it was really on behalf of the Corinthians. They would be the chief losers if a suitable sum was not raised in Corinth."<sup>259</sup>

8:17 It is not clear whether Titus had already left Paul for Corinth, or whether he was about to do so. The Greek aorist tense permits either translation, and no other textual reference provides a solution. He may have carried 2 Corinthians to its recipients. In any case, it was Titus' desire ("of his own accord"), as well as Paul's (v. 6), that led him back to Corinth.

8:18-19 The famous brother's identity ("brother whose fame . . . has spread through all the churches") is also a mystery. He may have been Luke.<sup>260</sup> Or he may have been any one of a number of others who assisted Paul. The churches

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<sup>259</sup>Plummer, p. 247.

<sup>260</sup>See John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):3-44; Plummer, p. 248; and Hughes, p. 313.

of Macedonia, Asia Minor, and Galatia had chosen this man as a courier. They knew him well, and he had won their respect. Paul personally supervised the project for a double reason. He saw it as an opportunity to promote "the glory of the Lord," and to lend a hand ("our readiness") in helping his needy brethren (cf. Matt. 22:37-39).

8:20-21 Paul was very conscious of his need to guard ("take precaution") his project ("administration of this generous gift"), and the people involved in it, from any charge of financial mismanagement ("that no one will discredit us"). Doing what was correct was not enough for Paul. He wanted to make sure that everyone perceived what he did as honest and above board as well. Paul had learned to anticipate the suspicions or accusations of those who viewed his ministry critically, and to take necessary precautions.

"Cicero's words (*De officiis* 2.21.75) are appropriate: 'but the main thing in all public administration and public service is to avoid even the slightest suspicion of avarice' . . ." <sup>261</sup>

Some observers doubtless wondered if Paul was using the money of other people for his own advantage. Others probably suspected him of skimming a certain percentage of the large gift off the top as his commission. To guard against any misunderstanding, Paul had originally thought that he would not accompany the delegates who carried the money to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3-4; cf. 2 Cor. 1:16; Rom. 15:25). He had also insisted that the churches, rather than he himself, appoint the delegates (1 Cor. 16:3), and that two delegates accompany Titus to Corinth before he arrived (vv. 18-19, 22-23). He sought to apply the wisdom of Proverbs 3:4, which verse 21 virtually restates.

We need to apply Paul's wise caution in our day, when so many professed servants of the Lord have proved deceitful. We cannot afford to be naïve or careless about doing things that are "honorable . . . in the sight of [all] men."

8:22 A third member of the delegation ("our brother") is also unknown to us. His qualifications fitted him well for his duties, however, since he had proven himself faithful for significant responsibility ("tested and found diligent in many things"). Like Titus, this Christian brother also had great "confidence" in the Corinthians, and consequently would have been welcome in Corinth.

Why did Paul not mention Titus' two companions by name? Perhaps the Corinthians already knew who they were, or Paul may have wanted to heighten anticipation for their arrival by keeping their identities a secret.

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<sup>261</sup>Martin, p. 279.

Paul may have sent three delegates to Corinth, rather than one or two, since his credibility there had been under attack. The anticipated arrival of three visitors would have also provided additional motivation for these until now slack Corinthian Christians to complete the collection. One writer speculated that they may have been Jason of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5) and Sopater of Berea (Acts 20:4; cf. Rom 16:21).<sup>262</sup>

"The word motivation is often confused with manipulation. Motivation occurs when you persuade others to take an action in their own best interests. Things such as people preparing their homework, accepting responsibility for their performance, and finishing their education are the results of motivation. Manipulation is persuading others to take an action that is primarily for your benefit. Things such as selling an inferior product at an inflated price and working people overtime with no extra pay are examples of manipulation."<sup>263</sup>

8:23 Titus was obviously the man in charge of this project. He was a special representative of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom. 16:21): "my partner and fellow worker." The other two delegates were Paul's spiritual brothers ("our brethren"), the churches' envoys ("messengers"), and credits to Christ. By calling these fellow workers "a glory to Christ," Paul meant that they *brought* glory to Christ.<sup>264</sup>

This is one place where the Greek word *apostolos*, usually translated "apostle," but here rendered "messenger," occurs in the non-technical sense of someone sent on a mission (cf. Phil. 2:25; Acts 14:4, 14; et al.). Usually it refers to one of the 13 apostles whom Jesus Christ personally commissioned (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:1, et al.).

8:24 Paul concluded his "letter of commendation" (vv. 16-24) with a warm appeal. He charged his readers to grant these messengers a reception ("openly . . . show them") that would demonstrate the Corinthians' ("the proof of your") "love" for Christ, Paul, and the delegates—to ("before") all the other "churches." They were to be open-hearted toward them, as Paul had urged them to be open-hearted toward himself (6:11-13). Their warm reception of the messengers would confirm the genuineness of their acceptance of Paul, as well as their positive response to his admonition concerning the offering. Other churches were watching the Corinthians and knew of their history. Therefore this positive welcome of the delegates needed to be public, in order to dispel any doubts in the minds of others.

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<sup>262</sup>Lowery, p. 575.

<sup>263</sup>Zig Ziglar, *Something to Smile About*, p. 43.

<sup>264</sup>See Keener, p. 210, for a parallel in Greco-Roman literature.

#### **D. THE ANTICIPATED VISIT OF PAUL 9:1-5**

Paul revealed his plan to visit Corinth, soon after Titus and his two companions arrived, to further motivate the Corinthians to complete their collection and have it ready to go to Judea. Chapter 9 continues the subject of chapter 8. Some scholars have argued for separating chapter 9 from chapters 1—8, but there are insufficient compelling reasons for doing so.<sup>265</sup>

- 9:1 Even though Paul said he felt no need to go on writing ("it is superfluous for me to write") about the importance of this collection ("this ministry to the saints"), he did so in this chapter. This is the rhetorical device called *paraleipsis* (cf. 1 Thess. 4:9, 13; 5:1). Saying one is not going to mention a subject, and then proceeding to do so, has the effect of emphasizing it in an understated way, that is less offensive than if one would simply speak on the subject. The emphasis in the verses that follow is primarily on Paul's plan to come to them. The additional motivation, that this visit placed on the readers to get the collection ready (cf. Phile. 21-22), is only a secondary emphasis.
- 9:2 Paul said he told the "Macedonians" that the Corinthians had been ready a year ago ("prepared since last year"). Evidently he meant by "readiness" that they had been ready to *start* collecting a gift, rather than that their gift was ready to go to Judea (8:6, 10). Their enthusiasm a year ago had faded since then (8:11), but they had been eager to participate in the offering project. It was this initial attitude ("readiness") that Paul commended here. Apparently the Corinthian Christians were taking the lead in their province, which also included churches in Cenchrea and probably other communities. This explains his reference to "Achaia."
- 9:3-4 Paul planned to bring some "Macedonians" with him to Corinth. The "if" does not imply doubt about this possibility in the Greek text. The first class condition in the Greek text describes a condition Paul assumed to be true for the sake of the argument. In this case we could translate the Greek word for "if" as "when" (cf. John 12:32; 1 John 2:28). Despite Paul's "boasting," there was a possibility that Paul and his Macedonian companions might find the Corinthians "unprepared" when they arrived. Paul evidently mentioned his intention as an added incentive for the Corinthians to complete their collection ("may be prepared").

"There were two situations Paul wished to avoid. One was that his repeated and confident boast to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' 'eagerness to help' (v. 2) and their expected 'readiness' on his arrival should turn out to be without foundation (v. 3). The other was that when the delegates of the Macedonian churches (not to be confused

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<sup>265</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

with the two companions of Titus) arrived at Corinth with Paul on his forthcoming visit (12:14; 13:1-2), the Corinthians would be still unprepared and this would lead to his acute embarrassment—not to mention that of the Corinthians themselves (v. 4)."<sup>266</sup>

"He is not afraid that they will refuse to give, but he is afraid that they may be dilatory for want of organization. It will produce a bad impression if the money is not ready when it is wanted. He carefully limits his anxiety to 'this particular.'"<sup>267</sup>

9:5 The "brethren" in view here are Titus and his two companions. The Greek word translated "bountiful gift" (*eulogian*, lit. good word) usually reads "blessing" elsewhere. The Corinthians' gift would be a blessing to the Judeans. That is, it would be an occasion for the Jerusalem believers to bless or thank God for their gift. The word also implies a sizable *blessing*. Paul assumed that his readers would collect a substantial sum of money, and that *generosity*, rather than "covetousness," would motivate them. Paul was contrasting two attitudes to giving, generously or grudgingly, rather than two ways of securing the gift, simple reception or extortion.

"Apparently, Paul did not see anything wrong or unspiritual about asking people to promise to give. He did not tell them *how much* they had to promise, but he did expect them to keep their promise. When a person signs up for a telephone, he promises to pay a certain amount each month. If it is acceptable to make financial commitments for things like telephones, cars, and credit cards, certainly it ought to be acceptable to make commitments for the work of the Lord."<sup>268</sup>

The subtle pressure that Paul put on his readers, which comes through especially forcefully in this section, raises a question as to his method of motivating his readers. Was he making it almost impossible for them to give from proper motives by stressing lesser motivating factors so strongly? Evidently Paul realized that the Corinthians might not follow through with their commitment unless they wanted to do so very strongly. After all, they had procrastinated a full year. The fact that he motivated them from several different angles does not mean that what he presented as the proper primary motivation for giving, in chapter 8, is secondary. If his primary arguments failed by themselves, these secondary arguments would add force and hopefully move his readers to do what was right.

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<sup>266</sup>Harris, pp. 374-75.

<sup>267</sup>Plummer, p. 254.

<sup>268</sup>Wiersbe, 1:660.

"So far from opportunistically playing off one church against another, as is often concluded from this passage, Paul is, rather, seeking to preserve the reputation of the Corinthians in a situation of potential misunderstanding in which they would have lost face."<sup>269</sup>

### **E. THE BENEFITS OF GENEROUS GIVING 9:6-15**

Paul concluded his exhortation regarding the collection by reminding his readers of the benefits God inevitably bestows on those who give generously. He did this so they would follow through with their purpose, and would believe that God would provide for the need that their sacrifice would create.

"Having begged the Corinthians not to spoil his praise of them by exhibiting unreadiness now, but to give without further delay, he puts before them three motives for giving liberally and joyfully. 1. Giving in a right spirit is a sowing which is sure of a harvest. . . . 2. God is able and willing to bestow the right spirit and the worldly wealth with which to exhibit it. 3. What they give will not only be a relief to the recipients, but it will fill them with gratitude to God and with affection for the donors."<sup>270</sup>

9:6 One of the great spiritual principles of life is that God blesses people in proportion to their blessing others (cf. Prov. 11:24-25; 19:17; 22:8-9; Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). Paul reminded his readers of this, here, by citing the example of the farmer. If he plants little ("sparingly"), he harvests little; but if he plants much ("bountifully"), he will harvest much. Giving to meet the needs of others is like sowing seed. It will yield fruit of the same kind in time. There will be a profit (a return; a crop).

