



“The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon”

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion
to the Book of
II Corinthians

*“So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading”*

Nehemiah 8:8

By
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Preface

The contents of this book were the essence of a course taught in the Bible College at New Germany Baptist Church in 2010. In order to present these materials in a form more readily available for further class use we have kept the class divisions used in the course. Therefore listed separately on the following Contents page you will find the starting pages for the 20 class portions as well as for the 13 chapters of the book of II Corinthians.

In this precious book of II Corinthians Paul relates the true nature of God's ministry. It is never a selfish thing, but ever a troubled existence. Yet trouble is the revealer of the treasure within. For this is a message about the treasure of God's eternal truths within the frail earthen vessels of our lives, transformed through faith in Jesus Christ. Though we are battered about for the cause of Christ, yet never are we so useful as then in revealing the true treasure of Jesus and His gospel within. "As if a delicate little boat carrying the precious message of truth, lashed and tossed by wind and waves, seemingly ever on the verge of going down, and yet kept afloat by the Lord of the storm. Perhaps when we feel most like we are ready to come unglued, that is when we are most able to demonstrate the Lord's reality and power in our lives."

Bill Daniels

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“Thanks be unto God
for His
unspeakable gift”

(II Cor. 9:15)

Class 1 – Introduction

In our study of Paul's first letter to the believers at Corinth we considered some of the problems resident in that church, and there were many. This further letter continues Paul's effort to deal with concerns among them. Where another man might quit in the face of such difficult, troubled people, Paul continued to instruct their heads and hearts, pursuing their best with the forbearance of God. And again, in so patiently dealing with them, these treasure books of I & II Corinthians have come down to us by God's design, inspired of the Spirit, and supplying God's people with such valuable instruction on the proper functioning of a local church and how to effectively deal with the kinds of troubles and troubled people that are sure to arise. Thus what the evil one meant for destruction and pain, the holy One turned to correction and gain.

Though we dealt with the background of these epistles more completely in our I Corinthians course, a brief review of the main points seems appropriate here.

The City of Corinth

Corinth was the capital city of the province of

Achaia in Paul's day. It had become an important commercial hub because it was situated on the southern end of the 6 km wide isthmus (land strip) separating the Aegean Sea from the Ionian Sea and connecting the mainland with the Peloponnesus. A huge amount of shipping crossed that isthmus, because it made more sense than sailing around the southern end of the Peloponnesus. Small ships were transported across by tramway, while the cargo of larger ships was unloaded and transferred across to other ships on the other side. For this reason Corinth for a time was the wealthiest city of the ancient world.



Corinth has been described as one of the most immoral of ancient cities as well, perhaps largely due to the temple of the goddess Aphrodite situated

there at that time.

The Church in Corinth

The background of the church in Corinth is found in Acts 18:1-18. Paul and company planted the church there during his 2nd missionary journey, staying with Aquila and Priscilla and working with them in their tent-making business to support himself while evangelizing the city. It seems Apollos later ministered in Corinth as well (Acts 18:27-28; I Cor. 1:12; 3:6).

The Book of I Corinthians

Paul then wrote the book of I Corinthians during his three years of ministry at Ephesus, on his 3rd missionary journey (I Cor. 16:8). Having heard discouraging reports concerning the believers in Corinth, Paul wrote in response to their concerns, and to give answer to some questions they had sent, offering solutions and instruction in mature Christian faith and practice.

The Book of II Corinthians

Paul then wrote this second letter from Macedonia while on his way to visit the church in Corinth, in preparation for his arrival. As the postscript at the

end of the book indicates, some have suggested he wrote from Philippi. The book was written to give further instruction in practical matters;

- In forgiving – In his first letter Paul had demanded the discipline of a man in the membership who was living in immorality (I Cor. 5). It seems they did proceed as Paul instructed, confronting this one and putting him out of the church, with the result that this man then responded with repentance. Paul now wrote to encourage a response of grace and forgiveness toward this unknown man (2:6-8). Paul's first letter produced some other positive results as well in a more general repentance among them (chapter 7).
- In giving (chapter 8-9) – Paul was at that time busy with a collection of funds from the Gentile churches to provide relief for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Yet beyond this particular need he would guide the saints into the joys and personal benefits of sacrificial giving, both to giver and receiver.

Paul wrote as well to defend himself and his apostleship against the accusations of some who were raising question over the truth of "*Christ speaking in*" him (13:3). There appears to have been

a vocal minority among them whose concerns were fuelled by false teachers, and who were stirring trouble in the church and against Paul;

- Attacking his character;
 - Suggesting him fickle because he did not come to them in the manner he had first proposed (1:17-18, 23). He had planned to sail from Ephesus to Corinth, head north to visit Macedonia, return to Corinth, and then sail from there to Jerusalem (1:15-16). He instead did just the opposite, sailing across to Macedonia first before visiting Corinth (Acts 20:1-3). Thus some were suggesting he could not be trusted with his words. His reason for not coming to them sooner was partly because he did not want to hurt them (1:23), while waiting and praying for significant reforms among them before he arrived.

Paul was greatly concerned that none should think his gospel message doubtful, regardless of what they thought of him (1:18-20).

- Suggesting him dishonest, that he was making a gain from them (12:16-19).

- Questioning his apostolic authority (10:10).

Yet Paul's response in II Corinthians is as warm and gracious as it is intense. He repeatedly pointed to the things he had suffered as proof of his sincerity. Paul's sufferings are such a prominent theme in this book (1:4-10; 4:8-12; 6:4-10);

- The words "sorrow" or "sorrowful" appear 7 times in the book ("sorry" 6 times as well).
- The words "afflict" or "affliction" appear 6 times.
- The words "suffer" or "suffering" are found 6 times.

Yet notice how he always speaks of these negatives in the context of his comfort and joy and hope in *"the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort"* (1:3-7, 12; 4:14-18; 6:8-10; 7:1).

- The words "comfort" or comforted" appear 14 times in the book.
- The word "consolation" is found 4 times.
- The word "glad" or "gladness" 4 times.
- The word "glory" 23 times.

Though Paul was ever so painfully aware of the

afflictions involved in a life of ministry yet he never lost sight of the surpassing joys and the hope of glory to come, and that all of our sufficiency and excellencies are of God (3:5; 4:7).

It would appear that Paul sent this letter on ahead to Corinth to prepare the way for his coming, after having heard a report from Titus. It was a visit he so earnestly wanted to be a success.

Much of II Corinthians is Paul's impassioned testimony, a very personal expression of his heart before the people of this troubled church. We learn so much about Paul's personality here, and about the concerns and comforts in his life of ministry. He exposed his own heart in pleading for theirs. He was sincerely striving to hold their friendship and to uphold their faithfulness to the truth. Paul would not easily write people off.

Basic Outline

Chapters 1-2 – Obstacles
Chapters 3-7 – Opportunities
Chapters 8-9 – Offering
Chapters 10-13 – Apostleship

Survey

One of the interesting aspects of this book is the long detour or side track in Paul's thoughts in the early chapters, perhaps expressing sincere urgency or the most earnest concern. In the first two chapters he speaks of the troubles they faced in ministry along the way; in Asia (1:8), in Troas with Titus not there (2:12), in Macedonia (2:13). And then with 2:14 Paul suddenly branches off into a long side trail concerning his ministry and the nature of it, only to pick up the running narrative again at 7:5 (*"when we were come into Macedonia"*).

1:1-2:13 – Paul Defends His Motives and Movements

- 1:3-5 – Having experienced the Lord's comforts in his afflictions, Paul was then able to bring understanding and comfort to others when facing the same.

2:14-7:4 – Paul Defends His Ministry

In this parenthesis portion Paul gives a commentary on the great gospel treasure we carry in the earthen vessels of our lives.

- 2:14-4:6 – The glorious gospel.
 - o 2:14-16 – We are the manifestation of Christ in this world, both as the Author

of life to the saved and as the Avenger of death to the unsaved.

- The gospel message was still a glorious treasure to Paul after many years of hardships. He never lost his love for the Master, His message, or His ministry.
- The Corinthian believers themselves were the living proof that God had sent him (3:1-3). He needed no certificates or other proofs of qualification.
- 3:6-11 – The new and old covenants contrasted;
 - The old, “*the ministration of death*” and “*of condemnation*”, though “*glorious*”, is “*done away*”. It had a fading glory from the beginning.
 - The new, “*the ministration of the Spirit*” and “*of righteousness*”, does “*exceed in glory*” with a “*glory that excelleth*” and “*remaineth*”.
- 3:17-18 – Our transformation into the image of Christ comes as we gaze upon Him in His glory through His Word and

through the inward working of the Spirit.

- 4:1-5 – Paul would neither corrupt nor conceal the gospel message.
- 4:7-5:10 – Feeble carriers, as earthen vessels – As Paul was broken in his service of the Lord through his sufferings this resulted in Jesus shining more evidently through him (4:7-10), *“that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh”* (4:11). Compare the light of Gideon’s lamps revealed when the pots hiding them were broken, resulting in victory over the impossible power of the enemy (Judges 7:19-20).
- 5:11-7:3 – Beloved hearers.
 - 5:11ff – Paul, being moved to godly fear in view of the judgment of the saved, would also move others to godly faith in view of the judgment of the lost. All who now live in Christ *“should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again”*.
 - 6:14-7:1 – Here is the classic passage on our separation from the world and worldliness. We must be pure, uncompromised ministers.

- Chapter 7 – See how the apostle, like his Lord, loved them still, rejoicing in their godly sorrow.

Chapters 8-9 – Concerning Giving

This is a vital biblical passage on the principles, purposes, policies, and promises involved in Christian giving. It is the most extensive consideration of the subject of giving in the Bible. The particular purpose here was the fund-raising project for the poor saints at Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1). The reason for the great poverty there at that time is unclear. It is likely that God was bringing His Deuteronomy 28 curse upon the nation of Israel for their rejection of Him in their treacherous murder of their Messiah (vs. 23-24). By this collection for the struggling Judean believers Paul extended the concept of care among believers to a global scale.

- Note some of the biblical *principles* of giving;
 - Our giving can be beyond ability, even out of poverty (8:2-3).
 - Our giving should be out of desire, not forced (8:3-4, 8; 9:7).
 - Our giving is a form of fellowship (8:4).
 - Our personal consecration should

precede our giving (8:5).

- Our ability to give is a gift of grace (8:1, 6-7).
 - Our giving proves love's sincerity (8:8).
 - Our giving imitates Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself (8:9).
 - Our giving meets the needs of others (8:14).
- Do not miss the amazing biblical *promises* concerning giving (9:6-15).
 - Note the climactic verse at the end of chapter 9, "*Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift*"!
 - Note the divine examples given;
 - Christ's gift (8:9).
 - God's gift (9:15).

Chapters 10-13 – Defence of Apostleship

There is such tremendous emphasis here at the end of this epistle on Paul's need to validate his ministry before these people (4 out of 13 chapters are given to this theme). Why? Because it was bigger than merely proving the trustworthiness of the man. It

was the trustworthiness of the message he brought that was at stake at that critical, foundational stage of church history when other false gospels were beginning to wing their way to the world as well.

- Chapter 10 – Paul’s encouragements in light of his authority.
 - Personal appearance means nothing, *“for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth”* (vs. 18).
 - Personal honours mean nothing. *“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (vs. 17).
- Chapter 11-12 – Paul *“foolishly”* commended himself to the Corinthian believers, pointing out his labours and sufferings and *“visions and revelations of the Lord”*, because of the *“false apostles”* and *“deceitful workers”* active there. The false teachers who were busy then within that church may have been Judaizers such as those Paul dealt with in the book of Galatians. These legalists tended to prey upon the churches, seeking to turn believers from salvation by grace alone to law-keeping. That these troublesome invaders were Jews seems evident from 11:22. It was *“another*

Jesus”, spirit, and gospel that they brought. Therefore they came attacking Paul’s trustworthiness and teachings (2:17; 10:10). Again, Paul defended his apostolic office that he might defend his message (11:4).

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Ponder Points

Paul did not avoid speaking on touchy issues (finances) to folks with doubtful appreciation of him, because it was for *their* best, for the growth of their faith, and for the good of God’s churches. Thus we understand that *truth* is what matters, not what folks think of the preacher of truth. God’s wisdom would not lead us to refrain from any portion of His whole counsel in order to attain or maintain the happy acceptance of the hearers.

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Look for credentials of a true ministry and minister in this epistle. In defending himself Paul never mentions academic degrees (11:22-29). He gives no credence to letters of commendation (3:1) or human approval. He points rather to his labours and sufferings and fruits. He holds high God’s stamp of approval rather than human tickets.