"The important lesson which Paul is urging upon the Corinthians at this point is that *to give is to sow*. What is given is not lost, but, like the seed sown by the farmer, contrary to all appearances it possesses the potency of life and increase. At the same time it is important to remember that, as the whole context shows, the Apostle is speaking of the quality, not the quantity, of giving."<sup>271</sup>

Is a proper motive for giving to get something in return? Both Jesus and Paul urged us to "lay up treasure in heaven," to make investments of time, effort, and resources, counting on the fact that they will yield eternal rewards (Luke 12:31-34; 14:14; Matt. 6:4, 6, 18-21; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; cf. Prov. 19:17; Matt. 10:42; Luke 6:38). It is perfectly legitimate to remind people of the inevitable consequences of their actions in order to motivate them to do what is right, as Paul did here.

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<sup>269</sup>Barnett, p. 435.

<sup>270</sup>Plummer, pp. 257-58.

<sup>271</sup>Hughes, p. 329.

"Low motives, if not immoral, are admissible, esp. in dealing with those to whom high motives do not always appeal."<sup>272</sup>

- 9:7 The example of the harvest suggests that the farmer has the freedom to plant as much or as little as he chooses (cf. Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2). We should give generously, freely, and deliberately. We should not give "grudgingly," feeling that we hate to part with what we are giving. We should not give because we feel there is no alternative, or because we think others will look down on us if we fail to give (cf. Acts 5:1-11). We should not give impulsively or thoughtlessly ("compulsively"), but with inward resolve. We should give cheerfully (Gr. *hilaron*), or hilariously, in the sense of very joyfully, but not in the sense of thoughtlessly. "Cheerful" givers always receive God's loving approval (Prov. 22:8 LXX).

"What makes a man a cheerful giver is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>273</sup>

- 9:8 Such giving need not produce anxiety in the giver, even if he or she is giving away much. God demonstrates His love for cheerful givers by giving them "more (all) grace" and more opportunity. He also makes them contented (Gr. *autarkeia*), *sufficient* in that sense (cf. Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6). However, we always need to remember that God is the One from whom everything we have comes.

Notice the "able" in this verse. This should not lead to the conclusion that God can, but He might not (cf. 12:9); rather, He is more than able and willing. The righteous person who desires to give to the needs of others will not lack opportunity to do so, because God will make this possible for him or her.

- 9:9 Psalm 112:9 supports Paul's point that God will provide grace (divine enablement) to givers. In this psalm, the psalmist described the God-fearing man distributing material goods "to the poor." The words read like the epitaph of a philanthropist. Consequently God will remember his benevolent acts, Paul said. "Righteousness" (v. 9) probably refers to benevolent acts here too (cf. Matt. 6:1). These are acts of giving for which God will reward the sacrificial donor with permanent benefits in this life—plus an eternal reward ("his righteousness endures forever"). God will multiply His grace to those who bestow grace on others.

"The righteous man does not keep for selfish use what was meant for the benefit of many."<sup>274</sup>

<sup>272</sup>Plummer, pp. 258-59.

<sup>273</sup>Richard D. Balge, "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 9:1-7," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 85:3 (Summer 1988):228. This article contains a good summary of what verses 1-7 teach concerning motivation in Christian giving and methods for encouraging it.

<sup>274</sup>Plummer, p. 261.

9:10-11 Paul applied this promise to his readers, and we can apply it to ourselves (cf. Isa. 40:10; Hos. 10:12). However, notice that what God promised is "seed for sowing," the opportunities and resources to make further investments of good works. He did not promise wealth for our own consumption.

Preachers of "prosperity theology" have used these verses to support their contention that God will inevitably give you more material goods if you give what you presently have to Him. They often urge their hearers to give to God through their ministries. However, Paul was comparing what God does on the physical plane with what He does spiritually. The farmer who plants a crop gets back more seed than he sowed. Similarly, Paul argued, those who sow spiritually—by giving sacrificially to others—will receive more *spiritual seed*, namely: divine enablement to help more people (vv. 8-9). Moreover, God will not just supply more spiritual seed, but He will "multiply" it.

Generally, what we give away is what we get back. That is the principle in view. However, this is not a promise that we will inevitably get more wealth if we give away our wealth. The opposite usually happens. In Galatians 6:7, the emphasis is on "that" rather than "reap." Paul's point there was that we reap in kind what we sow (cf. Gal. 6:8). He did not say that we will get back more of whatever we sow. "In everything" implies that God may give generous Christians more material resources that they can pass on to others. However, we should remember that the context is primarily dealing with *righteousness* that comes back to the person who sows righteous acts, not Rolls Royces and Rolex watches.<sup>275</sup>

"There is no hint here of a 'prosperity theology.' Enrichment, like 'overflowing' (v. 8), is metaphorical, and is not at all motivated by self-interest."<sup>276</sup>

Another result of the Corinthians' benefaction would be that the Jerusalem saints would thank God when the gift came to them through Paul and his associates.

9:12 Their gift would not only meet the needs of their Jewish brethren, and cause them to thank God (v. 11b), but it would also cause many other people to thank God. Paul viewed the benefits of their gift as spilling over onto others, who would also praise God ("overflowing through many thanksgivings to God") for the Corinthians' generosity. The abundant grace that God has given us will overflow into the lives of many others too if we pass it on.

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<sup>275</sup>For an evaluation of "prosperity theology," see Jim Kinnebrew, "The Gospel of Affluence," *Mid-American Theological Journal* 9:2 (Fall 1985):49-65, and Ken L. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.

<sup>276</sup>Barnett, p. 443.

- 9:13 The Jerusalem believers and others who heard about the Corinthians' gift would "glorify God" because it demonstrated the vitality of the donors' faith (cf. James 2:14-26 for the alternative). News of the Corinthians' former conduct probably had raised some questions about their faith among the Christians in the other churches. All who "confess the gospel" imply that they follow the teachings of Jesus and His apostles, who taught us to love the brethren (Rom. 12:13; et al.). Another reason these onlookers would thank God was that the Corinthians had been sacrificially generous (Gr. *haplotēs*) in their giving ("liberality of your contribution"). Paul apparently believed that there would be more thanksgiving for the virtues of the Corinthians than for their gift.
- 9:14 Another benefit of this gift, that Paul foresaw, was that those who received it and heard about it would reciprocate by interceding for the Corinthians ("by prayer on your behalf"). Moreover, they would long to see and be with the Corinthians ("yearn for you") because of the "surpassing grace" that God had given them. There is something attractive about people on whom the grace of God obviously rests.
- 9:15 The "indescribable gift" to which Paul referred in closing is probably Jesus Christ, the "divine gift which inspires all gifts."<sup>277</sup> It is probably not the same as the gift that God would give the Corinthians because they were generous toward the Judeans, to which Paul referred in the immediately preceding context (vv. 8-11). Some have suggested that it is the gift of eternal salvation.<sup>278</sup> Others have suggested that, in view of the preceding context, the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians, which this collection would facilitate, qualifies as the "indescribable gift."<sup>279</sup> Christ qualifies as an "indescribable" gift (cf. Rom. 8:32). Furthermore, reference to Him is appropriate and climactic at the end of this section of the epistle. Paul here was going back to the primary motivation for Christian giving (cf. 8:9) for his final appeal to his readers.

The Corinthians did follow through and assemble their gift. It was only a few months after Paul penned 2 Corinthians that he wrote Romans. In that epistle, he said that the Christians of "Macedonia and Achaia" (which includes Corinth) had made a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26-27). Paul and his delegation then traveled back to Jerusalem, from Corinth, through Macedonia and Asia Minor (Acts 20:3—21:19). The leaders of the Jerusalem church evidently received the gift gladly (Acts 21:17).

#### **IV. APPEALS CONCERNING PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY 10:1—13:10**

In this third and last major division of his epistle, the Apostle Paul defended his apostolic authority. He did this to silence his critics in Corinth—and perhaps elsewhere—permanently, and to confirm the united support of the Christians there. One of Paul's

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<sup>277</sup>Tasker, p. 130.

<sup>278</sup>E.g., Lowery, p. 576.

<sup>279</sup>E.g., Plummer, p. 268.

major purposes in writing this letter was to prepare the way for his next visit. He had just referred to that "anticipated visit" (9:3-4). Consequently he felt compelled to establish his apostolic authority firmly.

". . . the reason for the new subject (as in 1 Cor. 7:1; 12:1; 15:1) lies primarily in the situation [Paul faced in Corinth] rather than in Paul's logic."<sup>280</sup>

Broomall's observation on the general tone of 2 Corinthians is especially true of chapters 10—13.

"The progress of thought in this epistle is like the movement of a mighty army advancing over rugged terrain still inhabited by pockets of stubborn resistance."<sup>281</sup>

". . . 2 Corinthians 10—13 presents us with what might almost be called a new kind of Judaizing: a Hellenistic Jewish movement that opposed Paul but was less concerned (so far as we know) with circumcision and with detailed observance of the Mosaic law than with prestige and power in accord with the contemporary values of Corinthian society. Paul's response (2 Cor. 10—13) is the most intense, revealing, and emotional of all his writings."<sup>282</sup>

Several commentators have argued that chapters 10 through 13 were originally part of Paul's "severe letter." The strongest evidence *for* this view is the *internal* logic of the hypothesis. The strongest argument *against* it is that there are no ancient manuscripts, versions, or quotations that support it; there is no *external* evidence that this section was ever separated from chapters 1 through 9.<sup>283</sup>

### **A. REPLIES TO CHARGES MADE AGAINST PAUL 10:1-18**

Paul responded to charges of cowardice, weakness, and intrusion that one or more critics in Corinth had evidently leveled against him. Failure to submit to apostolic authority could have dangerous consequences, such as disregarding his inspired writings. It was to spare his beloved readers from these ill effects that Paul wrote as he did, not out of a carnal sense of wounded pride.

#### **1. Reply to the charge of cowardice 10:1-6**

10:1-2 Paul may have identified himself by name here so his readers would have no doubt that what he proceeded to say indeed came from him. Whenever he described himself as "I Paul" (and here "myself"), he made his point

<sup>280</sup>Keener, p. 216.

<sup>281</sup>Broomall, p. 1261.

<sup>282</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 447.

<sup>283</sup>See Plummer, pp. xxii-xxxvi, for a full discussion of this issue.

with strong emphasis (cf. Gal. 5:2; Eph. 3:1; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Phile. 19). He began by gently asking his readers to respond to his appeal ("I . . . urge you") to submit to his apostolic authority. This was important so that when he came, he would not have to deal severely with those who opposed him (cf. Acts 5:1-10). The description of himself in verse 1b is his critics' opinion. Those individuals were saying that Paul was behaving as a carnal Christian (v. 2; cf. 1:12-24). He sent forceful letters to them, especially his "severe letter," but when he was with them in person he was less aggressive. However, his "meekness" (mercifulness) and "gentleness" were characteristics of Christ, rather than signs of personal timidity (v. 1; cf. Matt. 23; John 2:14-22). Paul did not want to have to be critical when he arrived in Corinth, yet he was ready to be if necessary.