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Note the prominence of teaching on Satan in this book of II Corinthians;

- 2:10-11 – He gets “*an advantage of us*” when we fail to forgive in response to sincere repentance.
- 4:3-4 – He has “*blinded the minds*” of unbelievers against “*the glorious gospel of Christ*”.
- 11:3 – As he “*beguiled Eve through his subtilty*”, so he still seeks to corrupt believers “*from the simplicity that is in Christ*”, introducing complexity and confusion.
- 11:14-15 – He transforms himself “*into an angel of light*”, looking for all the world like a truly helpful “guiding spirit”. He comes in the form of human “*ministers of righteousness*” whose message and methods do not align with God’s standard of truth.
- 12:7-9 – God allows Satan access to believers, coming as buffeting thorns in our flesh, that God might display His sufficient strength in our weakness. Compare Job’s account.

“Blessed be God,
even the Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies,
and the God of all comfort”

(II Cor. 1:3)

Class 2 – II Corinthians 1:1-14

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

1:1-2 – Paul’s Greetings

Vs. 1 – *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God”* – Much of the reason for this letter to the church at Corinth was Paul’s defence of his apostleship, a truth doubted by some among them there at Corinth. And so here is where he begins, as with his first epistle to this church. *“An apostle of Jesus Christ”* is a title Paul seems to use particularly when writing to deal with problems, signalling that he came with the very authority of God. He was indeed an apostle, appointed and sent to the Lord’s service from the time he was first confronted by the Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 26:17-18), for it was Jesus Himself who stopped him in his tracks there and sent him to the Gentile world. Thus he came with God’s stamp of appointment upon him, not by his own will.

“And Timothy our brother” – Timothy was a man so

often by Paul's side, for he was a wholly sold-out servant of God and man. In time Timothy became a gifted shepherd, even a pastor of pastors, a man folks could count on for steadiness and readiness for service, a man to handle difficult tasks, one who ever remained obedient and cooperative as Christ's loyal servant to the very end. Tradition tells us he died a martyr's death for his faith and faithful service.

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth” – This is exactly the same phrase as in the greeting of Paul's first epistle to Corinth and carrying the same implication, a point all there were wise to ever hold close and not forget. The church at Corinth was God's institution, a congregation of God's people. Therefore any who would tamper with God's work on earth, causing divisions and difficulties within His church, must understand the seriousness of their actions. For they were touching God's work-piece, the apple of His eye!

“With all the saints which are in all Achaia” – There is a bit of a focus on *“all”* here. Think about the significance of this little feature. Paul's approach in this letter is very personal, and personally directed toward the problems in the church at Corinth. Yet no congregation can struggle with the kinds of

1:2 Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

concerns with which they were struggling without it becoming a matter known far and wide, a matter of public awareness. Perhaps for this reason Paul addressed this letter beyond only the church at Corinth to include all saints in the province. As well, he may have known the wider significance of what he was writing, that this would become part of God's Book of books, known and read by all.

Vs. 2 – Again we find here Paul's standard wish for his readers. That God's grace might be their portion, with the resulting peace that can only be found there.

1:3-7 – Comfort in Troubles

Vs. 3 – *"Blessed be God"* – Paul begins with the exaltation of the God of his love. As if bursting at the seams with praise, he immediately erupts with this expression of blessing the moment the formalities of greeting were done.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" – Consider that

Jesus is the eternal Son of God from eternity past. He did not become the Son of God with His birth through Mary. There was never a point when He became such.

“The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” – This is now the third time the word “Father” is found in referring to God the Father. As “*the Father*” He is the source or originator of every good gift (James 1:17). He is the One who initiated the concept of our union with Him as a child with a father. In our utterly fallen condition we could have no part in making that possible. Any measure of mercy toward man flows out of God’s abounding grace. Any degree of lasting comfort can only come from Him. And as He has blessed us with such bounty so we, as Paul, would bless Him in return with our praise.

Consider that in referring to the source of something, we might rather use the term “mother”. Yet repeatedly here the term is “Father”, expressing gender. The true God of glory cannot be confused with any notion of mother earth or some supreme mother god or co-god or female deity formed through the foolish fancies of fallible men.

Vs. 4 – *“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation”* –

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

God's comfort to us is not available only in *some* of the hardships we face, not only in the lesser concerns, leaving us to handle the really hard knocks on our own. Paul speaks of comfort and help from God in *everything* we face here below, "*a very present help in trouble*" (Psalm 46:1). Yet understand that this was spoken by a man living in the Lord's bosom. The same promise of comforts does not necessarily follow for the one with no time for God. King Saul had no help or answers from God in his dark hours, because he had no interest in God's pleasure in the brighter days. The same promise does not follow for the independent soul who never asks for God's helping hand. But for the one willing to acknowledge his need of his Father as he walks in His pleasure there are divine comforts available. This by the clear testimony of God's apostle, speaking "*by the will of God*". Compare "*Because...*" in Proverbs 1:24-33 & Psalm 91:14-16.

"That we may be able to comfort" – Paul was always more channel than end-user. For him, every gift or grace from God's hand was meant to be passed on

1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

to others. It is the way God means for all of us in fact, that we would take what we have received from Him and gladly distribute it to others. So with our gifts or abilities. So with our finances. So with the help and comforts we receive from the Lord. As He has helped me, so I willingly pass this on to you, rather than bottling up any blessing in myself. Even so with *“the glorious gospel of the blessed God”* through which we who are saved have found such eternal blessing (4:3). If we become bottle rather than channel we shut off the flow to others. And it is just such bottles God is in the business of breaking, that the benefit might be spread to the more.

Vs. 5 – *“As the sufferings of Christ abound in us”* – Paul understood that in his own sufferings it was actually Jesus Christ who was suffering with him and in him as well (Acts 9:5). Jesus suffers together with His people as they suffer for Him. Compare Judges 10:16 & Isaiah 63:9. Though Jesus suffered once for all on Calvary to put away sin, yet His servants on earth continue His suffering, in fellowship with Him, in the work of carrying His words to our world. In our suffering

1:6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

together with Him we find that “*our consolation also aboundeth by Christ*”, that our Lord stands ready with comforts for such suffering servants. Compare Stephen’s vision of Jesus standing and ready to receive him even while they were stoning him to death (Acts 7). Compare the Lord’s comforting visits to Paul while seeking to reach Corinth (Acts 18:9-10), and while captive in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11), and while on the ship in the storm (Acts 27:23-24).

Vs. 6 – “*Whether we be afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation*” – If Paul’s suffering of affliction served to bring comfort and salvation to others he was more than willing to endure it. And are we willing to suffer the hassles and heartaches, inconvenience and labours involved in conveying the comfort-bringing message of salvation? The joy of seeing others come to Jesus is only ours through the troublesome task of evangelism. It is what drove Paul to greatest lengths of difficulty in God’s service. It means putting ourselves through the pain and risk and loss of speaking for Jesus, when to do so might make enemies or turn away friends. But all

1:7 And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

1:8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life:

of my losses in living for Jesus are in reality my Saviour living out His suffering, His heartaches, His losses through me.

Vs. 7 – Paul knew that as the Lord had dealt with him in grace, so He would graciously deal with those at Corinth as well. He is no respecter of persons. Within the 5 verses of vs. 3-7 the word for “comfort” in either noun or verb form (paraklete) occurs 10 times. Obviously Paul comes into this book with greatest focus on the grace of God in providing comforts and encouragements to His people through their times of trouble.

1:8-11 – God’s Deliverance

Vs. 8-9 – “*Our trouble which came to us in Asia*” – It is unclear what particular event(s) Paul refers to in these troubles in Asia of which he now speaks. We know of the circumstance that developed at Ephesus (Asia) when “*there arose no small stir about the way*” (Acts 19:23); when Demetrius raised a

1:9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

major ruckus because of the effectiveness of the gospel against the idolatry he and other silversmiths serviced. Could Paul perhaps have been referring to the same in his first letter when speaking of fighting “*wild beasts at Ephesus*”? (I Cor. 15:32) We do not seem to read in the Acts 19 account of any situations carrying the degree of threat to Paul’s life that he describes here. Thus Paul may refer to some other unrecorded incident. With no adequate details given we are obviously not meant to locate the particular event, lest we should see his words applying too narrowly rather than more generally. The point is that in some situation of gravest concern, when the threat was so beyond their ability to cope that it was like they were under a death sentence, the Lord proved Himself big enough to handle it. No particular situation translates into *any* situation or threat we may face.

“That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” – Rather than responding in anger at God for allowing such trouble and threat upon one so committed to His service, Paul fully understood the reason for such an exercise in his

1:10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Christian experience. It was God allowing circumstances that would lead His child to more fully trust Him. As faithful Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, “*his only begotten son*”, as if handing over his own life, because he was fully convinced “*that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*” (Heb. 11:17-19), even so Paul’s confidence in God’s ability to raise the dead led him through such experiences more fully trusting in God for his deliverance.

Vs. 10 – “*Who delivered us . . . and doth deliver . . . will yet deliver us*” – Here it was *deliverance* out of some trouble, while in vs. 4-5 it was *comfort* through troubles. Sometimes the Lord rescues His people *out* of their pressing circumstance, as in the case of Peter, Paul, and Silas delivered from prisons in Acts 12 & 16. Sometimes the Lord comforts His people *through* their trials, as Paul throughout his years of Roman imprisonment after his capture at Jerusalem (Acts 22-28). Neither can be seen as the better option over the other. Only that the Lord in His sovereignty knows what He is doing, and sees fit to work in various ways at various times.

Paul speaks past, present, and future here, of what God did, continues to do, and will yet do. And beyond only the “*so great a death*” of Paul’s more immediate, temporal circumstance in Asia, the thought perhaps ranges to the larger deliverance from sin and eternal death. This great work of redemption began in the past, in the moment of our salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and continues in the Lord’s ongoing work of deliverance from sin in our sanctification, and will yet ultimately come to completion in our glorification before the Lord. Because God delivered Jesus from death therefore we know that He “*which raiseth the dead*” will deliver all of His children from the same. Because of the deliverance we have already found in Jesus Christ, therefore we can know “*that He will yet deliver us*”. Compare in Romans 5:10, “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled [past] to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled [present], we shall be saved [future] by His life*”.

Perhaps it is only in those darkest hours, when we are sorely pressed by the most difficult trials, that we are more completely able to see and delight in the Lord’s deliverance and grace. Then oh thank God for those darkest hours of life. And let’s be quick to allow such days of gloom to lead us to trust and thankfulness. Compare in Lamentations 3:22-

1:11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

25 Jeremiah's amazing words while looking upon the smoking ruin of Jerusalem destroyed, with the inhabitants removed to captivity. Only by God's grace are we able to "*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" without fear of evil, even perhaps rejoicing there like never before in the presence and care of our gracious God.

Vs. 11 – "*Ye also helping together by prayer for us*" – The Apostle Paul understood that the prayers of the saints make a difference, that there is a "*helping together*" when we pray for one another. Prayer in behalf of others is no empty exercise, but a meaningful and powerful weapon in the work of God on earth. Though we may not be able to help in the Lord's work in particular ways we might prefer, yet here is a means of real help that is available to all.

"That for the gift bestowed upon us . . . thanks may be given by many" – Paul pictured the earnest prayers of many bringing the answer of deliverance for which they prayed, and this in turn resulting in many giving thanks to God for His good answer. He pictured many among believers who were genuinely

1:12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

involved in this way in what was happening in the lives of others. Paul did not conceive of the Christian life as an unaware, uninvolved, unconcerned thing. He expected people to be aware of the concerns of others around them, and to actually be praying concerning those needs, and to be genuinely rejoicing when God's answers came. The Christian life is not meant to be a solo flight, a self-centred experience, but one fully consumed with the Lord's work in the lives of others. Compare in Philippians 2:4, *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"*.

1:12-14 – Paul's Sincerity

Vs. 12 – *"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience"* – Paul could honestly rejoice in a clean testimony and clear conscience. Again, part of the concern giving rise to this letter was the suspicion whispered by some at Corinth that Paul had ulterior motives of a more sinister, selfish nature; that he was corrupting the Word of God, handling it deceitfully (2:17; 4:2); that he was seeking to enrich

himself at their expense (12:17). But Paul, with clear conscience, could point to greatest sincerity in dealing with all. He used four terms or phrases in describing himself to them;

- *“In simplicity”* – At the root of the Greek word behind the English here is the idea of something spread out or without folds, thus fully visible with nothing hidden in the folds. So the notion is complete honesty, the wide-open nature of one who is free from any pretence or hypocrisy. Nothing hidden and nothing to hide.

“Godly sincerity” – Without any impurity of motive mingled with the pure. The phrase is literally “sincerity of God”, speaking of that sincerity sourced in God and forming in a soul through close relation to Him.

- Without *“fleshly wisdom”* – Paul used no human intrigues or cleverness in presenting Jesus, only the *“foolishness”* of the gospel message. Compare I Corinthians 2:4ff.
- *“By the grace of God”* – Paul’s sufficiency and power were wholly *“of God”* (3:5; 4:7).

After this manner he had conducted his life both *“in the world”* and toward the believers there. He did

*1:13 For we write none other things unto you, than what
ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall
acknowledge even to the end;
1:14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we
are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the
day of the Lord Jesus.*

not live a two-faced existence, showing one face to believers and something entirely different among unbelievers. He did not smile sweetly behind the pulpit and then swear a blue streak at his neighbour. Paul's approach was just what a sincere life before God will bring us to – a walk of the most consistent and sincere godlikeness.

Vs. 13 – *“For we write none other things unto you”* – Paul was not double-tongued, saying one thing to a few through private letters while saying something else in his public communications with them.

Vs. 14 – *“As also ye have acknowledged us in part”* – For the most part the believers there at Corinth genuinely delighted in what Paul and company meant to them and had done for them. But unfortunately it was not a unanimous vote, only *“in part”*. Yet though all there were not for him, he and his fellow servants were all for their best.

The nature Paul describes in presenting his own

character and experiences is consistent with the very nature of God. It was God at work in and through this sold-out soul. When God is fully allowed to have His way in a believing heart, godly characteristics, as we see described here, are sure to begin to show in such a life;

- A genuine love for God and joy in His fellowship and comforts (*“Blessed be God”*, vs. 3).

A will to take of the resources God makes available for our care and to invest in the care of others (*“that we may be able to comfort”*, vs.4).

- A willingness to suffer any loss or hardship for the gain or benefit of others (*“it is for your consolation and salvation”*, vs. 6). This even to the extreme of the supreme sacrifice of death (*“we had the sentence of death in ourselves”*, vs. 8-9).
- An abiding hope for the best for others (*“our hope of you is steadfast”*, vs. 7; *“charity . . . hopeth all things”*, I Cor. 13:7).
- Fullest trust in God’s ability rather than arm-of-flesh means (*“that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God”*, vs. 9).

- A prayerful and thankful heart (vs. 11).
- Finest simplicity and sincerity (vs. 12).
- Rejoicing in fruit for God forming in the lives of others (vs. 14).
- Living in happy anticipation of “*the day of the Lord Jesus*” (vs. 14).

“For all the promises of God
in Him are yea,
and in Him Amen,
unto the glory of God by us”

(II Cor. 1:20)

Class 3 – II Corinthians 1:15-2:4

When Paul wrote his first letter to this church he wrote to a troubled congregation;

- They were a divided lot, following after a variety of leanings or leaders (I Cor. 1:11-12).
- Paul had to deal with them as carnal believers rather than spiritual, even as “*babes in Christ*” (I Cor. 3:1-4).
- There was open incest among them and they were making no moves to deal with it (I Cor. 5).
- Pride was rampant among them (I Cor. 4:6, 18-19; 5:2).
- Some were even taking legal action against their Christian brothers (I Cor. 6:1-8). “*I speak to your shame*” Paul said.
- Paul warned against their immorality, that they must “*flee fornication*”.
- There were hair-length concerns and the love feast foolishness described in chapter 11, where shocking thoughtlessness and selfishness were on display among them. Twice Paul scolded there, “*I praise you not*” (vs. 17, 22).

- Chapters 12-14 are Paul's extensive effort to correct their selfish misuse of spiritual gifts and to draw them back to love.

Thus was the nature of this church now requiring the further input of this second letter. It is unclear what exactly Paul's further actions were in dealing with the church at Corinth. Some believe Paul's first letter was not well received, with many of their problems left unresolved, and therefore Paul found it necessary to make a "heavy" second visit to Corinth. Perhaps this is what he meant by not coming "*again*" to them "*in heaviness*" (II Cor. 2:1), as if he had already made a confrontational visit. And perhaps this was what he meant by "*Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you*" (12:14; 13:1-2). But since we do not have any record in Acts of such a second visit prior to this further epistle, it may be that Paul refers to his first letter to them as a second "visit", "*as absent in body, but present in spirit . . . as though I were present*" (I Cor. 5:3). Thus perhaps his first epistle to them was in fact his heavy visit, he penning the rebukes and corrections of that epistle "*out of much affliction and anguish of heart . . . with many tears*" (I Cor. 2:4).

As is always the case with the proclamation of God's truth, many among them at Corinth were touched

*1:15 And in this confidence I was minded to come unto
you before, that ye might have a second benefit;*

and helped by Paul's first letter. His delight over their positive response is evident in this 2nd letter. But some there were hardened in a spirit of opposition against Paul and the truths he proclaimed. And as is always the case with such a spirit there arose with it a suspicious eye to any and every slightest indication of weakness or failure, seeking support for a cynical leaning. The fact that Paul had communicated plans involving the church and then changed them was evidence enough for some among them of his unreliable nature.

1:15-2:4 – Paul's Change of Plans Defended

Vs. 15 – *"In this confidence I was minded to come"* – With the purest of conscience and sincerest of desire for their best (vs. 12), and with the assurance that *"we are your rejoicing"*, Paul had made plans to visit the church at Corinth and the way he would go about it.

"That ye might have a second benefit" – This is perhaps support for the idea that this would only be Paul's 2nd visit to Corinth. Their first benefit was

1:16 And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea.

when “*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*” was brought to them at the first.

Paul’s words here are no indication of pride, but an objective recognition of the abilities God had given him to bring the blessing of gifts and encouragements to others. His boast and confidence was in God. See how Paul’s thought in going was only of the benefits he could bring. He thought less of how they might profit him and more of how he might bring some blessing to them. How many approach their church involvement with this kind of attitude? What a vast difference such a mind-set would make to our every involvement with our church family.

Vs. 16 – Paul had planned to sail across from Ephesus to Corinth, to then move on to the north into the province of Macedonia, and then to return to Corinth. He would then look to them “*to be brought on my way toward Judea*” through their aid; that they might help him and those with him in acquiring passage and adequate supplies to continue on from there across the sea to Palestine.

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

But of course, as Act 20 indicates, Paul did not do this. Instead, while waiting for word from Titus of the response at Corinth, Paul went into Macedonia via Troas. It was then heard at Corinth that Paul was already in Macedonia, this obviously involving very much of a change of plans. And word had now come back to Paul, through the return of Titus, of the concerns of some there. For those who loved Paul without suspicions the reasons for his change of plans really would not matter so much.

Vs. 17 – “*Did I use lightness?*” – Did Paul’s alteration suggest an unstable, vacillating, fickle nature in him? Did he demonstrate by this change of plans that his words did not mean anything?

“*Do I purpose according to the flesh?*” – Was it as some were saying, that Paul was making plans or decisions independent of God, “*according to the flesh*” rather than in the Spirit? Implied here is the notion that plans made according to the flesh are unsure and may not work out, while plans made according to the Spirit are sure to come to pass. Is

this a valid assumption? Does God never change His mind?

“Yea yea, and nay nay” – The phrase suggests an indecisive, wavering, ja-nee sort of spirit; now a firm yes, now a solid no; making and then breaking promises; a response such as God’s Spirit would not author. Some would therefore propose it a fair suggestion that Paul was a man who did not walk in the Spirit, resulting in the flighty, unreliable appearance portrayed in this situation. And if such be true, surely this must reflect not only on his travel plans but on *what he said*. This of course was the conclusion the nay-sayers and opposers wished to propose in seeking cause against Paul’s teachings. These were the *“false apostles”* and *“deceitful workers”* he later exposes, *“them which desire occasion”* against him (11:12-13). Paul will explain his change of plans in just a bit, and he will give good and sincere reasons. But first he was more concerned with the ugly implications such a suggestion of unreliability brought upon his message, lest any think his doctrine as whimsical or changeable as his plans.

Vs. 18 – *“But as God is true”* – Paul has spoken concerning the manner of the *man* in vs. 12-17. But at this point he turns to the manner of the *message*

1:18 But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

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

(vs. 18-20). Concerning himself, Paul asked only questions in vs. 17, without offering answers, reflecting the kinds of things being asked of him there at Corinth. But when it comes now to a consideration of God, Paul was done asking questions, making only the firmest of affirmations. With God and His Word there are no doubts, uncertainties, or instabilities whatsoever. As surely as God is worthy of our trust in all that He says even so *“our word toward you was not yea and nay”*. Our message or preaching was not uncertain, as a yes that might then become a no. Though some may suspect the messenger unreliable, the message stands as surely as God stands true. See here Paul’s clear awareness of inspiration, of God speaking through him. He saw the words of his writings as God’s own expression of truth.

Vs. 19 – *“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ”* – Here was one aspect of *“our word toward you”* that would never fail, indeed the primary aspect. Jesus is who He says He is, the very Son of God, and therefore all of the answer to man’s need. Jesus Christ was the

1:20 For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

core concern of Paul's preaching and is the key focus of any true biblical ministry. Any departure from Christ as the central and vital theme constitutes a departure from God Himself. It is where the apostle John began his gospel account as well, with the truth of what or who Jesus is. So again, regardless of what they thought of Paul and his associates, they must not think that Jesus was anything less than who they had proclaimed Him to be. Their preaching of Him was in no way an uncertain, yes-no thing.

Vs. 20 – *“For all the promises of God in Him”* – Here again was another aspect of *“our word toward you”* that would never fail. The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ encompasses and makes available all of *“the promises of God”* to every believing soul. In Jesus Christ all of God's gracious bounty of blessings are YES and all green lights and coming right up most assuredly in due course! Regardless of what they might think of Paul, they must not think less of the salvation Jesus offers. All that Jesus is and gives is the very consummation of all of the Old Testament (O.T.) and the supreme direction of all of God's prophecy. All of man's need,

*1:21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and
hath anointed us, is God;
1:22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of
the Spirit in our hearts.*

for the present and into eternity, is met in Jesus Christ. All of our completeness is found in He who is “*Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending*” (Rev. 1:8).

It is the standard lie Satan has used constantly throughout the ages, so often providing the excuse the pagan heart needs for rejecting God, that the truthfulness and sincerity of the Word of God and ultimately of God Himself is dependent upon the truthfulness and sincerity of the child of God. So before he even attempts to defend himself Paul would affirm above every affirmation that no matter what the man might be or do, God and His words stand firm, because of what *God* is and does! The message stands in spite of the messenger.

Vs. 21-22 – “*He which stablisheth us with you in Christ*” – In these two verses Paul affirms the truth of God’s stamp upon them. It was God Himself who appointed Paul as His minister and messenger.

“*And hath anointed us*” – In their anointing Paul

does not seem to refer to any outward anointing by men, but to a spiritual anointing from God, the same “*unction*” or divine enabling through the indwelling Holy Spirit to which John refers in I John 2 (vs. 20, 27). This is after the O.T. image of spiritual leaders such as priests and prophets anointed for their office (Lev. 8:12; I Ki. 19:16). Even so all who are in Christ are now anointed into God’s “*royal priesthood*” (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). Thus it was God who made Paul fit for ministry among them.

“Who hath also sealed us” – Sealing expresses the idea of authority or security. A seal was an ancient signature that fixed one’s authority or authentication to a document or law or action, or marking one’s ownership (Esther 3:12; 8:7-10; Dan. 6:17; Matt. 27:62-68). All who believe the gospel are sealed unto salvation from the moment of their faith. And God’s divine seal can never be broken by any created power, for His authority is above all. Compare in Romans 8:31, “*if God be for us, who can be against us?*”.

“And given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” – This word “*earnest*” means guarantee or pledge or guaranteeing deposit. The Greek word behind it is found 3 times in the New Testament (also 5:5 &

*1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that
to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.
1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but
are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.*

Eph. 1:14), and always refers to the Holy Spirit. The idea is of something given as a pledge in binding a bargain, a first instalment or part payment given in assurance of the rest yet to come. The indwelling Holy Spirit of God, given in the very special way in which He is given to every believer in the current church age, marks God's pledge to us of the fullness of salvation and of our ultimate inheritance of the very fullness of God's presence! Compare Revelation 21:1-4. Every true child of God is so anointed and sealed and pledged through the indwelling Spirit, for *"if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His"* (Rom. 8:9).

Vs. 23-24 – *"I call God for a record upon my soul"* – With this verse Paul began to relate the reasons why his change of plans, calling upon God to witness to the sincerity of his words, inviting his own exposure if he should not be speaking true.

"To spare you I came not as yet to Corinth" – Though appointed to a place of authority and fully committed to the best for others, yet Paul's heart

2:1 But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.

2:2 For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?

was full of compassion, even for such a troublesome lot as these at Corinth. He would not, as some, quite willingly wade in, using his words like a club to knock sense into the wayward. Confrontation is easiest with those you do not really like. Yet Paul's sincere love for these moved him to greatest caution in dealing with them. He knew that if he came in person he would be forced to hear and speak hard words. Thus he wrote his first letter and sent Titus ahead of him, while asking God to spare him the need to sort them out further by dealing with them Himself. Paul did not want to come across as one lording it over them. It would not help them if they made changes simply for his benefit, for such surface adjustments would not last. They must come to stand upon faith alone, to believe God's words for themselves, thus leading on to the kinds of responses and joys true faith will display. This was the work of God for which Paul waited in his delaying.

2:1-3 – *“Lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice”* – Not only did

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

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

Paul not wish to come with a mouth full of rebuke, he did not wish to come with a heart full of grief either. He wanted and waited to hear of positive, encouraging reforms among them. This was the turn in them for which he was holding back and waiting, and which he did in a measure receive.