"In v. 2 Paul gives the probable clue to his critics' basis of opposition to him. Judging his attempted discipline of moral offenders in Corinth to have been ineffectual, they 'reckon' that Paul must be a man who 'walks according to the flesh.'"<sup>284</sup>

- 10:3-4 Paul admitted that he walked "in the flesh" (was only human), but denied that he worked (warred) "according to the flesh" (as carnal Christians and unbelievers do). He was contrasting living in the world and living as a worldling. Carnal weapons like intimidation, manipulation, trickery, double-talk, rumor, and hypocritical behavior are ineffective in spiritual warfare. Reliance on the working of God, however, results in supernatural victories. The spiritual Christian's "weapons" are those that Paul later enumerated in Ephesians 6:11-17. The "fortresses" or "strongholds" (Gr. *ochuroma*, used only here in the New Testament) probably refer to the false arguments of Paul's opponents (cf. v. 5).
- 10:5 As in Ephesians 6:12, Paul described the enemy as impersonal. We wage war against invisible, intangible spiritual forces, though obviously Satan is behind these forces. Satan's strategy is not only to use demons (Eph. 6:12), but also speculations (theories), and incorrect information that contradicts God's revealed truth. The propaganda of our enemy consists of ideas that run counter to the truth of God. "Speculations" or "arguments" (v. 4 in NIV) contrast with revelations that God has given, and they contradict those revelations. "Lofty things" or "pretensions" include any human act or attitude that asserts itself as being superior to God's will or truth. Paul claimed to make it his aim to bring all such thoughts and actions into submission to what God has revealed in His Word. He regarded this as "obedience" to Christ. He was a bondservant to the truth of God in his thinking. His desire was that everyone would voluntarily submit to such servant status.

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<sup>284</sup>Barnett, p. 461.

"It is not a case of the Christian's effort to force all his thoughts to be pleasing to Christ. Rather the picture seems to be that of a military operation in enemy territory that seeks to thwart every single hostile plan of battle, so that there will be universal allegiance to Christ."<sup>285</sup>

10:6 Paul was "ready" to come to Corinth, and to "punish all disobedience" to God's will and his own apostolic authority. However, he wanted to do that only after the whole church had made a clean break with the rebels in its midst ("whenever your obedience is complete"). If the church would not stand with him in disciplining his unrepentant opponents, his discipline would not be effective. Unless any church as a whole is willing to support the discipline of its member or members, the discipline that its leaders seek to impose will be ineffective.

### **2. Reply to the charge of weakness 10:7-11**

As Paul defended himself against the charge of cowardice leveled by his critics, so he also claimed ability to deal forcefully with them in person as well as by letter. He referred to this to explain his conduct further, and to urge obedience to his commands.

10:7 The Corinthian Christians tended to evaluate the claims of Paul's critics superficially ("outwardly"). The apostle urged them to look below the surface. At least one critic seems to have been claiming that he had received apostolic authority from Christ, which would have been every bit as binding as Paul's, if not more binding. Paul did not dispute this claim here, but simply argued that his own authority was from Christ ("so also are we"). The critic and Paul both claimed to belong to Christ as His apostles. It was unfair for the Corinthians to accept the claim of the critic and to deny Paul's claim.

10:8 Paul argued that he could have said more about his apostolic authority ("boast somewhat further") without feeling "shame" about exaggerating. The facts spoke for themselves. However, he did not want to put that kind of pressure on his opponents in a letter. They had charged that it was only in his letters that he could express himself forcefully. His reference to his authority for "building them up," here, seems intended to contrast his edifying ministry in Corinth with the destructive work of his critics (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17).

Paul had stressed the divine origin of his call and the gospel when he defended himself to the Galatians (Gal. 1:1, 11-12, 15-16). Here he stressed the divine origin of his "authority" (3:5-6; 13:10), and how he had used it for his readers' good.

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<sup>285</sup>Harris, p. 380.

10:9-10 Paul's reference to terrifying his readers (v. 9) is sarcastic, as is clear from verse 10. It is probably better to take the critics' charge that Paul was "unimpressive" as a reference to his conduct among them, and not to his physical appearance, in view of the context (cf. 1:13). Paul evidently was not a showy speaker, compared to many silver-tongued orators of his day, or even Apollos. The power of his influence came through the Holy Spirit's working through his words (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:3; 2 Cor. 11:6).

". . . unlike his opponents (11:20), Paul avoided self-assertiveness and admitted the inferiority of his rhetorical skills (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; 2 Cor 11:6). What he firmly resists, however, is the inference drawn from the claim about his personal bearing and his manner of speaking—namely, that he was "'timid' when face to face' (v. 1)."<sup>286</sup>

"Like so many who judge things according to the outward display of this world, Paul's opponents interpreted meekness as weakness, forbearance as cowardice, and gentleness as indecision (cf. v. 1; . . . 11:21 . . .)—or at least they had sought to induce the Corinthians to place this interpretation on Paul's character."<sup>287</sup>

10:11 Paul had restrained his words of exhortation to the Corinthians while he was with them for their welfare. He continued to restrain himself in this letter, lest he give substance to the charge that he was only bold and impressive "when absent." However, he was perfectly capable of being just as forceful ("weighty and strong") in person as he was in his "letters" (cf. 13:2, 10).

### **3. Reply to the charge of intrusion 10:12-18**

Paul defended his right to preach the gospel in Corinth, and he denied his critics' claim that they had been responsible for what God had done through him there. He did this both to vindicate his former actions as well as to prepare his situation for future ministry in the regions beyond Corinth.

". . . Paul, responding to his opponents' characterization of him as inconsistent, and hence as a flatterer, and of the invidious comparisons of his opponents, attacks the whole convention of self-advertisement by means of a remarkably subtle and forceful parody of its methods."<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>287</sup>Hughes, p. 362.

<sup>288</sup>Christopher Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *New Testament Studies* 32:1 (January 1986):2.

What Paul wrote in this section and the following ones helps us see that some opposition against Paul in Corinth came from Jewish Christians. These critics contested Paul's special calling and his legitimate right to minister to Gentiles. Moreover, in their unrestrained self-commendation, they were claiming the credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth.

10:12 In irony, Paul claimed to be a coward, as his critics accused, when it came to comparing himself with his critics ("those who commend themselves"). They cited their own conduct as normative, and then prided themselves on measuring up to their own artificial standard. The Corinthians would be just as foolish ("without understanding") if they measured Paul's apostolic credentials by using the same subjective standard that his critics applied to themselves.

J. B. Phillips' paraphrase of the first part of this verse captures Paul's irony well.

"Of course, we shouldn't dare include ourselves in the same class as those who write their own testimonials, or even to compare ourselves with them!"<sup>289</sup>

10:13-14 Evidently Paul's critics were claiming that the apostle had exceeded the proper limits of his ministry by evangelizing in Corinth. They proudly refused to admit that Paul's commission as the apostle to the Gentiles gave him the right to minister as far from Palestine as Corinth. He responded that he had not exceeded the territorial limits of his commission ("we are not overextending ourselves") by planting the church in Gentile Corinth ("to reach even as far as you").

Paul's ministry had definite divinely prescribed limits ("measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure"). He was called and appointed to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Rom. 1:5; cf. Gal. 2:9), and he was to do pioneer missionary work (Rom. 15:20). His ministry at Corinth had been within those bounds. He had not overextended his authority by coming to Corinth. It was his critics who were "overextending" themselves, by claiming that Corinth was their special domain.

"We may conjecture that had they come to Corinth and confined their ministry to the synagogue (as Cephas had?), there would have been no problem. The difficulty appears to be that these newcomers are not content with that; they wish to move into Paul's God-assigned 'field' of ministry, the Gentiles."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup>J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*.

<sup>290</sup>Barnett, p. 488.

10:15-16

Paul was anxious that all the Corinthians acknowledge that he was not doing what his critics were doing, i.e., "boasting beyond measure . . . in other men's labors." They were taking credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth ("boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another"). They were apparently claiming that the spiritual vitality of the Corinthian church was due to their ministry in spite of Paul's influence. This is sometimes a temptation for those who follow others in ministry. Sometimes they confuse, unconsciously, or as in the case of Paul's critics, consciously, the results of their work and the results of their predecessors' work.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to continue to support him as he reached out to yet unevangelized fields, such as Rome and Spain, in the future (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:11; 15:24, 28). He hoped that his ministry would take him even farther still.

Pioneer evangelism precluded the possibility of Paul falling into the error of his critics. He could not claim the credit for what his predecessors had done, since he had no predecessors whenever he planted a new church. Paul did not want to build on, much less take credit for, the foundational work that his predecessors had done, but to "preach the gospel" in previously unevangelized areas (Rom. 15:18-21). He did not, however, object to others building on the foundation that he had laid, or watering what he had planted (1 Cor. 3:6, 10). He did object to their failing to give credit where credit was due.

Paul spoke as though his future was in the Corinthians' hands. It was because, in order for Paul to proceed into unreached areas ("regions beyond" Corinth), he needed to have his former churches, including Corinth, in good spiritual condition. Paul did not just want to plant as many churches as he could. He wanted to plant a church, and then make sure it continued to follow the Lord faithfully, before he moved on to plant other churches. If it did not, he felt responsible to get it spiritually healthy before he moved on. The "faith" of the Corinthians would continue to "grow" as they responded positively to Paul's instructions. Then they would be able to provide the support (prayer and perhaps financial) that was essential for him to expand his ministry (v. 15b): "enlarged even more by you".

10:17-18

In summary, Paul purposed not to take credit for ("boast in") what others had accomplished in their service for Christ. He could not even boast about what he himself had accomplished, since it was God who was at work through him. His only boast therefore would be "(in) the Lord." That is, he would be proud only of his Lord. He quoted Jeremiah who expressed this thought well (Jer. 9:24; cf. 1 Cor. 1:31). The only commendation worth anything is the *work* that God has done through His servants, not their *words* of self-commendation. Their approval by God is His commendation of them (cf. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:15): "he whom the Lord commends".

"In the Christian church, indeed, self-commendation should be viewed with suspicion as a mark of disqualification. God's commendation of a person is shown, not by verbal boasts, but by the testimony of the consciences of those who have experienced the blessing attendant upon that person's labours and by the continuing and increasing fruits of his labours (cf. 4:2, 5:11)."<sup>291</sup>

In this chapter, the contrast between Paul's view of ministry and his critics' view stands out clearly. They had different motives, different authority, different loyalties, different objectives, and different procedures. In all of these contrasts, Paul emerges as the truly Spirit-led apostle.