Vs. 4 – “*I wrote unto you with many tears*” – How earnestly determined Paul was to win their hearts. Hear him and understand the subtleties of effective persuasion;

- His one desire was to spare them the need for hard and painful words. He was sincerely all for them.
- He wished only to lead them to joy (1:24).
- He spoke his confidence in their wish for his pleasure (2:3).
- When he did send hard words in his first letter it was with tearful eyes and anguished

heart (2:4).

- He had no desire to stir their grief, but only to display his abundant love (2:4).

Only the most calloused soul could hold out against such sincere, winsome concern. See again in Paul the tender heart of a true shepherd. Though willing to do and say hard things if and when the need arose, yet this was no pleasure to him, no prideful occasion to dominate others. Such painful confrontations were rather to be avoided if possible. For there was in him greatest patience, with a fear of crushing the tender shoots of God's budding work in others, desiring only to foster their faith and joy and benefit. Somewhere between crushing tyranny and compromising timidity is the purpose, patience, and passion of a true shepherd heart.

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Ponder Points

Do not miss here the danger of jumping to wrong conclusions. How very, very far from a right judgment some there at Corinth landed concerning God's man and message. How dangerously far they were from the truth! They, as the Jewish leaders with Jesus, were *"found even to fight against God"* in their evil doubts (Acts 5:39). We must be careful

arriving at conclusions concerning others before we have all the facts. There is always another side to every story, and these at Corinth had yet to hear Paul's side of it. Proverbs 18:13 speaks of the "*folly and shame*" of the one "*that answereth a matter before he heareth it*". In Deuteronomy the judges were taught the danger of coming to conclusions without hearing both sides or of allowing one's perspective to become predisposed (poisoned) by the first side before even hearing the second. It is a lazy, cowardly way that has caused untold hurt within human relations.

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One gets the distinct impression that Paul's opposers there at Corinth were raking around for any bit of muck to cast doubt on his character and message. Because Paul changed his plans therefore he was unreliable and thus his message could not be trusted either? Perhaps a measure of desperation there? This grasp at such an accusation suggests they could find no charge of any *real* substance to lay against Paul, confirming Paul's statement concerning himself in 1:12. We must be careful never to fall to the same readiness for unjust and unforgiving conclusions in dealing with those of whom we may disapprove. Yet on the other hand we must recognize how carefully

opposers observe the dealings of God's child. May our own good and godly character leave open only the same option of desperation, lest by any means we, as David of old, should give "*great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme*" (II Sam. 12:14).

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Regardless of what you might think of the minister, beware that you not despise the Word of God that he brings. Regardless of whether the minister should fumble and fail, the Word of God will not fail. The most capable and charismatic of spiritual leaders may often be found to actually be unsaved. While the true child of God may be quite inept in his approach, yet Spirit-led in his words. Beware the folly of allowing your attitude toward the messenger to affect your attitude toward the message. The Word of God stands, regardless of the nature of the vehicle by which it is carried.

The converse is a worthy consideration as well. We are wise to recognize here a basic human tendency, that oftentimes one's bad attitude toward a messenger and readiness to find fault in him can really reflect a bad attitude toward the message he brings. Men do not often wish to admit this and will rather tend to point to inequities and

inconsistencies and inflexibilities and incompetence in the man, when in reality their gripe is with the God behind the man. Seems it is awfully easy to get the two muddled up, easy to fabricate reasons to avoid God and His words. Beware my friend! For the tendency to pride in all of us comes with this same little add-on feature. Look honestly at your motives. Look honestly at your reasons for labelling that one bad, and therefore unworthy of a serious hearing. Remember how godless King Ahab looked rather negatively upon godly Elijah as his enemy and the one *“that troubleth Israel”* (I Ki. 18:17; 21:20). Yet it was the true God behind the man of God whom Ahab actually hated. Remember how godless King Ahab despised godly Micaiah, publicly stating *“I hate him”* (I Ki. 22:8), simply because the words of that man came true and stood in the way of Ahab’s evil purposes. It is not that Micaiah was a particularly objectionable man. It was that the true God spoke through him, spoke what Ahab did not wish to hear. And so it was the *man* he despised. Ahab’s hatred of the servant of God displayed his hatred of the God of the servant. In both cases the true bad apple in the lot was not that faithful servant at all, but the one despising him. Remember how the proud Jewish leaders hated Jesus without a cause. Why? Because He was of

His heavenly Father, and they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). How often in the Bible God's messenger was lightly esteemed by proud men, yet his words stood and proved to be true. So it was in the case of;

- Jesus.
- Elijah.
- Micaiah.
- Joseph in his dreams.
- Noah.
- Lot in warning his children.
- Jeremiah, with all of God's prophets.
- The unnamed 70 sent by Jesus (Luke 10).

Class 4 – II Corinthians 2:5-17

Paul had expressed his great *“affliction and anguish of heart”* in writing his first letter to the church at Corinth (vs. 4). He did not tell them this in order to increase their grief with the knowledge of the hurt and heartache they had caused him, only that he would have them to know the depth of his genuine love for them.

Then in 2:5 Paul turned his thoughts to a particular individual who had caused him some grief. The only troublesome individual we are aware of from Paul’s first letter is that unnamed man of I Corinthians 5 who was involved in an immoral relationship with *“his father’s wife”*. Paul had spoken very sharply there about the way that man should be dealt with in removing him from the fellowship of the church, delivering him *“unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”* (I Cor. 5:5). Now Paul gives further instruction concerning their response to this individual.

2:5-11 – Forgive the Offender

Vs. 5 – *“But if any have caused grief”* – The word *“any”* here is singular in the Greek behind the

2:5 *But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me,
but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.*
2:6 *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which
was inflicted of many.*

English, in the sense of “any individual” or “a certain individual”. Paul seems here to turn his attention to that man who had been involved in incest among them (I Cor. 5). Yet hear how Paul softens his focus in not naming the man or referring to him directly, but only as “anyone”. Though that man brought much sorrow upon many through his choice for evil, as every such choice will do, yet Paul would diminish the impact of it upon himself and thus upon the church, suggesting the grief caused to him was only to a certain degree.

Vs. 6 – *“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment”* – As if to say “enough now!” It was time to back off from their harsh dealing with this man. Several unspoken things are implied in Paul’s words here;

- Obviously the church had dealt hard with the man, as Paul’s directed in I Corinthians 5.
- And it can only be that the man had come to genuine repentance through their discipline.
- But they had not yet forgiven and received him back into their fellowship.

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

“Which was inflicted of many” – It would seem that not all there joined in the righteous censure demanded by Paul and administered by the church, but only *“many”* or the majority. Perhaps some protested such harsh treatment and refused to join with it, siding rather with the sinner. Proper church discipline is not to be carried out only by the church leadership, but by the congregation as a whole, as Paul explained in I Corinthians 5 and as Jesus suggested in Matthew 18:15-17.

Vs. 7 – *“Ye ought rather to forgive him”* – Again the implication is that there had been a sincere change of heart in the man, and that there was a desire in him to be restored to their fellowship. Forgiveness is based on repentance. With genuine repentance in an offender there must be a willingness to forgive and embrace, as the compassionate father with the return of his prodigal son (Lk. 15). To not do so could perhaps lead to discouragement and despair.

Vs. 8 – *“Wherefore I beseech you”* – Notice Paul’s approach with these believers. Though he was the

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

spiritual father of many among them, and though Paul was making no soft suggestions when earlier requiring their hard dealing with this one, and though, as God's apostle, Paul expected the obedience of his readers (vs. 9), yet he comes to them with an unassuming gentleness here in beseeching or begging of them a response of love. This is no papal decree or dictatorial demand of a spiritual despot, but the tender, expectant encouragements of the shepherd who would guide his sheep in the best course. There is a time for command and demand. But with God's leadership through Paul it was more often the crook of the gentle shepherd than the crack of the slaver's whip or threat of the tyrant's sceptre. Included in the action suggested in vs. 8 would be a restoration to fellowship of the offender as public and united as had been his removal from fellowship.

Vs. 9 – *“For to this end also did I write”* – Part of Paul's purpose in writing his first letter to them, and particularly the hard instructions included therein, was to provide them the opportunity to demonstrate obedience toward him as God's apostle and toward the Word of God which he brought. Do not miss

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

how gently but effectively Paul's words press upon them the same obedience in restoring that they had shown in condemning. His subtle query was whether they would "*be obedient in all things*", rather than only *some* of his instructions. He did not abrasively demand, but simply, graciously expected their willing response. The former, the abrasive demand, can stir opposition, where the latter, the better, constrains by compassion and hopeful expectation. Like the boss who says, "I have given this job to you because I know of nobody who can do it as well as you can". Wow, what motivation to perform! The Lord comes to us with the same gracious question of our willingness to obey His every word, or whether we are willing only for some of the things He has said, the aspects that are easier to obey, that are more agreeable with our own purpose or interests.

Vs. 10 – "*To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also*" – As Paul had stood with them in their condemnation of this unnamed offender in I Corinthians 5 (vs. 3-4), even so now he stood with them in their forgiveness of the same. Again, see

2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

how this wise leader was leading the way before them, casting the first vote for compassion as he had for condemnation, rather than crowding and driving them by force.

Vs. 11 – *“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us”* – The verb translated *“get an advantage”* here is found 5 times in the New Testament (N.T.), with 4 of them in this book of II Corinthians (7:2; 12:17, 18). The thought is of making a gain by taking advantage or defrauding someone. Outside of this epistle the word is used only in I Thessalonians 4:6, referring there to one involved in an immoral relationship with another. In being so involved one actually robs their partner of something that is not theirs to take, defrauding them of the honour of their good name. To not be severe enough with one who is living in sin within the church membership, to not properly deal with them according to the instruction given in I Corinthians 5, would be to allow Satan an advantage in defrauding us of the purity and power of our good testimony among men. Yet to not respond with loving forgiveness and acceptance when there is a sincere change of heart is to swing to the other extreme, again right into Satan’s lap,

again granting him a measure of advantage over us. To not lovingly accept one who has been put right with the Lord, for any reason, reveals Satan's hold upon such an unkind, intolerant heart.

"For we are not ignorant of his devices" – Clearly Satan has purposes he is ever seeking to effect in churches and individuals. He seeks to subtly work into God's people and institutions characteristics that are not God's and thus do not reflect His nature. Is God holy? Then by any means Satan would work impurity into God's fold. Is God love? Then most earnestly Satan would stir rifts and unresolved contentions and intolerance and loveless bitterness among believers. By one means or another, by one swing of the pendulum or another, through this extreme or that, the evil one ever seeks to sow unrest among God's earthly witness. Do not be ignorant of what he wishes to accomplish, even *in you!* Be wise to recognize his trail by the effects left behind in your own life. When rats and roaches have been busy in the goods, they leave behind the evidence of their work. Even so the work of the evil one in the lives and loves of God's people.

2:12-17 – Victory in Christ

2:12 *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach
Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of
the Lord,*
2:13 *I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus
my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went
from thence into Macedonia.*

Vs. 12-13 – “*When I came to Troas*” – Luke skips over the details Paul mentions here when recording in Acts 20:1 Paul’s movements from Ephesus to Macedonia. Though Paul was only passing through Troas on his way to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, yet every place Paul passed through he saw as an opportunity for gospel ministry. Thus in going to Troas he carried “*Christ’s gospel*”. And while there some door of opportunity was opened for him “*of the Lord*”. Yet it seems the troubling circumstance at Corinth was weighing so heavily upon Paul that he “*had no rest*” in his spirit while there. Apparently there had been an arrangement with Titus, that after assessing the situation at Corinth he would meet Paul at Troas, or return to Paul through Troas. That Titus had not yet arrived at Troas was a heavy blow for Paul. Unable to concentrate on the work there, it seems Paul was forced by his deep concern to put that open door on hold and cross over to Macedonia. And there he did at last happily meet Titus with news of the impact of his first letter among the Corinthian believers.

Again, it was the refreshment of good news, for the most part (Prov. 25:25; 15:30).

Put yourself in Paul's situation. He was forever dealing with problems;

- There was serious trouble among the Galatian believers with legalist teachers and teachings.
- There had been severe persecution of the church in Thessalonica.
- There were serious troubles at Corinth.
- He was leaving in Ephesus a major up-rising against Christ's gospel.

Perhaps at times it seemed to Paul that he was leaving behind him more a path of problems than a trail of triumph! Even as he laboured to build a new work the old might seem to be crumbling behind him. Yet Paul pushed on, crossing over to meet the problem with God's help. He was walking in rather than running away, as he might have wished to do. For the love of Christ constrained his heart.

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On the Side

What do you do when life lands you in the pits? How do you respond when nobody seems to understand or when you are feeling overwhelmed? When “What’s it all for?” begins flashing red on your screen? When all seems hopeless and useless and endless? What did God’s apostle do? He just kept going, trusting God for the triumph! He just kept serving from the heart and for the Lord (Col. 3:23-24). He refused to fall to inactivity in what might lead a lesser man to despair. He refused to quit or “*curse God and die*” or drown his sorrows in drink or run after his carnal appetites as many choose to do in their dejection. He just kept trusting God and doing right, even when it seemed like it was no use and all was lost. All was *not* lost! God in fact was busy accomplishing incredible things through His servant that went far beyond Paul’s point of immediate focus. He did not need to *feel good* about what he was doing. How we *feel* about what we do is largely irrelevant. He did not need to *know* how much he was accomplishing. He did not need to be concerned about the great things other servants were reporting, for God’s true work is measured by *faithfulness* rather than by apparent results on the ground. So much of what Satan throws at us in an effort to discourage us is all false facade, seeking to overwhelm and drive us from God’s answers just around the corner of endurance. God says,

2:14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (I Cor. 15:58). God says, “Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Just put your chin down, keep your heart up, and keep going for God’s glory and the good of others till the stars fall. And if you mess up, then pick yourself up and go back and do it again the right way. If you are depressed then encourage others. If you are angry then comfort others. If you are overwhelmed then help lift the load of others. If you are without hope then lead others to God’s message of hope.

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Vs. 14 – *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ”* – Suddenly, in that spontaneous way of writing so characteristic of Paul, from his anguished uncertainties he bursts into happy praise and thanks. Maybe it was due to Titus’ cheerful report. Maybe it was the Lord’s direct work in Paul, encouraging him through a revelation of where true certainties are found.

Perhaps it was a bit of both. But suddenly Paul was certain and assured of “*triumph in Christ*” and the “*always*” nature of it. It is as if perhaps a subtle drift toward independence had been gradually leading his heart to discouragement, as such self-dependence will always tend to do. And suddenly, joyfully, the Lord yanked Paul back to His bosom. Again the needed reminder came clear to him, that it is not *our* strength or abilities that keep God’s work afloat here on earth. God is the One working in and through us, in spite of us.

Paul now begins at this point a long excursion from the narrative, which runs until 7:5, during which he discusses many aspects of the Lord’s triumphant ministry in spite of his own weakness. Yet it is the Lord who is always leading us in the train of His triumph. All that we do for Him out of a right heart He is so able to turn to blessing. Every one of Satan’s insidious purposes God has so deftly turned to blessing and a revelation of His glory and grace.

Some suggest that Paul in this portion seems to draw from the imagery of the triumphal processions of the Roman victors, who would ride into their city from victory in battle to the cheers of their people and the fragrance of burning incense in celebration, gloriously proceeding down the main street in

2:15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

triumph, leading their captives taken in battle.

“And maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place” – Gone is any breath of the anguished concerns expressed earlier. Gone is every consideration of human inadequacies. This now is all about the *Lord’s* supreme adequacy, and yet His willingness to involve us in His victorious programme. Through the vehicle of His people God is able and active in making Himself known to the people of earth, not only in isolated pockets here and there, but *“in every place”*. There is a proclamation of God that is far more universal than we realize. Always, in every place, God ensures a testimony of His truth is available for any soul to know who truly wishes to know.

Vs. 15-16 – *“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ”* – Do you hear it? The Father delights in what He sees of Christ in His children, both His own perfect righteousness with which every saved soul is clothed in justification, and His righteous nature beginning to shine in the lives of believers as well. Rather than our heavenly Father frowning upon us, ready to punish every failure, see here the smile of

*2:16 To the one we are the savour of death unto death;
and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who
is sufficient for these things?*

our gracious Father with every indication of His Son's nature in us. As if a sweet fragrance of His Son arising from the mess of earth's vile corruptions.

"In them that are saved, and in them that perish" – Again, the impact of God's nature through His children reaches everywhere and to both kinds of people upon earth, both to the saved and to the lost. The saved rejoice together in the character of Christ evident in other believers. To each other *"we are the savour of life unto life"*, a continual reminder of a more abundant life in Christ here on earth, leading *"unto"* our eternal presence with the Lord when our life's work is ended. Our fellowship here is suggestive of our eternal fellowship in His presence. On the other hand the lost are moved either in one direction or the other by the same *"savour of Christ"*. They are either driven away or drawn to the sweetness of that Saviour, depending on whether the good seed of *"Christ's gospel"* meets with the good soil of faith in their heart (Heb. 4:2). It is not so much a question of how effectively we present the message. The vital concern is what the message

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

meets in the heart of the hearer. For the lost the awareness of Christ or Christ in us is a continual reminder of their life that is really a living death here on earth, leading “unto” eternal death “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (II Thess. 1:9).

“And who is sufficient for these things” – What human ability could even begin to accomplish what God is now busy accomplishing on a worldwide scale through His saints? How could we think that all or even anything really depends on our efforts? We simply follow in the train of God’s triumph. God through Christ is the divine incense, the true source of the sweet fragrance, while we are merely the incense burners. In the burning of our lives, in our death to self for our Saviour, it is the sweet incense of Christ that emanates from us. And the incense only sends its fragrance when burned. Do not despise the burning afflictions of our Christian experience. In Paul’s anguish over Corinth his Christ-like love was on display.

Vs. 17 – *“For we are not as many, which corrupt the*

word of God” – This apparently was an accusation being raised at Corinth against Paul. And again, much of his purpose in writing this letter was to defend himself against such falsehoods and to demonstrate who were the true impostors. Yet one only needs to employ deceptions or doubtful methods in God’s ministry when he carries the weight of outcomes upon his own shoulders, when he feels *he* must make things happen. But when we understand our own insufficiency, and that God is indeed working His perfect work, sending out the sweet fragrance of Christ through us, regardless of what is evident around us, regardless of seeming losses or missing gains, all push for ploys or artifice evaporates. What need for tricks when one follows the trail of triumph?

Yet Paul implies in his statement here that there are “*many*” who do “*corrupt the word of God*”, suggesting such corrupters as those false teachers opposing him there at Corinth and the legalists active in Galatia. It is a truth that holds throughout this church age, for to this day there are “*many, which corrupt the word of God*”, men and women who seem to radiate all saintly sincerity, yet who have in fact departed from the simplicity of “*Christ’s gospel*”. Folks who seem to have a sound message, yet who are discerned for what they are by the true

sheep who hear and follow the Good Shepherd's voice (Jn. 10:3-4, 27).

“But as of sincerity, but as of God” – In contrast to the false, Paul and company were all out *“of sincerity”*, because they were truly born out *“of God”*, and because they had truly found refuge *“in Christ”*, and because they did and said all *“in the sight of God”*. All up front, all out in the open, all genuine, hiding nothing. Oh may the same ever be our way as well, as we help carry the *“sweet savour of Christ”* to our world.

“Not that we
are sufficient of ourselves
to think any thing
as of ourselves;
but our sufficiency is of God”

(II Cor. 3:5)

Class 5 – II Corinthians 3

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

The Apostle Paul now leaves the narrative of his movements to focus on the nature of his ministry. As we shall see in chapter 3, the proofs of his authenticity were in those he had led to Jesus (vs. 1-3), his sufficiency and appointment were of the Lord (vs. 4-6), and his New Covenant gospel message far excels the Old Covenant of Moses (vs. 7-18).

3:1-6 – Accreditation and Sufficiency

Vs. 1 – “*Do we begin again to commend ourselves?*” – Paul had come out the end of chapter 2 speaking of the “*always*” triumph they (we) were experiencing in Christ, and of the proclamation of Christ that their (our) lives were showing “*in every place*”, as if a sweet, pervading fragrance, and of their integrity and sincerity “*in the sight of God*”. In so commending himself to them as one who was true to the Lord and His true ministry Paul was now perhaps mindful of some who were suggesting him a self-promoter, some who did not consider him

3:2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

quite the “*wise masterbuilder*” he had claimed for himself in his earlier letter (I Cor. 3:10).

“*Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation*” – Obviously it was the practice even in that day to carry certifying documents, degrees, or diplomas in affirming the qualification of the carrier. Though Paul was a highly qualified man from a human perspective, trained by the renowned Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), yet all such human “qualifications”, so vital in the world and church of our own day, Paul considered to be so much “*dung*” (Phil. 3:4-8). His point here as well is that man’s certificates are of little worth compared to the Spirit’s commendation in genuine fruit written into the lives of people. It is God’s gifting that counts, not man’s.

Vs. 2 – “*Ye are our epistle*” – Nothing more was needed than an evident work of God through Paul in the lives of those believers. Nothing is more qualifying than a genuine work of the Spirit through a man, or the Spirit’s evident gifting in a man. This qualification was not something Paul carried in his hand or framed on his wall, but something “*written*

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

in our hearts”. It is a personal family relationship, expanding throughout the world and formed by drawing others “*out of the fire*” and into the brotherhood and fellowship of believers.

“Known and read of all men” – The reality of Jesus Christ should be evident in us, and is in fact discernible in all true believers (2:14). *“By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (Jn. 13:35). This kind of qualification carries a far greater visibility than the certificates and credentials men offer among themselves.

Vs. 3 – *“Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ”* – It was quite evident that the believers there at Corinth were Christ’s letter, a work of His own writing. For He Himself had authored the work of redemption among them, from the initial provision of it in Christ’s death and resurrection to the extension of it to them in the province of Achaia.

“Ministered by us” – Paul was commonly served in

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

his writings by an amanuensis or secretary who would do the actual penning of the words as Paul dictated. Even so Paul and company were as Christ's secretaries there at Corinth, being "*ministered by us*" as they did the actual foot-work according to the Lord's gracious purposes, writing the matchless work of salvation into the lives of the hearers there.

"Written not with ink" – Where Paul's secretary wrote with pen and ink, Christ's secretaries write with word and Spirit. And where a lasting work might be engraved on a stone tablet in that day, Christ's lasting works are engraved upon the hearts of those finding eternal salvation by faith in Him. And though Christ's work of redemption is written on the heart, deep within the core of a human existence, yet it is knowable and readable to all looking on.

This contrast between tablets of stone and flesh will carry Paul's thoughts to the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, as prophesied in portions such as Jeremiah 33 and Ezekiel 11 & 36.

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

Vs. 4-5 – *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves”* – Paul returns to where he began this chapter. Though he served with much confidence, he was careful not to attribute any ability to himself. He was only the secretary writing the words of the Master into the lives of others. He was only the channel conveying God’s gracious flow to lost mankind. Any confidence toward God can only be found *“through Christ”*. Any sufficiency or competency in the work can only be *“of God”* or arising *“out of God”*. Thus the *proof* of Paul’s ministry abilities was the results in the lives of believers. The *source* of Paul’s ministry abilities was from God alone and not from himself. Again, there was no prideful boast in Paul, as some were likely suggesting. He served only *“in simplicity and godly sincerity”* and *“by the grace of God”* (1:12).

Vs. 6 – *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament”* – Again, it was God who appointed Paul and company. He enabled them to do the work they were given. Not as masters but as *“ministers”*, as servants of the *“new testament”* or covenant. So they were indeed capable servants, made so by God

Himself. They did in fact know *what* they were doing and saying, and they knew *whom* they served. So Paul affirmed that he possessed absolutely no ability in himself for gospel ministry (vs. 5), and yet he possessed absolutely *every* ability in God for the gospel ministry.

“Not of the letter, but of the Spirit” – This is a transitional verse, turning from Paul’s sufficiency in God for his work and words to the nature of Paul’s message. In speaking of *“the letter”* he refers to the Old Covenant of Moses’ law. This in contrast to the New Covenant with its gospel message and particular focus upon the Holy Spirit. It is one vital characteristic difference in this new era or church age, in comparison to the old era under the law, that the Spirit of God has now come to indwell believers. This began with Jewish believers at Pentecost, and then extended to every racial group through the rest of the Acts account. Thus in this current age every true child of God is now baptised with the Spirit into the body of Christ. Every believer has the Spirit’s indwelling presence, and that forever. It is a wonderful aspect of the New Covenant that the principles of the law are now written on the heart through the Holy Spirit’s presence within.

“The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life” – The

3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

letter of the law could only kill, because the law of Moses offered no ability for the weakness of human flesh to live it. But now, through Jesus, we receive *“the washing of regeneration and renewing”* of the indwelling Holy Spirit for all who believe in that crucified and risen Saviour (Titus 3:5). The law of the old covenant could only inform us of our failure and condemn us as worthy of death. But now, in this new covenant era, the very Spirit of God dwells within a soul from the moment of their salvation, providing divine help toward victorious Christian living. *“These are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth bondage”*. The other *“the children of the promise...born after the Spirit...children...of the free”* (Gal. 4:24-31).

3:7-11 – Contrast of Covenants

Paul now chases further the question of these two covenants, the old and the new, showing both the excelling and the continuing nature of the new over the old.

Vs. 7 – *“If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious”* – There can be no doubt that the reference here is to the Old Covenant of the Law of Moses, particularly the 10 Commandments which the Lord gave to Moses on the *“two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God”* (Ex. 31:18). This Paul called an administration of death, because the law could only kill. It was a way to life only for *“the man that doeth them”* (Gal. 3:12; Lev. 18:5). Yet the one thing that old era proved above all else is that no man could do the law perfectly, apart from the sinless Son of God. Though this be true, Paul would have us to recognize that the law of God *“was glorious”* and good. It was a vehicle of death only through man’s sin and weakness. Compare Romans 7:6-14, where the law is proclaimed holy, just, good, and spiritual.