"If there is currently a temptation to import models of ministry from management, the social sciences, or academia, the New Testament sources indicate the inadequacy of all nonbiblical models."<sup>292</sup>

"The import of this passage is threefold. First, Paul establishes that the spreading of the gospel is the priority of Christian ministry. In Paul's case this meant the mission to the Gentiles to which he was called by God on the road to Damascus, as recognized by the missionary concordat of Jerusalem c. A.D. 47. Second, because the existence of another mission—that to the Jews—brought its own complications and tensions, accepted principles of cooperation were needed, as they continue to be in comparable situations. Third, self-commendation in Christian ministry is excluded. The Lord commends his servants for ministry by the fruits of their ministry."<sup>293</sup>

## **B. CLAIMS MADE BY PAUL 11:1—12:18**

In this section, Paul gave further evidence that he possessed apostolic authority, in order to encourage the whole Corinthian church to continue to respond positively to his ministry. Some writers refer to 11:1—12:13 as Paul's "Fool's Speech" because of the recurring "foolishness" terminology in this passage (*aphrosyne*, *aphron*, *paraphron*; cf. 11:1, 16 [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:11, 16).

### **1. Paul's reasons for making these claims 11:1-6**

In the first subsection, he explained his need to present this evidence.

11:1 Paul found it necessary to remind and reveal to the Corinthians some of the evidences of the Lord's commendation of his ministry (cf. 10:18). He

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<sup>291</sup>Hughes, p. 371.

<sup>292</sup>James W. Thompson, "Ministry in the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 27:3 (Third Quarter 1984):156.

<sup>293</sup>Barnett, pp. 493-94.

called this exhibit "foolishness," because he should not have had to make this defense. He and his ministry were well known to his readers.

11:2 God had jealously guarded His people Israel from the deceitfulness of deceivers, who sought to draw their affections away from Him (cf. Hos. 2:19-20; 4:12; 6:4; 11:8). Paul felt the same concern for the Corinthians. His "jealousy" was in that sense "godly" (God-like). Paul pictured himself as the father of a "virgin" bride (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 12:14). His desire was to keep his daughter, the Corinthian church, "pure" until she would consummate her marriage "to Christ" (cf. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; 1 John 3:2-3).<sup>294</sup> This will take place at the Rapture. Another view is that Paul was thinking of himself as the groomsman or bridegroom's friend who, traditionally, presented the bride to the groom in the Jewish wedding ceremony.<sup>295</sup>

"Human jealousy is a vice, but to share divine jealousy is a virtue. It is the motive and object of the jealousy that is all-important. There is a place for a spiritual father's passionate concern for the exclusive and pure devotion to Christ of his spiritual children, and also a place for anger at potential violators of that purity (11:29)."<sup>296</sup>

The motive of Paul's critics in citing what they had done was self-glorification, but Paul's was the welfare of his readers. This is the first of three reasons that Paul gave for the Corinthians to bear with him (v. 1): he wanted them to be completely loyal to Christ.

11:3 Paul's critics were not just calling his apostolic authority into question. They were leading the Corinthians "astray." The apostle communicated the seriousness of this seduction by comparing it with the serpent's cunning deception (Gr. *exepatesen*) of Eve (Gen. 3:13).

"The very future of the Corinthians as an apostolic church is in jeopardy."<sup>297</sup>

Genuine Christians can be, and are being deceived by false teachers, and are abandoning their faith today. This sometimes happens when young people go off to college and conclude that what they learned in church is unscientific. It also happens when Christians accept the teachings of cultists who come knocking on their doors.

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<sup>294</sup>See Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.

<sup>295</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 153.

<sup>296</sup>Harris, p. 385.

<sup>297</sup>Barnett, p. 501.

11:4 The "Jesus" they were preaching was different enough from Him whom Paul preached, that he could say their "Jesus" was a different person. The "if" in this verse does not represent a hypothetical possibility, but a past reality. In listening to the false teachers' message, the church was under the influence of some sort of "spirit," but it was "different," and not the Holy Spirit. They were in danger of accepting a "different gospel" (cf. 10:5; Gal. 1:8-9). In all this, they were bearing up "beautifully." Paul sarcastically described their accepting it all—very graciously and submissively—from the false apostles (cf. 10:7). Since they showed such remarkable toleration of false teachers, surely they owed their "father in the faith" the same toleration.

This is the second reason the Corinthians should bear with Paul (v. 1): their willingness to accept visitors who presented an adulterated message.

11:5 The "most eminent apostles" were probably the false apostles, who claimed to be "eminent," and were not even actual apostles, rather than the genuine apostles.<sup>298</sup> The context supports this interpretation, as does the rare term translated "eminent" (NASB, Gr. *huperlian apostolon*, lit. "exceedingly beyond apostles"). It is probably a term more appropriate to phonies, claiming apostleship, than to genuine apostles. However, this term may have been one that Paul's critics used to describe the Twelve in contrast to Paul (cf. 12:11-12).<sup>299</sup> By elevating the Twelve exceedingly, they effectively denigrated the apostle to the Gentiles. Whichever view is correct, the meaning is clear: Paul's foes were claiming that he was an inferior apostle.

This is the third reason the readers should bear with Paul (v. 1): he claimed that he was not inferior to these "super-apostles."

11:6 Paul had just said that he was not inferior. So he was not now admitting that he was inferior "in speech." He evidently meant that even if his critics' charge that he was inferior ("unskilled") in speech was true, which it was not, no one could charge him with being inferior "in knowledge." Another view is that Paul meant he was not professionally trained as a rhetorician.<sup>300</sup> In any event, the Corinthians knew very well Paul's superior knowledge of the revelations of God (cf. Eph. 3:4-5; 1 Cor. 2:6-11). He had expounded divine truth to his readers exhaustively, both in person and in his letters. Obviously knowledge is more important than speech.

Paul had previously revealed that some of his Corinthian hearers criticized him for not being a skilled rhetorician (10:10). Nevertheless, Paul was as

<sup>298</sup>Bernard, 3:104; Hughes, pp. 378-80; Richard Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 1245-7; Plummer, pp. 298-9; Tasker, pp. 148-9; Barnett, pp. 50708; Martin, p. 337; Wiersbe, 1:669.

<sup>299</sup>Bruce, pp. 236-7; Hodge, p. 256; Kent, pp. 164-5; Harris, p. 386; Lowery, p. 580.

<sup>300</sup>Plummer, pp. 299-300; *The Nelson . . .*, pp. 1959-60.

competent as any of the Twelve, or any of his critics, in his ability to communicate—as well as in his ability to understand God's revelations. He was responding to criticism of him here, not conceding inferiority.

The fact that the early Christians used the word "apostle" in both a general sense (e.g., 8:23; Acts 14:4, 14; et al.), and in a technical sense (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:1; et al.), probably created some confusion. In what sense was Paul an "apostle"? He claimed to be an apostle on a level equal with the Twelve. Yet the word in the general sense means anyone sent out on the Christian mission, and in this sense the teachers in Corinth who were criticizing Paul were themselves apostles. Perhaps it would be more accurate to define the Corinthians' question about Paul as: What *type* of apostle was he?—rather than—Was he an apostle or not?

## **2. Freedom to minister without charge 11:7-15**

Paul claimed the freedom to minister in Corinth, without receiving financial support from the Corinthians, to illustrate his self-sacrificing love for his readers and his critics' selfishness. He digressed from his "foolish" boasting (vv. 1-6), to defend his policy regarding his own financial support (vv. 7-12), and to describe his opponents' true identity (vv. 13-16).

11:7-8        Again Paul used irony (by meaning the opposite of what he said): "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself?" This is bordering on sarcasm. He had written that apostles have the right to refrain from working for a living, and to live off of the gifts of their audiences (1 Cor. 9:6, 14). Yet he had made tents in Corinth, and had refused to accept gifts from the Corinthians (cf. Acts 18:3; 1 Cor. 9:4-15). This suggested to some, in Corinth, that he did not believe he was an apostle. The other apostles normally accepted support from the recipients of their ministries, and these false apostles evidently did so consistently.

Paul had expounded God's truth in Corinth "without" accepting money ("charge") from his converts there for doing so. He adopted this policy, in Corinth and elsewhere, because he did not want to burden the people he was currently ministering to. He also did so because he knew there were people who would accuse him of preaching to receive payment. He accepted financial help from other churches, while not ministering to them directly ("robbed them"), so that he could serve the Corinthians without "charging" them.

11:9        Paul had practiced his trade of leather-working (Gr. *skenoipoios*) when he had first arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:3). When Silas and Timothy joined him "from Macedonia," Paul stopped his craft work and devoted all his time to preaching and teaching (Acts 18:5). He apparently did this because these brothers had brought financial gifts with them from the Macedonian churches ("they fully supplied my need"; cf. Phil. 4:15; 1 Thess. 3:6). Paul's principle was to preach and teach without charging those who benefited directly from his ministry. This is a good policy in church

planting, but it is not normative for a settled pastoral ministry (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).<sup>301</sup>

11:10-12 Paul claimed that he had not sinned in behaving as he had (v. 7). He had not deceived his readers. Rather, as God knew his heart, he had behaved as he had because he "loved" the Corinthians. Furthermore, it was not necessary for him to change his policy, of accepting or declining support, on the basis of the welfare of those he served. His critics uniformly accepted support. By giving up his right to preach the gospel free of charge, Paul would have been descending to their level. He also would have enabled his critics to compare themselves with him favorably.

11:13-15 "The moment has come for Paul to drop the veil of irony and to speak in the plainest possible terms in denunciation of these would-be 'super-apostles' who have invaded his territory in Achaia."<sup>302</sup>

Paul did not want the Corinthians to associate him with these people because they were counterfeit, "disguising themselves" as ambassadors of Christ. It is for this reason that their accusations concerned Paul. They were self-servers who were the true sons of their father—"Satan"—the consummate hypocrite.<sup>303</sup> They may have been genuine believers. Indeed they appear to have been. Nevertheless in their conduct, they were following the example of Satan. They perverted the thinking of, and misdirected the affections of, the Corinthians. Some scholars have argued that these "false apostles" were different individuals from the "eminent apostles" of verse 5, but I agree with those who see them as the same. Another view of their identity follows.

"Several factors suggest . . . that they were Palestinian Jews, members of the Jerusalem church who were false brothers (cf. Gal. 2:4) in Paul's estimation."<sup>304</sup>

In our own day, when people value toleration so highly, and practice it so widely—even in the church—we need to learn from Paul's example of "calling a spade a spade." The welfare of those under his ministry required him to identify his critics for who they really were. We shall serve our own generation faithfully if we do the same. We should point out teachers who lead others into error, and warn people about them, if we want to keep the naïve from harm (cf. 3 John 9-10).

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<sup>301</sup>Cf. Barnett, p. 518.

<sup>302</sup>Hughes, p. 392.

<sup>303</sup>See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Work as a Deceiver," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):190-202.

<sup>304</sup>Lowery, p. 579.

### **3. Paul's service and sufferings 11:16-33**

To answer his critics, and prove the extent of his own service and sufferings for Christ, Paul related many of his painful experiences as an apostle.