“So that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses” – Paul refers here to the second time the law was given, after the first stone tablets were broken. When Moses came down from being with the Lord on the mount his face was brightly shining, such that the people could not even fix their eyes on his face, and a veil actually became necessary (Ex. 34:29ff). That incident was an object lesson given by the Lord to illustrate two

3:8 *How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?*

3:9 *For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.*

important truths;

- The *glorious* nature of that first covenant that Moses received up on the mount.
- The *passing* nature of that first covenant.

Not only is the glow of Moses' face pointed out here in vs. 7, but the fading of that glow ("*which glory was to be done away*") is indicated as well, particularly in vs. 13.

Vs. 8-9 – "*How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?*" – "*Rather*" here is in the sense of "more". If God's administration of death was so glorious, how much more glorious must be His administration of the Spirit. The point is that the super-abounding glory of the New Covenant, written on the heart through the indwelling Holy Spirit and bringing in liberty, far excels the Old Covenant, written on stones and bringing men into bondage. While the law is called an administration of condemnation because it can only condemn man's inability to perfectly keep its righteous standard

*3:10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory
in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.*

(Deut. 27:26), the New Covenant is called an administration of righteousness because Christ's own perfect righteousness is now freely given to all who believe. *"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe"* (Rom. 3:22).

Vs. 10 – The expression of this verse is something like, "What had been glorious was not glorious only in this respect, on account of the super-abounding glory". Though several candles may bring a radiant glow to a dark room, their lustre is lost when switching on the house lights. Though the moon's glory is a notable thing in the dark of night, yet it is shown up for a paltry glow with the rising of the sun. Though a man may be a champion within the small pond of his local competition, yet in the international arena he may be found to be quite a lesser light. It is not that the law is now proven useless, having no glory (Gal. 3:19-25). It is only that every other glory fades before the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ!

Vs. 11 – *"Much more that which remaineth is glorious"* – Now it is a comparison of the durability

3:11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.
3:12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

of the two covenants. Where the old “*is done away*” and was in fact fading from the start, the new “*remaineth*”, because it is “*after the power of an endless life*” (Heb. 7:16).

3:12-18 – Veiled and Unveiled

Vs. 12 – “*Seeing then that we have such hope*” – Paul could proclaim his gospel message with such assured confidence because his hope was not pegged to any fading glory, but to that most brilliant and eternal pinnacle of “*the true Light*”, that glorious “*Light of the world*”, before whom every glint of earlier glories is dimmed in comparison. Paul’s exceeding hope was in the Person of Jesus Christ. Of Him Paul could speak with greatest boldness, as the great answer to the entire Old Covenant, and to every allusion and symbol and prediction of it.

There is an obvious suggestion here of Christ’s transfiguration on another mount, when not only “*His face did shine as the sun*”, but “*His raiment was white as the light*” as well (Matt. 17:1-2). There again the surpassing nature of Christ’s brilliance is

*3:13 And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face,
that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to
the end of that which is abolished:*

highlighted, with Moses His attendant there.

Vs. 13 – “*And not as Moses*” – Now we discover an interesting factor that was not revealed in the Exodus account. There was a secondary reason why Moses put that veil over his glowing face. Of course the immediate concern was that his face was so bright that folks could not even look at him and were actually afraid of him (Ex. 34:30). But partly he did not want the people to see that the glow, representing the glory of the law, was actually fading. From the beginning the law was all about types or foreshadows of that better thing that was to come in the Son of God and Saviour of man. It seems Moses did not want the people to see “*to the end of that which is abolished*”. He did as people still do today, seeking to hold onto the security of an old code of conduct. There is a certain comfort some find in the concretes and predictables provided under a system of law. And then folks begin to take pride in the same, in their knowledge of such a system over the “ignorance” of others, and in their keeping of such a code more carefully than others. Moses should perhaps have been wide-open

3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

3:15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

or open-faced from the first about his fading face and its meaning in the fading glory of the law. In this way his people might have been better prepared to understand the meaning of Jesus when He appeared, instead of anxiously holding to the law as they and others down through the ages have done.

Vs. 14-15 – “*Until this day remaineth the same vail*” – As Moses sought to with a veil the fading nature of the law in those early days even so that same veil remains over the reading of the law. It is as if the veil is still covering the face of Moses, still keeping his people from seeing and understanding that from the first that Old Covenant was to be “*done away*”. It was to be replaced by something (Someone) far more glorious, that promised Redeemer who is the very fulfilment and focal point of the whole; He who is the *Passover* deliverance through the shedding of His own precious blood; He who is the *Promised Land* of rest for all who by faith enter in; He who is the *scapegoat*, carrying away the sins of His people; He who has at last come in fulfilment of all. Paul

uses the actions of Moses in something of an allegorical sense, as if his hiding of the fading glory at the first set his people on a course of hiding or blinding or hardening of their minds from any thought of the old way ever fading in prominence or falling to disuse or being replaced by something better or brighter. Remember how the book of Hebrews uses the word “*better*” a dozen times in describing what Jesus is and has brought over the law. As if the Jewish people, and Christian legalists with them, are unaware that behind the veil the old glory of the law is gone.

Please understand that the second occurrence of the word “*vail*” in vs. 14 (KJV) is supplied by the translators (*italics*), marking it as an interpretive addition. The literal statement from the Greek original reads, “For until this day the same veil upon the reading of the Old Covenant is remaining not being taken away, that in Christ it is being brought to an end”. *What* is being brought to an end in Christ? Would it not seem evident that Paul refers to the Old Covenant of the preceding phrase, that which is under discussion in this context, that fading covenant reflected in the fading face of Moses? The same word is used here, meaning “*done away*” or “*abolished*” or “brought to an end”, as is used in vs. 7, 11, 13. A different word is used in vs.

3:16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

16 for the veil “*taken away*”. With that veil still remaining in the reading of the O.T., the followers of Moses therefore cannot see that the force of the Old Covenant has come to an end with the coming of Jesus Christ. Thus they still glory in the shadow when the glorious One casting the shadow has now arrived.

Vs. 16 – “*Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away*” – The moment any individual Jew turns in true sincerity to the Lord, even as Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6), that soul is saved by faith in Jesus, or will be led by God’s Spirit to such faith in that only Saviour of mankind. And in the same moment that blinding veil is removed for that believing soul. Compare how the true meaning and application of the old law opened up for Paul with his conversion (Acts 9:17-18). With his blindness removed, he saw how it all pointed to and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And ever after Christ was all of his theme. By faith every believing soul is spiritually changed from the core. Even as Nebuchadnezzar was changed and restored to dignity in the moment he lifted his eyes to really

3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

look and believe upon the true and living God (Dan. 4). Even so it will be for a representative remnant of the entire nation of Israel at Christ's return, when they as a people will at last "*look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn*" (Zech. 12:10). In that coming moment "*the vail shall be taken away*" and they will finally come to understand what all true believers in Jesus have already found.

With vs. 17 Paul now seems to move beyond the initial transformation available to every soul who believes in Jesus Christ, to the ongoing transformation available to every true believer in Jesus. As the work of a soul's salvation is a work of the Spirit, even so the work of sanctification is a work of the Spirit as well, that process of transforming believers into the image and character of Christ.

Vs. 17 – "*Now the Lord is that Spirit*" – Jesus and all He offers is that life-giving work of the Spirit, in contrast to the old letter that "*killeth*". Jesus Himself is "*the resurrection and the life*" (Jn. 11:25). Centred in Him is the administration of the Spirit and righteousness of the New Covenant, in contrast

3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD.

to the old administration of death and condemnation centred in Moses. In his first letter Paul proclaimed that *“the last Adam (Jesus Christ) was made a quickening Spirit”* (I Cor. 15:45). Christ’s earthly work throughout this age is through the agency of that other *“Comforter”*, sent in His name (John 14:16, 26). In the wonder of the Trinity, Jesus Himself somehow comes to us in the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:18). And wherever and whenever the Spirit is given liberty to work, He grants life and freedom from blindness and bondage to sin and the law (Rom. 7:4-6). In Christ sin no longer has dominion over us, *“for ye are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom. 6:14).

Vs. 18 – *“But we all, with open face”* – From the blinded, Christ-rejecting children of Israel, Paul now turns to *“we all”* who are in Christ. The veil has been removed from the reading of God’s words with the turning of our hearts to the Lord in simple faith in our Saviour. With open (unveiled) face we now read an open Book through the enlightening work of the indwelling Spirit. *“Installed”* within us now, from the moment of our salvation, is the

spiritual “software” to be able to read God’s divine Document of His eternal Word. Through the Spirit’s interpretive inward working we are able to more fully comprehend “*the glory of the Lord*” in all of the wonder of who He is and what He has worked, is working, and will yet work. We are amazed and thrilled and stirred. We are rebuked and exhorted. Our pride and carnality are scattered before the all-penetrating, living Word as we look into it as into a mirror (James 1:22-25).

Twice in Exodus 34 we are told that when Moses left the fearful people to speak with the Lord he removed his veil (vs. 34-35). Thus he was able to commune with God “*face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*” (Ex. 33:11). It is what put the glow on his face at the first in so gazing upon and communing with the Lord on the mount. Even so the same is available to “*we all*” who are in Christ. We too may boldly approach God’s throne of grace, in contrast to those who worship at a distance (Ex. 33:8-10). In Christ we too may speak to our heavenly Father “*face to face*”. And in so doing, we like Moses will gradually be transformed, wearing the glow of “*the same image*” of the Lord Himself upon our character and countenance and conduct. Again, it is a work accomplished in us “*by the Spirit of the Lord*”.

Ponder Points

Is it too mystical a notion that others might actually be able to see the difference in one who has been in communion with the Lord and is keeping his heart utterly right before Him? Could we expect a tangible, visible effect upon our appearance, as the glowing face of Moses?

“But we have this treasure
in earthen vessels,
that the excellency of the power
may be of God,
and not of us”

(II Cor. 4:7)

Class 6 – II Corinthians 4:1-7

4:1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

Paul continues in this chapter in the light of his previous discussion of the faded glow of the face of Moses and of the era of law he brought. That fade was unknown to the people of his day because of the veil over his face, and that veil is as if still in place. Now in these early verses of chapter 4 Paul affirms that the new beaming glory of God's gospel of Christ was not in any way veiled by he and his associates, either through idleness (vs. 1) or deception (vs. 2) or negligence (vs. 3-4) or self-glory (vs. 5ff). These are all ways in which we might veil the gospel to the world.

4:1-7 – Glory Not Veiled

Vs. 1 – *“Therefore seeing we have this ministry”* – Because of the nature of the ministry they (we) had received, one of surpassing, continuing glory compared to the old (3:8-11), and because of the transforming power inherent in the gospel message and the working of the Spirit through it (3:17-18), and because in Jesus Christ Paul and company had

4:2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

found such hope and mercy from God and deliverance from sin and the law, therefore there was no quit in them in their New Covenant proclamation. Paul's sense of indebtedness to the God of mercy and keen awareness of the wonder of what they were carrying is what kept him from ever flagging in his fervent focus. Knowing what we have received from God is meant to have this same effect in us as well. When we truly know and believe what we have from the Lord, we do not fall to discouragement in His work. The disheartened Christian does not really understand what he has. Such a one does not really grasp or believe the true glory of it. See here how it was not a matter of who or what Paul himself *was*. It was all about what "we have" and "have received". Paul understood that he was merely one who had received mercy, both in his salvation and in his appointment as an able minister "*of the new covenant*" (3:6; I Tim. 1:12-16).

Vs. 2 – "*But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty*" – The word behind "*dishonesty*" here carries a particular notion of shame. The hidden

things of shame that Paul and company had renounced obviously involve the inappropriate use of God's words. Paul was likely alluding to those false teachers among them who were perhaps using devious means in insisting that the Old Covenant was still in effect.

“Not walking in craftiness” – They were not into tricks or the *“enticing words of man’s wisdom”* in promoting the truth (I Cor. 2:1-4). They were not using arguments with a ring of truth, which were really another gospel, a false gospel, one still founded on the old faded glory of law-keeping, rather than upon the simplicity of believing in Jesus Christ. The true gospel leads and keeps our focus there, upon that One who *gives* us His own righteousness, rather than upon ourselves and our own performance.

“Nor handling the word of God deceitfully” – The word behind *“handling . . . deceitfully”* speaks particularly of mixing in wrong ingredients with the right. Paul and company were not subtly mingling in any falsehoods or human traditions with the pure word of truth. There was no guile in them. There were no other, hidden motives behind what was evident on the surface. Again, perhaps there is indication here of those among them who were in

4:3 *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:*

fact “*handling the word of God deceitfully*”. Compare the similar statement in 2:17.

“*Commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God*” – Paul did what he did before God (2:17), fully aware that He knows every hidden thing. And Paul was aware as well that the measure of a man’s sincerity tends to be evident to others also (5:11). He came with the confidence that the Spirit of God is able to work with power upon the conscience of every honest hearer through the honest truth brought with an honest heart.

Vs. 3 – “*But if our gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost*” – Paul would be both active and honest with the gospel, lest some might never hear the truth that Jesus saves. He understood the simple reality that every soul who has not received the benefit of Christ’s gospel is “lost”; that there are only two kinds of people on this earth, the saved and the lost. Behind this word “lost” is the present participle “perishing”. It is the very same word used in I Corinthians 1:18, “*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish* [those who are perishing] *foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the*

4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

power of God". All without the Saviour are even now on the road that leads down to eternal destruction. They are perishing *now*, even before they actually arrive at that place of everlasting ruin. We who know the Lord, having received the gospel of Christ unto salvation, were once there in the very same position. How well we understand the peril from which we have personally been delivered. How can we then become an end-user of that message that so proved to be "*the power of God*" unto salvation in us, allowing the furtherance of the gospel of deliverance to be stopped in us? In so doing we actually serve the same function as the veil over the face of Moses and over the reading of his law, that veil blinding the eyes of the Jewish race from the truth. By not furthering the gospel we actually put ourselves in the way, veiling the hearts of the lost from the shining light of the truth, keeping them from seeing it.

Vs. 4 – "*In whom the god of this world*" – This is an interesting reference to Satan, the evil one. Elsewhere in the Bible he is referred to as "*the prince*

of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30) and “*the prince of the power of the air*” (Eph. 2:2), head over “*the rulers of the darkness of this world*” (Eph. 6:12). Satan is a “god” only in the sense that he (and his evil host) is the sinister being behind every religious deception, behind every false faith or idol or god that has ever been promoted on this planet, with every crafty form of false Christianity as well.

“Hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” – This of course is not a physical blinding. It is a spiritual and mental blinding, a hindering of one’s perceptions, a hardening of the heart to the point of insensitivity to the truth, resulting in a stony refusal based on a perceived foolishness or lack of need. There is an obvious parallel here with those blinded or veiled in the reading of Moses (3:14). Men must ever be mindful of the danger of their hearts becoming blinded or hardened or darkened from the clear perception of the truth. All of the unsaved world even now walks “*in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*” (Eph. 4:17-18). Satan is ever keen to shield mankind from any benefit they might receive from the God of grace, keeping them bound in the dark dungeon of blind ignorance. And he is even able and willing to

use God's own children in his hardening work, in stopping the gospel from being sent any further through them, shutting their mouths in their prideful fear of being thought foolish. Of course God Himself is involved in this blinding work as well, allowing Satan freedoms to do so when men have shown themselves to be determined rejecters of His truth (II Thess. 2:10-11).

“Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine unto them” – In contrast to those then veiled from seeing the face of *Moses*, pointing to the fading glory of the old covenant, these are now blinded that they may not see the face of *Jesus*, of the new covenant, that now truly glows with all brilliance. As Satan perhaps then moved Moses to place that old veil over the reading of the law, even so he now moves believers to place other veils over the reading of the gospel; veils of idleness or dishonesty or negligence for example. Any kind of veil he can manage. As long as men are hindered from seeing the brilliance of the truth that shows up every falsehood.

“Who is the image of God” – The same word behind *“image”* here is used of Jesus in Colossians 1:15, *“Who is the image of the invisible God”*. As *“the image”* Jesus is the exact representation and

4:5 *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

revelation of God. To see Him is in every way to see the God we cannot see. As the writer of Hebrews expressed it, Jesus is in fact “*the brightness of His [the Father’s] glory, and the express image of His person*” (Heb. 1:3). He is the brilliant shining of the Father’s glory, the exact expression of His essence. Therefore Jesus could say of Himself, “*He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father*” (John 14:9). God is invisible to our eyes, and therefore John said, “*No man hath seen God at any time*”. And yet he further affirmed that “*the only begotten Son . . . hath declared Him*” (John 1:18). The natural world of God’s creation can tell us much about the only true and living God. So much so that all men are proclaimed “*without excuse*” in failing to believe (Rom. 1:20). Yet creation alone cannot reveal to us the fuller image of God. Only in Jesus Christ, in the living (and written) Word, is the invisible God revealed perfectly.

Vs. 5 – “*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*” – The focal point of Paul’s preaching was Christ, always Christ (I Cor. 2:2);

- That He is the *Christ*, the Messiah.

4:6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

- That He is *Jesus*, the One who saves.
- That He is *Lord*, for to this end He came above all else (Rom. 14:9).

“And ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” – Paul never came promoting himself, but his Saviour. He was only a man merced, only a lowly servant. And not only was he a servant of the Lord, but *“your servants”*, a servant of men. He would not place himself under the Lord but over men. He placed himself under both the Lord and men, as *“less than the least of all saints”* (Eph. 3:8), yet graced by God. The word in the original language behind *“servants”* here is *doulos*, a strong term often used of a bond-slave.

Vs. 6 – *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness”* – *“For God”* are key words here. Again, it was not Paul. It was not about Paul or any human abilities. It was and is God in His abounding grace who has made the moves to make man’s salvation a reality. It is God who was working through Paul and company, and is still working

through all who stand for Him;

- It is He who “*always causeth us to triumph in Christ*” (2:14).
- It is He who “*maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place*”.
- It is God who makes us “*sufficient for these things*” (3:5).
- It is Christ who is writing His epistle “*by us . . . with the Spirit of the living God . . . in fleshy tables of the heart*” (3:3).
- It is God who makes “*us able ministers*” (3:6).
- It is “*by the Spirit of the Lord*” that we “*are changed into the same image from glory to glory*”, as we merely behold Him “*with open face*” (3:18).

It was God who began it all as far as man is concerned. He began with creation when He first “*commanded the light to shine out of darkness*”, first making separation between light and darkness in bringing the world into existence (Gen. 1:2-5). Man’s only significant contribution was to mess it up, bringing such ruin through his sin. So then it was God again bringing “*the true Light*” into the world in sending Jesus, shining “*the light of men*”

into the darkness of man's hopeless corruption (John 1:1-9).

“Hath shined in our hearts” – Christ in His coming, in bringing in Himself the very *“image of God”*, is that *“true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”*. The salvation He offers is in a measure visible to all, available to every soul who will receive Him. And when any soul turns and looks to Him, a “quickenning ray” penetrates that darkened, alienated heart, and the lights come on in that receiving soul, as if the blinding veil is torn away and the wonder of Christ's beaming face is now seen at last for the glory He is.

“To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” – Far excelling the glow of Moses, all who look upon *“the face of Jesus Christ”* see *“the glory of God”*, even as the three disciples saw the same gleaming glory in the face of Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Again, He Himself is *“the true Light”* to whom every lesser glow ever pointed. And as the light shined in our hearts through the vehicle of someone's faithful witness, even so may we be used to shine that same light into the lives of others through our unhidden, unveiled gospel.

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

Vs. 7 – “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels*” – The “*treasure*” speaks of Christ’s presence and power and life-giving message. Yet it is a wonder that the “*treasure*” might be held in the “*earthen [clay] vessels*” of our lives. It is a wonder that the Lord would so involve frail and faulty mankind in His great work. For we are still so very earthly and given to sin and weakness in our human nature. We have weak human bodies. We have dull human minds. We have human feelings that can sometimes be very fickle.

“That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” – Paul spoke of the incredible treasure we have within, in the excellency of the very words and presence of God there. Yet still it is in earthen, clay (dirt) vessels, expressing the frailty of the carrier. Oh the marvel of it that the Lord is willing to be carried by us to our world! He is able and actually does use us in His wonderful service in spite of our human weaknesses. He is able to take even our humanness, when presented to Him as a living sacrifice, and so multiply the impact of our lives to the blessing of our world. He is able to show *Himself* strong in the context of our own inability. Even so

Paul would insist upon his own weak and limited humanity and frailty. He was less an amazing man and more a man amazingly used of God, a man with an amazing God. Why? Because he was a man so wholly given over to the Lord and His purposes. How that glorious, victorious presence of that surpassing treasure of the Lord of glory within so magnifies or exalts these otherwise humble vessels and so extends our usefulness for ministry far beyond all reasonableness, making life worth living and a joy to live!

How can we make an impact for the Lord in a world full of people so committed to themselves, so given to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life? How can we ever hope to make the slightest imprint on a world of people so given to false religion? Still it is the Lord using the weak things of this world to confound the wise (I Cor. 1:27-28). It is the Lord taking frail people who know their frailty and using them to conquer in His own power and for His own name, as young David against the seasoned giant. *“That the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us”*. For it is *“not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the LORD of hosts”* (Zech. 4:6). The Lord is prepared to use even such poor specimens as you and I to forward His work. What a joy to be a part of it! As

one writer put it, “The frail shall not fail – if filled”. As we walk with the Lord, as we walk in the Spirit, walking in continual dependence on Him in everything as we keep ourselves right with Him and close to Him, what marvellous things God can and will accomplish through us! Though we are weak and moved by human longings and limitations, yet none of these things are a hindrance to God when given over to His hand and will and purposes. Just as the utter inadequacy of a little boy’s lunch, yet *given over*, did not hinder what Jesus could do for the multitudes through it. *Multiplied for the blessing of the multitudes!* Paul was merely a man, with very human limitations, yet the Lord so greatly used that earthen vessel! And if He could so use *that* man then He can so use *any* willing soul!

May we hold fast the precious treasure of God’s gospel, come what may, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. May we both hold it *fast* and hold it *forth*, claiming no glory or strength of our own. Only His strength displayed in our weakness (12:9). Ours is only the joy of being a vessel, of being so used of the Lord to carry the “*glorious gospel of the blessed God*”.

Class 7 – II Corinthians 4:8-18

4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

Paul began this chapter with the assurance that they were not veiling the glory of God's gospel, either through idleness (vs. 1), deception (vs. 2), negligence (vs. 3-4), or self-glory (vs. 5-7). We are only as frail, common, earthenware pots. Yet we who are in Christ carry and shine forth the priceless treasure of God's very presence and life-giving message within. Now Paul relates the living death they happily endured in the Lord's service, the breaking of the vessels that the light and life of Jesus might be visible to all and born in others. He describes a life of faith that knows with assurance both of resurrection and reward for our labours and losses here, and therefore one that does not quit.

4:8-12 – Living Death

It is all a continual sentence of running participles through vs. 8-10 until the last verb of vs. 10, suggesting even in this grammatical construction the relentless nature of Paul's life of sacrificial service.

4:9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Vs. 8 – *“Troubled on every side, yet not distressed”* – Though they were facing the pressure of difficult trials, yet they were never cramped or crushed by circumstance. Though God allowed them to be stressed, He did allow them to be pressed past the breaking point.

“Perplexed, but not in despair” – Though they were often stopped, they were never brought to a complete standstill. Though God allowed what might seem to be dead-ends, He only used such roadblocks to deflect or redirect them in His all-seeing wisdom.

Vs. 9 – *“Persecuted, but not forsaken”* – Though they were often touched by the hateful servants of Satan on this earth, they were never left by the Lord to their own devices. Though hounded and pursued by the yapping dogs of the evil one, the Master of all ever kept the hounds at bay. Compare Israel pursued by Pharaoh’s army in their flight from Egypt. The Lord’s presence was always there as a shield between in the pillar of cloud and fire. Pursued by the enemy, yes; they even pressing close, yes; threatening with real threat, yes; yet

4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

never quite able to make good their malicious purpose because of that One who *“is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Ps. 46:1). Compare David safely kept through King Saul’s pursuing efforts to take him. Even in the martyrdom of a saint, such as Stephen and James, there is only victory and a happy entrance into the Lord’s presence *“eternal in the heavens”* (5:1).

“Cast down, but not destroyed” – “Though he [a good man] fall, he shall not be utterly cast down”. Why? Because *“the LORD delights in his way”* and *“upholds him with His hand”* (Ps. 37:23-24). Yes, the Lord is willing to allow His servant to be knocked down, even as Jesus went to an unjust death at the hands of those who thought they were doing God’s service. Yet it was only the planting of the seed, resulting in untold blessing and fruit throughout the age and into eternity! Jesus was not brought to ruin but only to exaltation for His willing sacrifice. The same principle applies to all.