11:16 Paul "apologized" again for having to resort to mentioning these experiences (cf. v. 1). He listed his sufferings to prove to the skeptical minority in the church that he had suffered as much as, if not even more than, the false apostles. The false teachers had impressed the "wise" Corinthians with their boasts. Consequently Paul answered these fools "according to their folly" (Prov. 26:5). However, he stressed that he was not a fool, but was only *speaking as one* (i.e., boasting) to make his point.

"The key term is *aphron*, 'fool': not a dim-witted person or clown, a jester (as in 'play the fool'), but in the technical sense of the person in hellenistic-Roman society who had lost the correct measure (*metron*) of himself and the world around him . . ." <sup>305</sup>

11:17-18 These two verses are probably parenthetical. Paul evidently knew that only such "boasting" would convince the minority of his own genuineness. Straightforward claims, such "as the Lord" Jesus made, would not.

"The reason for Paul's embarrassment at this juncture is now given: self-commendation is not 'after the Lord' [cf. Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:24; Col. 2:8] but, the exact opposite, 'after the flesh' [cf. 5:16], that is, typical of the old unregenerate nature whose values are dictated by the external, self-centered standards of this fallen world." <sup>306</sup>

11:19-21a The apostle was most ironical and sarcastic in these verses (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10). The Corinthians considered themselves unusually wise, but they were being unusually foolish, by not only humoring (tolerating) the fools ("foolish") in their midst, but doing so "gladly." They were absurdly tolerant. They submitted to the teaching of the false apostles even though it resulted in their own enslavement. Probably this teaching involved the "Judaizing error" (i.e., submission to the Mosaic Law is necessary for justification and or sanctification, cf. Gal. 2:4; 5:1). The false teachers had evidently devoured the Corinthians' financial contributions. They had abused them, and exalted themselves at their expense. *Hitting* in the face may have occurred (cf. Acts 23:2; 1 Cor. 4:11), but it definitely depicts the most insulting and harmful conduct. How inconsistent this behavior was with the manner of the Savior!

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<sup>305</sup>Martin, p. 362.

<sup>306</sup>Hughes, p. 397.

Ironically, Paul feigned "shame" (embarrassment) that he had behaved so weakly among them: "To *my* shame I say that we have been weak . . ." Really it was the Corinthian Christians who should have been ashamed (cf. 1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34). Paul's conduct had been Christ-like. Now he was experiencing abuse for such gentleness, as his Master had.

11:21b-22 After repeated announcements that he was going to boast (10:8; 11:1, 6, 16), Paul now finally began. At first he matched each of his critic's claims: "So am I."

"It is probable that this 'Speech' mirrors, but so as to parody and also correct, the claims of the newly arrived false apostles."<sup>307</sup>

"Thus the 'Speech' proper has elements of antitriumphalism as well as of triumph, characteristics that inexactly replicate those in the remarkable victory parade metaphor set out in 2:14."<sup>308</sup>

The term "Hebrew" had three connotations: A "Hebrew" was a pure-blooded Jew, and or one who could read the Old Testament in the original languages, and or one who could speak Aramaic, as contrasted with one who knew only Greek (cf. Acts 6:1; Phil. 3:5).

"'Hebrew' . . . denotes Jews whose family ties were Palestinian, if they were not wholly resident in Palestine. . . . It looks very much as if Paul's opponents at Corinth were of Palestinian provenance."<sup>309</sup>

As an "Israelite," Paul was a member of God's chosen people, as his critics were. Paul traced his descent all the way back to "Abraham." He probably did so to connect himself with the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision, both of which were of cardinal importance to the Jews. Thus, in his upbringing, his citizenship, and his ancestry: Paul was not inferior to any of his Jewish critics.

11:23-25 The apostle first listed general afflictions he had suffered in the service of Christ (v. 23), and then cited specific examples (vv. 24-25). He turned from nationality (v. 23) to achievements (vv. 24-29). Here he claimed superiority to his critics, not just equality with them. He proceeded from speaking as a fool (vv. 16, 17, 21) to talking like an "insane" madman (v. 23).

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<sup>307</sup>Barnett, p. 534.

<sup>308</sup>Ibid., p. 535.

<sup>309</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 240-1.

"He begins with sufferings which were inflicted on him by officials, Jewish and Roman, in the name of law; then, after one outrage inflicted by a lawless mob, he mentions a number which were due to the operations of nature."<sup>310</sup>

His opponents claimed to be servants of Christ (v. 23), but really they were only masquerading as such (v. 13). Paul alone was the true servant of the Lord. However, instead of citing successes that he had experienced in his ministry, any awards that he had received from others, he listed his apparent defeats. Thus he boasted in his weaknesses (v. 30; cf. 12:5, 9, 10).

". . . Paul is not in fact magnifying self in the passage which is now beginning—in this, too, there is complete disparity between himself and his adversaries—but he is magnifying, as he does throughout this epistle, the amazing grace of God which in the midst of afflictions and sufferings is sufficient for his every need."<sup>311</sup>

Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians fits into Luke's chronology of his life at Acts 20:2, so everything that Paul described here occurred before Acts 20:2. Paul's life involved many more dangerous experiences than we read about in Acts. Paul referred to many imprisonments (v. 23), but Acts only records one before this time (i.e., in Philippi, Acts 16:23-40).

"Prison (cf. Acts 16:23) was merely detention until trial or execution, but having been in prison and bonds were matters of grave shame in the culture—not a typical subject of boasting!"<sup>312</sup>

The apostle mentioned numberless beatings (v. 23), whereas Acts only records one by this time (also in Philippi, Acts 16:22-23). The only record of a near fatal experience in Acts, before this, was Paul's stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19), though Paul said he had often been "in danger of dying [death]" (v. 23). Paul claimed to have received whippings ("thirty-nine lashes") by the Jews five times (v. 24), but Acts says nothing about any of these. A commonly accepted method of punishment by the Jews was the "thirty-nine lashes":

It was "only inflicted after a regular judicial investigation and sentence, and for the breach of some negative precept or prohibition. . . . If the number of stripes were less than thirty-nine, it must still be some multiple of three, since, as

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<sup>310</sup>Plummer, p. 323.

<sup>311</sup>Hughes, p. 406.

<sup>312</sup>Keener, p. 234.

the scourge was composed of three separate thongs (the middle one of calf's leather, the other two of asses', with a reference to Isaiah i. 3), each stroke of the scourge in reality inflicted three stripes. Hence the greatest number of strokes administered at one time amounted only to thirteen. The law also most particularly defined and modified every detail, even to the posture of the criminal. Still this punishment, which St. Paul underwent not less than five times at the hands of the Jews, must have been very severe."<sup>313</sup>

"This punishment was so severe that death often ensued . . ."<sup>314</sup>

Acts does not mention the three beatings "with rods" (by the Gentiles, v. 25; cf. 2 Tim. 3:11) either.

"The fact that St Paul was thrice treated in this way [i.e., beaten with rods by the Romans] is evidence that being a Roman citizen was an imperfect protection when magistrates were disposed to be brutal."<sup>315</sup>

Paul had already experienced "shipwreck" three times to this point, though Luke recorded none of these in Acts. Paul's "night and a day . . . in the sea (deep)" (v. 26) also comes as news to the reader of Acts.

"Ancient sources suggest that shipwreck was a common experience for those who spent much time on the sea (cf. Ps.-Phoc.25), especially if they traveled even during the more dangerous seasons. Some would view surviving them (especially multiple times), however, as divine protection or even vindication."<sup>316</sup>

Obviously in Acts, Luke gave us only a highly selective account of the Apostle Paul's very difficult life.

11:26-27 Paul broadened his description, from specific hardships, to general types of "dangers" (v. 26) and privations (v. 27) that he had experienced as an apostle. Paul's sufferings on his journeys as a missionary merited special mention (v. 26), as did his labors when he settled in an area to plant a church (v. 27). Again, Luke recorded only a few of these in Acts (cf. Acts 9:23, 29; 13:13, 45, 50; 14:19, 24; 16:16-40; 18:12; 19:23-41)

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<sup>313</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 66-67, 68. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 4:8:21.

<sup>314</sup>Bernard, 3:106.

<sup>315</sup>Plummer, p. 325.

<sup>316</sup>Keener, p. 234.

11:28-29 All the previous trials that Paul enumerated were temporary, but what follows remained with him always. Internal "pressure" (v. 28) harassed Paul, on top of all the "external" difficulties that he endured. Specifically, concern for the "weak," and the moral failures of his converts, disturbed Paul (v. 29).

"And so it should be with every faithful pastor of Christ's flock: he should lovingly identify himself with those who have been committed to his care, showing himself deeply anxious for their spiritual well-being, compassionate with them in their frailties and temptations, and resisting and resenting every one who seeks to entice them away from the purity of their devotion to Christ. This compassion is not of man: it is the divine compassion of Christ Himself, burning in the heart of His servant, and blazing forth in love to reach and to bind to the one Bridegroom the hearts of those to whom he ministers."<sup>317</sup>

11:30-31 Rather than boasting about his strengths, as his critics did, Paul boasted in his weaknesses, humiliations, and sufferings.<sup>318</sup> These would not initially impress others with his qualifications as an apostle, but these afflictions had come upon him as he had faithfully served others and Christ. They were evidences that God had supernaturally sustained His servant through countless discouraging circumstances. They were, therefore, the greatest possible proof and vindication that Paul was an apostle (cf. 1:8-10; 3:5; 4:7, 10-11; 12:5, 9-10). Paul's "boast" was that he resembled the Suffering Servant; his life was like that of Christ. Paul called God as his Witness that his claims, which probably seemed incredible to those who did not know him well, were true: "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus . . . knows that I am not lying."

It seems possible that, with his strong claim in verse 31, Paul anticipated what he was about to say in verses 32 and 33.<sup>319</sup> Others believe Paul was referring to what he had already written in this chapter.<sup>320</sup> Still others think he meant what he wrote both before and after this verse.<sup>321</sup>

11:32-33 Paul might have mentioned this final experience he cited because it was his first experience of suffering for the gospel. It had provided a pattern that continued throughout Paul's life. Paul's critics may have charged him with cowardice in his escape from Damascus, though there is no basis for this revealed in the text. That may be an additional reason he mentioned it,

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<sup>317</sup>Hughes, p. 418.

<sup>318</sup>See Toussaint, pp. 190-92.

<sup>319</sup>Alford, 2:707-8; Hughes, pp. 419-20.

<sup>320</sup>E.g., Tasker, p. 167; Hodge, p. 278.

<sup>321</sup>E.g., Plummer, p. 332.

though I doubt it. It may also have been that it would have reminded his readers of his supernatural call and appointment as an apostle on the Damascus road. It was also undoubtedly a humbling memory for Paul. This specific example of danger increases the emotional intensity—in the reader—of Paul's litany of sufferings.

Aretas IV was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas. He lived in Petra, and ruled the kingdom of Nabatea (called Arabia in Gal. 1:17) between 9 B.C. and A.D. 40. "Damascus" at the time of Paul's conversion may have been under Nabatean rule.<sup>322</sup>

"Nabatea included the city of Damascus before the city was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria. Aretas was able to appoint a governor over Damascus because the emperor Caligula (A.D. 37-41) gave Aretas control over the city."<sup>323</sup>

Alternatively, Damascus might have been under Roman rule, with a colony of Nabateans controlling it.<sup>324</sup> A third possibility is that "Aretas" ruled the Nabatean population of Damascus.<sup>325</sup> The historical evidence is incomplete. Aretas evidently wanted to arrest ("seize") Paul, because the apostle had begun evangelizing in that region immediately after his conversion (cf. Acts 9:20; Gal. 1:17, 22-23). Aretas himself may have been a Jew.<sup>326</sup>

Paul's activity had antagonized the Jews living in the area, who had obtained official support for their opposition to Paul (cf. Acts 9:23-25). Paul's escape from Damascus in a basket probably took place after his return to Damascus from Arabia (between Acts 9:19a and 19b; cf. Gal. 1:15-17).<sup>327</sup> It seems unlikely that Paul would have escaped in a basket, went to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus, from which he had previously fled for his life.

In many of his examples, Paul presented himself as one who did not fit the pattern of "successful" ministers of the gospel. Like the Corinthians, we modern Christians tend to evaluate a person's success on the basis of the world's standards. Rather than playing down the events in his ministry that made him look inferior, Paul *emphasized* them—because they glorified God, and His remarkably sufficient grace! In view of all of Paul's calamities, there is no way he could have been so effective unless God was with him.

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<sup>322</sup>Hughes, p. 425.

<sup>323</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1962.

<sup>324</sup>Bruce, pp. 244-45.

<sup>325</sup>Keener, p. 236.

<sup>326</sup>Hughes, p. 425.

<sup>327</sup>Plummer, pp. 335-36.

#### **4. Special revelations Paul received 12:1-10**

Paul had cited his freedom to minister without the Corinthians' financial support, as well as his sufferings in ministry, as grounds for boasting. He next mentioned, in this section, the special visions and revelations that God had granted him. He referred to these, here, in order to further bolster his readers' confidence in his apostolic calling and authority.

12:1 The apostle again explained that he felt his "boasting" was "necessary" to convince the fleshly-minded Corinthian minority. It was "not profitable" (beneficial) for any other reason.

All visions of this type were revelations, but not all revelations came through visions. Furthermore, "visions" are always seen, but "revelations" may either be seen or perceived in other ways.

"If, as seems likely, his opponents are claiming paranormal experiences to validate their apostolate (cf. on 5:12-13), the very vagueness of Paul's reference may be his way of asserting the uniqueness of his apostolate."<sup>328</sup>

12:2-4 The "man" of whom Paul spoke in the third person was himself (cf. vv. 7-9). He referred to himself this way, probably out of reluctance to speak of this matter. Moreover, he wanted to minimize the effect of boasting, which citing such a spectacular experience would have produced.

Paul could not tell (did "not know") whether God had transported him physically ("in the body") into the third heaven (cf. Acts 8:39; 1 Thess. 4:17), or if his experience had been "out of the body," in a vision (cf. Gen. 15:12-21; Ezek. 1:1). The "third heaven" probably represents the presence of God. It could be a technical description of God's abode, above the cloudy heavens overhead, and beyond the farthest reaches of space that man can perceive. "Paradise" (v. 4) is a good synonym for the third heaven (cf. Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7).

What Paul *heard* in heaven, not what he saw there, is what the apostle referred to. That message, given in "inexpressible words," was personal; Paul never revealed in Scripture what God had told him. However, it had the effect of strengthening his faith, and giving him the hope that the Lord would abundantly reward his sufferings. This experience evidently took place when Paul was ministering in and around Tarsus. This was about A.D. 42, "14 years" before A.D. 56, the most probable date for the composition of 2 Corinthians.

"The man who experienced the ineffable 'ascent' even to the third heaven was the same man who had experienced

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<sup>328</sup>Barnett, pp. 558-59.

the undistinguished 'descent' from a window in the Damascus wall [11:32-33]."<sup>329</sup>

12:5-6 Such a revelation could have made Paul quite a Christian celebrity had he publicized it. Instead he preferred to proclaim his sufferings ("weaknesses"), since by these people could see more easily the supernatural working of God through him. Paul did not want his converts to form an opinion of him based on hearsay, what they heard about him second-hand ("I refrain from this"). He preferred that they do so because of what they saw and heard in person, first-hand, with their own eyes and ears. Besides, other people could not verify many of his experiences.

12:7 Others might live in awe of Paul, because of the spectacular "revelations" they had heard he had received, but Paul himself was in no danger of becoming too impressed with himself. God had given him a "thorn" (Gr. *skolops*, better than "stake") in his "flesh."<sup>330</sup> This was a gracious gift from God, though it was unpleasant to Paul. It reminded him of his limitations, and so kept him humble.

"In this passage there is a complete reversal of the religious pride and the religious triumphalism of the 'superlative' apostles. Genuinely apostolic ministry sustains 'weaknesses . . . on behalf of Christ,' replicating his sufferings yet finding power in ministry in dependence on him. There is no place for arrogance in ministry."<sup>331</sup>

Why did Paul change from the third person to the first person in describing this experience? He probably did so because there was no danger that others would think too highly of him because of the outcome of his vision.

Does "flesh" here mean his physical flesh or his sinful human nature? Was the "thorn" a physical affliction or some external problem?

"Three basic suggested interpretations of the thorn are as follows: (1) If flesh is a reference to the body, then it is a physical ailment like an earache, headache, eye trouble, epilepsy, or recurrent fever. (2) If flesh is a reference to the fallen nature, then the thorn could be a temptation. (3) If the expression is figurative, it could refer to persecution or opposition. Most commentators interpret it as a physical ailment."<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup>Hughes, p. 422.

<sup>330</sup>Bernard, 3:111.

<sup>331</sup>Barnett, p. 567.

<sup>332</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1963.

Many early church Fathers and Reformers understood the "thorn" to be a spiritual temptation, perhaps a tendency toward pride or the opposition of Paul's enemies. Some modern Roman Catholic interpreters take it as a fleshly temptation assailing moral purity. Many modern Protestant interpreters see it as a bodily suffering, some physical illness or infirmity, such as: bad eyesight, a speech impediment, malaria, or epilepsy (cf. Gal. 4:13-15). Since the scriptural data does not provide a definite answer, it seems best to suspend judgment on any conclusions. Various commentators have made good cases for every one of the positions described above. Probably Paul avoided being explicit so his readers would not focus on his particular form of affliction exclusively.

Paul regarded his thorn in the flesh as a "messenger" that came from "Satan" to frustrate him (cf. Job 2:1-10). Nevertheless God had permitted it, and would use it to bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:28).<sup>333</sup>

"Satan is regarded as an instrument for effecting the Divine purpose, as Judas in the case of the Atonement."<sup>334</sup>

12:8 Normally Paul meant Jesus Christ when he used the title "the Lord." There are other scriptural examples of believers addressing their prayers to the second person of the Trinity (Acts 1:24; 7:59). However, normally they addressed the Father, in the name of the Son, with the Spirit's help (e.g., Eph. 2:18). Here "Lord" definitely means God, and probably it also means Jesus, with the emphasis on His being Paul's Master (cf. Acts 9:5). The fact that Paul repeated his petition "three times" shows how intensely he wanted God to remove his affliction—like Jesus in Gethsemane.

12:9-10 Here is an example of God denying a prayer request because He wanted to give something better (though not more comfortable). What we must learn, from what Paul told us about this "messenger of Satan," is that God used it to teach the apostle dependence on Himself, and the sufficiency of His "grace."

"What is grace? It is God's provision for our every need when we need it."<sup>335</sup>

So thoroughly had Paul learned this lesson, that he even boasted about his afflictions ("weaknesses"). He realized that when he was naturally "weak," the Lord would provide the "power" that he lacked and needed.<sup>336</sup> The

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<sup>333</sup>See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

<sup>334</sup>Plummer, p. 348.

<sup>335</sup>Wiersbe, 1:675.

<sup>336</sup>See Larry J. Waters, "Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):425-30.

Lord enabled Paul to do things he could not have done had he been naturally strong (cf. Rom. 8:35-37).

"This is the summit of the epistle, the lofty peak from which the whole is viewed in true proportion."<sup>337</sup>

This is one of the most important lessons every ambassador of Jesus Christ must learn. Both natural weakness and supernatural power are constantly at work in us, as they were in Paul and in Jesus. The Cross is the greatest example of divine power working through human weakness. The greater the degree that we sense our weakness, the more we will be ready to experience God's power (cf. Eph. 3:16; Phil. 4:13). Someone has said that Christians live on promises, not explanations. This is one of the greatest promises that God has given us to live on.

We may not have experienced as high of spiritual highs, or as low of spiritual lows, as Paul did, but we too are in constant need of being aware of God's supernatural power. Our success does not depend on our natural abilities, but on God's "power" working in and through us. Human weakness can be a profound blessing if it results in our depending more on God and less on self.<sup>338</sup>

"It was not, however, in the weaknesses themselves that Paul took delight but in the opportunity sufferings endured 'for Christ's sake' afforded him for Christ's power to reside and be effective in his life (v. 9b)."<sup>339</sup>

"Human weakness provides the opportunity for divine power."<sup>340</sup>

"In the Christian life, we get many of our blessings through *transformation*, not *substitution*. . . . Sometimes God does meet the need by substitution; but other times He meets the need by transformation. He does not remove the affliction, but He gives us His grace so that the affliction works *for* us and not *against* us."<sup>341</sup>

"In the 'Fool's Speech' proper [11:21b—12:10] Paul (1) exposes the triumphalism of the 'false apostles,' whose keyword is *hyper* (they have 'more' to offer than Paul, whom they are 'above,' or 'better' than), but also (2) 'boasts' of his 'weaknesses,' that is, of those sufferings incurred in the course of ministry in replication of the sufferings of Christ."<sup>342</sup>

<sup>337</sup>Hughes, p. 451. Cf. Barnett, p. 572.

<sup>338</sup>See Rick Warren, "God's Power in Your Weakness," in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, pp. 272-78.

<sup>339</sup>Harris, p. 397.

<sup>340</sup>Hughes, p. 453.

<sup>341</sup>Wiersbe, 1:675.

<sup>342</sup>Barnett, p. 534.

### **5. Paul's supernatural miracles and paternal love 12:11-18**

In this pericope, Paul concluded his claims of being a genuine apostle, by citing the miracles that God had done, as well as the love that He had manifested to the Corinthians through him. Paul did this to dispel any lingering reservations any of his readers might have had concerning his apostolic credentials.

#### **Paul's previous conduct in Corinth 12:11-13**

12:11 Again Paul reminded his readers that he had spoken of his own qualifications as an apostle, as he had, only because the Corinthians required such proof ("you yourselves compelled me"). He had not done so because he wanted to commend himself, or because his critics boastfully commended themselves. The majority in the church "should have" defended ("commended") him before the critical minority.

"If any Christian community was qualified to write Paul's testimonial, it was the Corinthian church. They had remained silent, forcing Paul to speak up. His action had been excusable, but not theirs. Commendation was what he deserved and they owed."<sup>343</sup>

They knew he was just as qualified as the "super-apostles" (Gr. *huperlian apostolon*, i.e., whether the false apostles or the Twelve, cf. 11:5). Paul considered himself to be a "nobody," in the sense that he had received everything that made him an apostle. Apart from the grace and calling of God, he was not superior to any other believer. Another possible reason is that when Paul called himself a "nobody," he was speaking ironically, using a description of himself that his critics employed.

12:12 The "signs of an (a true) apostle" refer generally to the supernatural gifts and activities that marked the true apostles. This reference seems to indicate that Paul was referring to the Twelve, rather than to the *professed* apostles, when he used the term "super-apostles" (v. 11; 11:5). God had enabled Paul to manifest these signs, so he described them as being done "among" them, rather than as having done them himself. Paul's perseverance in his apostolic mission in Corinth—despite much opposition—distinguished him from the false apostles (cf. 10:1; 11:4; 13:14; Acts 18:6, 9-10, 12-16). "Signs," "wonders," and "miracles" are synonymous terms that emphasize respectively their authenticating value, astonishing effect, and supernatural power.

"These passages [i.e., Acts 2:22; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4] demonstrate that in the New Testament the purpose of signs and wonders and powers is that of

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<sup>343</sup>Harris, p. 398.

authentication, even when deceitfully imitated by satanic forces."<sup>344</sup>

12:13 In irony and sarcasm again, Paul appealed to his readers for forgiveness ("Forgive me this wrong!"), because he had not treated them as he had a right to do as an apostle. It was only in refraining from demanding his rights of support as an apostle, that Paul had not treated the Corinthians as an apostle would normally do (cf. 11:5-12; 1 Cor. 9:1-18). He had given them special privileges ("I . . . did not become a burden to you"). This treatment had led some to criticize him.

Paul's focusing on the signs (evidences) of an apostle, rather than on the rights of an apostle, is helpful for all servants of the Lord to observe. We, too, should concentrate on demonstrating the proofs of our ambassadorship in our works, especially our perseverance, rather than expecting those we serve to follow us because we are "claiming" our rights. We need to earn the respect of those we serve, with our works and by our example, rather than demanding it because of our position.

#### **Paul's proposed conduct in Corinth 12:14-18**

12:14-15 Paul was about to return to Corinth another, "this third time": his "anticipated visit."<sup>345</sup> When he came, he planned to continue his same financial policy with them; he would remain financially independent of them (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15; 2 Cor. 11:9, 12). He wanted their welfare and their affection ("love") "more" than their money. His concerns were also for their spiritual maturity (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4) and their complete devotion to Christ (cf. 11:2-3).

As a general principle, parents (Paul) sacrifice for their children (the Corinthians), not the other way around. However, in another sense, children do have a responsibility to "love" and help their parents (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:8). Parental responsibility is more basic, however, and this is what Paul stressed here. In family life, parents sometimes refuse support from their children, as Paul did of the Corinthians, if they feel that doing so is in their children's best interests. Paul planned to use all his resources to contribute to the Corinthians' welfare. Nevertheless, he expected at least their "love" in return for doing so.

12:16-18 Whether the Corinthians showed Paul proper filial love or not, he would continue to sacrifice for them.

Some in Corinth had evidently accused Paul of craftily obtaining money from (taking "advantage of") the Corinthians *indirectly*, through his agents such as "Titus." They may have regarded the collection for the poor Jerusalem saints as one way that Paul was stealthily getting money from

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<sup>344</sup>Hughes, p. 457.

<sup>345</sup>See the chart in the introduction section of these notes.

them for himself. If that was their charge, he may have used his critics' terms sarcastically in saying that he had been "crafty." However, he was only crafty, not in getting money from them, but in giving money to them ("I did not burden you"). He had done this by working to support himself while in Corinth. Even if critics were not leveling this charge, the intent of Paul's irony in verse 16 remains the same.

"There seem to have been three missions of Titus to Corinth; (1) the one mentioned here and in vii. 6 (*kathos proenerxato*), in which Titus and one colleague started the Palestine collection; (2) the one alluded to in ii. 13, vii. 6, 13, in which Titus carried a severe letter from the Apostle, by means of which he succeeded in winning back the rebellious Corinthians to their allegiance; and (3) the one mentioned viii. 6, 17, 18, 22, in which Titus and two colleagues were to finish the Palestine collection. This last cannot be alluded to here; for, when ch. viii. was written, Titus and his two colleagues had not yet started for Corinth. And it is very unlikely that (2) can be the mission alluded to here. St Paul would not make so difficult a task as that of putting an end to a rebellion against his authority still more difficult by coupling with it a request for money."<sup>346</sup>

Paul's illustration of a parent's loving sacrifice for his or her children, in this section, should have helped his readers understand his own motives and actions more clearly. It helps us understand the proper attitude of a servant of Jesus Christ, toward those he or she serves, and how this attitude should manifest itself in the practice of ministry.

### **C. EXHORTATIONS IN VIEW OF PAUL'S APPROACHING VISIT 12:19—13:10**

As he concluded his epistle, Paul looked forward to his anticipated return to Corinth in the immediate future (cf. v. 14). He shared his concerns about what he might experience, and warned his readers to make certain changes before he arrived. He did this so he would not have to shame or discipline them when he arrived.

#### **1. Paul's concerns 12:19-21**

12:19      The first part of this verse may have been a statement or a question. The meaning is the same in either case. Paul said what he did ("speaking in Christ"), especially in 10:1—12:18, primarily to build up the Corinthian believers in their faith. His self-defense was only a means to that end. It was for that worthy goal ("all for your upbuilding") that he was willing to speak "foolishly." He recognized that he, as a man in Christ, was ultimately responsible "to (in the sight of) God," not to his critics (cf. 2:17; 5:11).

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<sup>346</sup>Plummer, p. 364.

12:20 Paul feared that he might see qualities in his readers that he did not want to see, if they refused to respond to his instructions in this letter. Furthermore, he feared that they might see the disciplinarian in him. He also feared that he might grieve and "mourn" (v. 21) if he saw continuing carnal conduct in them (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11-12, 31; 3:3; 4:6; 5:2, 11; 8:1; 11:18; 14:33, 40).

"It is an understatement to say that Paul was afraid of what he might find at Corinth upon his third visit. This list of sins reflects a church that was in turmoil. Little wonder that he was coming to correct the situation."<sup>347</sup>

12:21 Moreover, he feared that he might suffer humiliation over their failure to repent of the attitude that had embarrassed him on his former painful visit. This situation would cause Paul to "mourn" over those in the church who had "not repented" of their former sins. The sins mentioned seem to have been unrelated to Paul's critics, though the critics may have practiced them as well. Paul's concern here seems to have been mainly the ungodly conduct that had marked the Christians in Corinth since the founding of their church.<sup>348</sup>

## **2. Paul's warnings 13:1-10**

13:1 There are at least four possibilities about what Paul meant by the "two or three witnesses" that would confirm his credibility and his critics' guilt: First, he may simply have been saying that the church would pass judgment and, on the testimony of the witnesses that Jesus Christ prescribed, should decide who was right (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:3-5). Second, Paul may have viewed his three visits to Corinth as three witnesses to his innocence. Third, he may have been referring to his warnings that he would not spare the Corinthians. These may be the one in 1 Corinthians 4:21, possibly a warning given during the painful visit, and the one in verse 2b. Fourth, Paul may have meant the witness of his fellow workers when he returned to Corinth. He may have meant Titus and the brethren who accompanied him (cf. 8:23), and or Paul's fellow travelers. I tend to favor the first possibility, because it views the witnesses as people, which is the normal meaning of witnesses in the passage quoted (Deut. 19:15). The fourth view seems weak to me, since Paul's friends would have appeared biased to his critics.

13:2 Paul had "previously" warned the Corinthians during his "second" or painful visit. He was now issuing a second warning in anticipation of his return to Corinth. When (Gr. *ean*, not "if") Paul came, he would use his apostolic authority to discipline any in the fellowship who required

<sup>347</sup>Martin, p. 464.

<sup>348</sup>See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

correction ("I will not spare"). "Those who have sinned in the past" probably refers to the immoral individuals who had failed to respond to Paul during his painful visit (12:21b). "All the rest" probably includes the larger group that failed to submit to Paul's authority (12:20b).

13:3 Then his critics would have first-hand proof of his divinely given power. Christ-like gentleness and humility (10:1) did not impress the Corinthians like displays of power did (11:20). Paul's threatened judgment of the erring in the church, when it was dispensed, would provide the "proof" that many of them required, that the powerful "Christ" was working through Paul ("who speaks in me, and who is . . . mighty in you"). Jesus Christ will Himself likewise experience vindication one day when He comes in judgment.

13:4 Jesus experienced crucifixion because He was obedient to His Father's will, and therefore did not assert Himself against His enemies who eventually executed Him. He appeared to be very "weak" to onlookers. However, His "weakness" was in reality an evidence of great strength, strength of commitment to His Father's will—even to death on a cross. The Father rewarded His Son by sustaining Him with supernatural "power." Similarly Paul, in submitting to God's will, had appeared "weak" to some in Corinth. Nevertheless God would also sustain him supernaturally. That supernatural "power" would become evident to the Corinthians when Paul arrived in Corinth, and he dealt with them as Jesus Christ will deal with His people when He returns (cf. 5:10).

"It appears that Paul and the Corinthians did not understand 'power' in the same way. For them it was on display in an aggressive and a mighty personality. For the apostle, it is seen in weakness."<sup>349</sup>

13:5-6 In anticipation of Paul's judgment, he called on his Christian readers to "examine" themselves, to make sure every one of them was walking "in the faith." Testing themselves would preclude his having to discipline them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). Paul believed that "Jesus Christ" was working in each one of them—"unless" they *failed* this "test." In that case, there was some doubt whether they were "[walking] in the faith." Paul himself claimed to be walking in the faith ("we ourselves do not fail the test").

Verse 5 may at first seem to be talking about gaining assurance of one's salvation from his or her works.<sup>350</sup> However, this was not what Paul advocated here, or anywhere else in his writings. He was writing to genuine believers (1:1, 21-22; 3:2-3; 6:14; 8:9). He told them to examine

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<sup>349</sup>Martin, p. 476.

<sup>350</sup>See John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 190; idem, *Faith Works*, pp. 162-63; and Wiersbe, 1:679.

their works to gain the assurance that they were experiencing sanctification, that they were walking *in obedience* to the faith.

"Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were they Christians or not? But it more likely concerned practical sanctification: did they *demonstrate* that they were in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) and that Christ was in them by their obeying His will. To stand the test was to do what was right. To fail was to be disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline."<sup>351</sup>

". . . were they living Christian lives?"<sup>352</sup>

"After twelve chapters in which Paul takes their Christianity for granted, can he only now be asking them to make sure they are born again?"<sup>353</sup>

"Fail the test" translates the Greek word *adokimos* (disqualified), which everywhere else in the New Testament refers to Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27).

"In verse 3 Paul indicates that some of the Corinthians were seeking proof (*dokimen*) that Christ was speaking in Paul. Then in verse 5 Paul turns the tables on them and challenges them to prove themselves (*dokimazo*). What some of the Corinthians questioned was not Paul's salvation. It was his sanctification. They questioned whether he was a true spokesman and apostle of Christ. Likewise, when he turned the tables he questioned their sanctification, not their salvation."<sup>354</sup>

". . . even though Paul asked the Corinthians to examine their objective standing in Christ, his remarks are structured in such a way that he knew there was no possibility they were still unregenerate. He asked them to examine themselves, not because he doubted their salvation, but because he was absolutely sure of their salvation, and that assurance formed an undeniable foundation for his appeal in verses 5b and 6. Paul's jolting challenge in verse 5a is best understood when placed in the context of his self-defense in the entire letter. . . .

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<sup>351</sup>Lowery, pp. 586-87. Cf. Barnett, pp. 607-8; and V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 577.

<sup>352</sup>Plummer, p. 376.

<sup>353</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 200.

<sup>354</sup>Bob Wilkin, "Test Yourself to See If You Are in the Faith: Assurance Based on Our Works? 2 Corinthians 13:5," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:10 (October 1990):2.

"The logic of Paul's argument is compelling: If the Corinthians wanted proof of whether Paul's ministry was from Christ, they must look at themselves, not him, because Paul had ministered the gospel to them (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Cor. 2:1-5)."<sup>355</sup>

"Nowhere in the Bible is a Christian asked to examine either his faith or his life to find out if he is a Christian. He is told only to look outside of himself to Christ alone for his assurance that he is a Christian. The Christian is, however, often told to examine his faith and life to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."<sup>356</sup>

"Instead of a threat, Paul's challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is a sobering reminder about the true mark of a Christian's ministry. The barometer of Paul's ministry was people—the believers in Corinth, as well as those in Ephesus, Philippi, and other cities where he ministered. Eternally redeemed people were the proof of his apostolic authenticity and of God's presence in his life."<sup>357</sup>

- 13:7 The apostle's greatest desire was the obedience and godliness of his readers ("that you do no wrong . . . do what is right"). This was more important to him than his own vindication, as important as that was (v. 6).
- 13:8 Paul could not bring himself to do anything that would harm "the truth," even to vindicate himself. Promoting the truth (i.e., the gospel) was his great ambition, even if it meant that some regarded him as a false apostle ("though we may appear unapproved," v. 7). This acting for the truth included judging the Corinthians if necessary (v. 2).
- 13:9-10 The great apostle was willing to appear "weak," if by that weakness his disciples could become stronger ("strong") and more mature (cf. vv. 5, 11; Col. 1:28). It was in harmony with this objective that he was writing 2 Corinthians. He wanted his distance from the Corinthians to cushion his severe admonitions. Nevertheless, if it became necessary, he would deal severely with them in person. Some destruction, through judgment of sinful conduct, might be necessary before construction of the church in Corinth could proceed.

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<sup>355</sup>Perry C. Brown, "What Is the Meaning of 'Examine Yourselves' in 2 Corinthians 13:5?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:614 (April-June 1997):181. Cf. also Bruce, pp. 253-54; Lenski, p. 1333; Tasker, pp. 188-89; Harris, p. 403; Hughes, p. 481; Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second . . .*, p. 338; and Martin, p. 457.

<sup>356</sup>Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 288. Cf. pp. 299-300. His twelfth and thirteenth chapters on faith and assurance, pp. 271-91, and self-examination and faith, pp. 293-310, are helpful.

<sup>357</sup>Brown, p. 188.

". . . he writes sharply, that he may not have to act sharply."<sup>358</sup>

"This verse brings to a conclusion the section of the epistle which began at 10:1. The theme there announced as it were in a minor key is now happily transposed into the major key: there he is accused of being bold and terrifying when absent, especially in his letters, but weak and innocuous when present; here he concludes his answer to this charge by saying that if he writes with sharpness when absent it is with the purpose of obviating the need for acting with sharpness when present. There is, however, no renunciation of authority on his part, but his conduct is governed by the principle that (as he has previously stated in 10:8) his authority has been entrusted to him by the Lord to be used for constructive, not destructive, ends."<sup>359</sup>

Evidently Paul's anticipated visit to Corinth turned out to be a pleasant one. Paul wrote Romans during the three months he was in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3, A.D. 56-57). In that epistle, he gave no indication that there were problems in Corinth. Moreover, he proceeded with his plans to evangelize unreached areas, which he would not have done if the Corinthian church still needed his attention (cf. 10:14-16). Furthermore, Paul wrote that the Corinthians (believers in Macedonia and Achaia) "were pleased" to complete their collection for the Jerusalem saints (Rom. 15:26-27). Finally, the Corinthian church's preservation of 2 Corinthians argues for this church's acquiescence to Paul's admonitions and warnings.<sup>360</sup>

## **V. CONCLUSION 13:11-14**

Paul concluded this letter with an exhortation, a salutation, and a benediction. He intended each of these to draw the emphases of this epistle together to impress on his readers the basis and importance of their unity with one another and with himself.

### **A. THE EXHORTATION 13:11-12**

13:11 Obedience to five commands would result in one condition that Paul wanted his readers to express in a particular practice.

First, they were to "rejoice," probably because they had the opportunity to judge themselves before God would judge them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). What is more important, they could and should rejoice *in the Lord*. Second, they were to mend their ways (RSV), and thus experience completion ("be complete") or restoration, so God could bring them to *maturity* (cf. v. 9).

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<sup>358</sup>Plummer, p. 378.

<sup>359</sup>Hughes, pp. 484-85.

<sup>360</sup>See Barnett, p. 619.

They needed to: break permanently with all idolatry (6:14—7:1), to complete their collection (chs. 8—9), and to change their attitude toward Paul (chs. 10—13).

Third, they were to accept Paul's exhortation, which would result in their comfort ("be comforted"; cf. 1:3-10). Fourth, they were to foster a united outlook by putting first things first (cf. v. 8). Specifically, they needed to unite in their attitude ("be like-minded") toward Paul and his authority. Fifth, they were to "live at (in) peace" with one another and with Paul.

These conditions being met, "the God" who manifests "love" and "peace" as fruits of His Spirit would remain in fellowship with them. They should emulate God, and cultivate love and peace toward one another and toward the apostle.

"It is not by sitting with folded hands that we enter into the blessings of God, but by actively and purposefully promoting those dispositions which are in accordance with God's will for His people: rejoicing, harmony, unity in the truth, living together in peace. It is true that we look to God alone to supply the grace for their achievement; but it is the actual daily practice of love and peace that ensures, from the human side, the realization of the promise that the God of love and peace will be with us."<sup>361</sup>

13:12 They could then exchange the "holy kiss" sincerely. The believers practiced this custom commonly. It symbolized the forgiveness, reconciliation, unity, and fellowship that existed between the people who kissed each other. Until unity prevailed in the church, this kiss was hypocritical.

### **B. THE SALUTATION 13:13**

The love of the body of Christ elsewhere reached out to enfold the Corinthians in unity. Perhaps Paul meant "all the saints" *with him* where he was, in Macedonia, when he wrote this epistle.

"Like the 'holy kiss,' this epistolary greeting was an expression of unity within the one body of Christ."<sup>362</sup>

### **C. THE BENEDICTION 13:14**

This so-called "Trinitarian benediction" is one of the most widely quoted verses in the Pauline corpus. In each of the three phrases, the genitive is subjective (i.e., the grace that comes from Jesus Christ, etc.).

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<sup>361</sup>Hughes, pp. 487-88.

<sup>362</sup>Harris, p. 405.

Paul wished that God's "grace," demonstrated in the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, might be the atmosphere in which all his readers lived their lives. Appreciation for that grace banishes self-assertiveness and self-seeking. He hoped that God's "love," demonstrated in the Father's work in sending Jesus Christ as our Savior, might be the motivation for their lives. Thankfulness for His love subdues jealousy and strife. He longed that the "fellowship," that God's Spirit produces among all the saved, might unite their lives in fellowship with one another and with all believers. Gratefulness for this fellowship minimizes quarreling and factions.

Note the centrality of Jesus Christ's work on the cross in Paul's arrangement of these prayerful wishes. Note, too, the clear testimony to the Trinity that this verse provides: It is in the "grace" of *Jesus Christ*, displayed in His substitute sacrifice (8:9), that we see *God's "love"* (Rom. 5:8), which the *Spirit* uses to produce "fellowship" (Eph. 4:3).

## Appendix

In this most autobiographical of Paul's epistles, the apostle commented on many of the difficulties that he had faced in his ministry, and how he responded to them.<sup>363</sup>

THE DIFFICULTY	THE RESPONSE	THE REFERENCE
He experienced tribulations and sufferings.	He turned to God for support.	1:3-7
He encountered life-threatening trouble.	He trusted in God.	1:8-11
He faced charges by his opponents that he was unreliable and untrustworthy.	He explained his pure motives for changing his itinerary and postponing his trip to Corinth.	1:12-24
He felt emotional anguish over an unpleasant visit with the Corinthian church.	He expressed his great love.	2:1-4
He had to deal with an unpleasant church discipline situation.	He urged forgiveness and comfort for the repentant sinner.	2:5-12
His motives were suspected.	He clarified his sincere motives.	2:17; 4:2, 5
He underwent trials, persecution, and pressure.	He persevered, clinging to the truth that Jesus was being manifested and God was being glorified.	4:7—5:11
His apostolic credentials were questioned.	He recited his record of faithfulness in a wide variety of difficult circumstances.	6:3-10
He faced allegations of misconduct.	He maintained innocence, stated his affection, and pleaded for a more loving response.	7:2
He experienced conflict, fear, and discouragement.	He found comfort in the arrival of Titus and in the news that the Corinthians cared about his situation.	7:5-7
He had to write about the uncomfortable subject of giving.	He cited the sterling example of the Macedonian Christians, and courageously challenged the Corinthians to give.	8:1—9:15
He was criticized by the false apostles.	He refused to compare, and sought the Lord's commendation.	10:9-11

<sup>363</sup>Adapted from *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1954.

He was compared to the false apostles.	He set forth his long history of sacrificial service.	11:5-33
He had to live with a "thorn in the flesh."	He prayed for the removal of this ongoing, unpleasant affliction; then realized it was God's grace to him, forcing him to rely on God's strength and not his own.	12:1-10

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