Vs. 10-11 – *“Always bearing about in the body the dying the Lord Jesus”* – Paul explains why he would continue in difficult ministry when another might

easily quit; why at Troas he turned tentatively west to the fight, instead of speedily east in flight. It was because he was *“crucified with Christ”* (Gal. 2:20). Though it was Paul who lived, yet in a very real sense it was not Paul but *“Christ liveth in me”*. Therefore the life Paul lived in the flesh he lived by faith in the Son of God, *“who loved me and gave Himself for me”*. The old Paul was dead and a new Paul was raised up and living a new life in Jesus Christ. *“In Christ”* he was *“a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (5:17). Paul was living that great biblical principle of death to self, of which Jesus first spoke and then displayed (John 12:24). In his complete devotion of himself to Jesus Paul had died to himself and his own desires and pleasures and purposes. And in so dying and living for Jesus he of course became a target of Satan’s scorn. The utter loss of Paul’s self-interest, with the resulting hardships, were as if Jesus was continuing to display His dying in the man. And yet in the ongoing deliverances Paul received in his trials, in answer to prayer, it was as if Jesus was displaying the power of His resurrection life in the man. Even so for Paul as he wrote this epistle, the great stormy clouds of anguished concern for the saints at Corinth had at last broken forth into the sunshine of hope for their growth in Christian virtue. Paul

*4:11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death
for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be
made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

was reminded again that he had only to hold fast to the Head and remember he was dead and that his life was *“hid with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3). So in dying to ourselves in our willingness to endure the anguish and hardships of living Christ’s life for others we display Christ’s death in our trials, and He displays His resurrection power in our deliverances. And by this means others are able to see the life-giving power of Christ at work in us. Paul will later list the many ways in which they were *“always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake”* in their multiplied trials (6:4-5, 8-10; 11:23-28), yet in this *“the life also of Jesus”* was *“made manifest”* in him. Compare in Judges 7:15-21 how it was only when the earthen pots of Gideon’s men were broken that the light inside shone, revealing the presence of the Lord’s people and bringing terror to the pagan oppressors (2:16). Only when the alabaster box was broken did the sweet smell of the precious ointment fill the room, and could thus be poured out upon Jesus in recognition of His coming death (Matt. 26:6-13). Blessing through breaking is the Lord’s way with us for His glory and the good of others.

4:12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

“Manifest in our mortal flesh” – Paul refers not only to himself in a general sense, but specifically to his body or *“flesh”*. He was one who carried in his body *“the marks of the Lord Jesus”* (Gal. 6:17), the physical scars of his stoning and beatings and scourgings, for the simple reason that Jesus was to him *“the Lord Jesus”*. His devotion to Christ had been written indelibly upon his flesh. And yet still he lived, demonstrating the living, delivering power of Jesus working in his behalf.

Vs. 12 – *“So then death worketh in us, but life in you”* – The planting of a seed brings an end to the seed itself, and yet results in the life of the plant and multiplied fruit. Even so, in the sacrifice of Paul’s life for Jesus Christ there resulted the blessing of eternal life for many others through him. Again, Paul was happy to suffer affliction if it would abound to the *“consolation and salvation”* of others (as he began, 1:5). *“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all”* (Phil. 2:17).

4:13-18 – By Faith in the Unseen

Vs. 13 – *“We having the same spirit of faith”* – Paul

4:13 *We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;*
4:14 *Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*

points to the O.T. for a display of the same kind of faith operating in them; a faith strong enough to open their mouths. The Psalmist said “*I believed, therefore have I spoken*” (Ps. 116:10). Even so Paul and company, with all who stand with Christ, responded according to what they truly believed. The nature of genuine faith is that it will become outwardly evident. As the planting of a seed ultimately reveals a visible plant, even so Christ’s plantings will tend to show in faithful response. Faith will speak of God’s true way of salvation. Being fully persuaded, Paul was an earnest persuader (5:11). Faith will lead into righteous living in the fear of God and away from sin. True faith cannot lie entirely dormant and undetected having no impact on our convictions and habits. It is going to play out in our walk and talk. It was indeed Paul’s faith that moved him to endure all for Christ and others.

Vs. 14 – “*Knowing . . .*” – It is the result of faith. By faith we *know*. Though Paul did not personally

4:15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

see either Christ's resurrection or his own, yet by his faith in God's Word he was convinced of both. And it was this settled knowing that moved him to showing and going. In the firm conviction that faith brings, Paul was convinced that God has already raised up Jesus from the dead. And in that conviction there is peace in the assurance that He will raise up all who are His as well. Paul's confident faith in the resurrection was motivation enough to endure. He is back to his theme coming out the end of his previous letter to this church. With death and the grave completely robbed of their power and victory through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul was thus *"steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"*, knowing that his *"labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (I Cor. 15:58).

Vs. 15 – *"For all things are for your sakes"* – In the firm and settled view of all that is already ours and will yet be ours, why hold anything back in the service of God and others? Paul's life was all out for them, without any concern for the losses such commitment might mean to him or the scars it might trace on his flesh. For his life was all the

Lord's anyway. It is such a different way of thinking, that just does not seem to exist anymore in the modern church. *"For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:45). As Paul had said, he was a servant (*doulos*, slave) of those people of his love (vs. 5). His sacrifices in their behalf proved the truth of it.

"Might . . . redound to the glory of God" – For Paul, all was for others and all was for God, that He might receive greatest glory. The point here seems to be similar to that in Colossians 1:28, that in preaching Christ Paul was *"warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"*. His purpose was that every soul might be found in Christ and walking in the light, knowing both salvation and consecration, and by that means God might be glorified all the more in the combined thanksgiving of His grateful people. As we more abundantly make known God's gospel of grace, the more abundantly souls are saved, and thus the more abundant the great crowd of thankful people offering praise to God.

Vs. 16 – *"For which cause we faint not"* – This purpose of God's glory and the good of others is

4:16 *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

what moved Paul again to not quit in the Lord's work (vs. 1). Paul was unconcerned with the preservation of his flesh or "*outward man*". He was not concerned about his own well-being, keeping himself fit or attractive (diet routines, physique shaping, hair implants, etc.). His body had been badly abused in his service for Jesus, but this was the least of his concerns. Let the world and the devil do their worst in panelbeating his flesh and frame, yet his "*inward man*" was daily renewed in strength and encouragement to carry on in Christ's work. He was not offended. He was not discouraged or distraught. He demanded no perks and placed no qualifications or limitations on the Lord for service. He had neither fears nor regrets for his life spent for Christ, body and soul. His relation to God in Christ ever kept his heart lifted, his spirit buoyant. Though the world kept hammering the touchable parts of his person, yet he was ever renewed in the untouchable parts. It is the transformation through "*the renewing of your mind*" through "*the washing of the water by the word*" Paul spoke of elsewhere (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:26). It is that transformation effected through our gazing "*with open face*" upon

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

the “*glory of the Lord*” in His words (3:18). It is the “*renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*” (Titus 3:5). It is that inward lift God provides through His words and Spirit as we walk with Him, keeping our spirit bright and vibrant and expectant and diligent and pressing on, in spite of our outward circumstances. Compare in Isaiah 40:31, “*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...*”.

Vs. 17 – “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment*” – Though the afflictions Paul endured were heavy by anyone’s standard, yet how easily he dismisses them as “*light affliction*”. How much easier to endure all that we face here when fully activated by love for God and others, and when we *know* by faith that we will receive reward for our labours here. “*Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (I Cor. 15:58).

“*Worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” – This does not refer to God’s glory, but to that reward of glory *we* will receive from Christ’s hand for our service for Him here (Rev.

22:12). Behind the phrase “*far more exceeding*” is an interesting doubling of the word for “excess” or “superabundance”. It is the same word translated “*excellency*” in vs. 7 (KJV). Literally the phrase here in the Greek is “according to superabundance into superabundance”. We will receive back *excess upon excess*, excelling far beyond excess for our losses and sufferings for Jesus in this life. But of course this we must accept at “faith value” this side of death’s curtain. See what excellent motivation Paul gives to carry on and not quit;

- Faith in the resurrection (vs. 14).
- A thankful loving heart toward God that wishes only to see Him glorified (vs. 15).
- Assurance of the most abundant reward for our labours and losses (vs. 17).

The earthly fruits and heavenly rewards of ministry are of far greater value than any personal costs in this life. Anything we may suffer here actually is not that big a deal, but is really only a relatively light weight concern. So pick yourself up and pluck up your courage and keep going for the Lord and for others as a servant “*for Jesus’ sake*”, recognizing by faith God’s guarantee of both resurrection and reward.

4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Vs. 18 – *“While we look not at the things which are seen”* – This is a return to Paul’s words coming out the end of chapter 3. We are wise to ever keep the attention of our gaze upon heavenly realities rather than upon earthly circumstances. The former is sure and real, while the latter can be riddled with the false facades of the evil one designed to dampen our courage and zeal. Our proper heavenly focus will involve both present unseen realities of the Lord and His things (*“the invisible things of Him”*, Rom. 1:20), and promised things yet future. Our faith is *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb. 11:1). Our faith, as Paul’s, gives tangible substance to promised things for which we wait, and it provides a kind of positive proof of the actual existence of things our physical eyes cannot see as yet. As we keep our *“inward man”* focused there we are *“renewed day by day”*.

“For the things which are seen are temporal” – The Apostle John assured us that *“the world passes away, and the lust thereof”* (I John 2:17). The Apostle Peter proclaimed that this world with its *“elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also*

and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Pet. 3:10). The world as we know it will be completely recreated after Christ’s 1000-year earthly kingdom.

Paul, as a clay pot, was quite willing to be broken, that the glory of God placed within might be seen. He was not determined to remain intact. He was not determined to have a share in the glory. He was not wishing to be a co-hero in God’s work. He was as if dead, that the life of Jesus Christ might be evident in him. Lord, please lead our heart to the same.

Ponder Points

Outward Trouble

Inward Renewal

Troubled on every side

Not distressed (vs.8)

Perplexed

Not in despair (vs. 8)

Persecuted

Not forsaken (vs. 9)

Cast down

Not destroyed (vs. 9)

Always carrying the
dying of Jesus

Life of Jesus made
manifest in flesh (vs.
10-11)

Death works in us

Life works in you (vs.
12)

Outward man perish

Inward man

renewed (vs. 16)

Our affliction is trivial
and temporary

Our weight of glory
is exceeding and
eternal (vs. 17-18)

The three Christian pillars of faith, hope, and love are a common N.T. theme. “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three*” (I Cor. 13:13; I Thess. 1:3). It is our faith that fills us with hope and frees us to love. Notice the same combination in this portion;

- Vs. 13 – “*We having the same spirit of faith . . . we also believe*”.
- Vs. 14 – Affirms the hope of the resurrection, that “*the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also*”.
- Vs. 15 – “*All things for your sakes*” and for “*the glory of God*”, in love of God and man.

“We are confident, I say,
and willing rather
to be absent from the body,
and to be present
with the Lord”

(II Cor. 5:8)

Class 8 – II Corinthians 5:1-11

5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

It is about what moved Paul to ministry in this portion of his 2nd epistle to the church at Corinth. In chapter 4 Paul spoke of what he *knew* by faith (vs. 13-14). Because he believed therefore he spoke of what he knew. By faith he was confident that the One who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise all believers. Paul walked according to eternal, unseen realities, rather than according to temporary visible realities (vs. 18). Now in chapter 5 he continues to speak of the practical effects of his faith in the things he knew. He discusses the nature of the resurrection, again assuming its certainty. He had already discussed the nature of the resurrection *body* in I Corinthians 15. Now it is a discussion of us in relation to the resurrection. We must understand that God's apostle speaks in this portion to the saved. Here are promises for those who have placed their soul in the hand of the Saviour and are thus secure in Him.

5:1-8 – Resurrection Confidence

Vs. 1 – “*For we know . . .*” – Again, it was not concerning things of uncertainty that Paul spoke, but of things of which he was assured. Compare the same “*confident knowing*” in vs. 6, and of course in 4:14. Genuine faith in the words of God leads not to a maybe/ possibly, but to a surely/certainly.

“If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved” – It is the possibility of his physical death that Paul is considering here. By “*our earthly house of this tabernacle*” or tent he refers to these bodies in which our souls now live here on earth. He speaks of the possibility that he (we) might die before Christ’s return. He does not say “When” but “*If*” it should be so. By this we understand that Paul was hoping Jesus might return soon, even before his own death. It was (is) possible. And by this hope Paul implies the same attitude that we should carry in our own expectation of Christ’s return. His coming is imminent or at any moment, and could be soon. His return may in fact precede our own death, and thus we may actually escape the distasteful need to pass through the trauma of death.

Consider in Paul’s description the contrasts between our present body and that one to come. He

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

speaks of;

- *“This tabernacle”* or tent, suggesting the temporary nature of this dwelling place of our soul, in contrast to the more permanent *“building of God”*. We are only tenters here, only passing through.
- This *“earthly”* body, of the earth, in contrast to that one to come that is *“in the heavens”*.
- This one to be *“dissolved”* in our death, in contrast to that which is *“eternal”*.
- This one made with human involvement, in contrast to that one to come that is *“of God”* and *“not made with hands”*.

Vs. 2 – *“For in this we groan”* – *“In this”* body we sigh our way through the hardships of life here on earth (vs. 4), as we anticipate by faith that renewed body we will receive, but do not yet have. Even so we, with all creation, groan and travail *“in pain together until now”*, recognizing *“the bondage of corruption”* that life on earth involves (Rom. 8:21-22).

“Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house

which is from heaven” – Paul’s figure of being “*clothed upon*” with our heavenly house, as if a garment we put on, helps us to see that he still refers to the particular “*house*” of our body, the personal dwelling place of our soul, rather than generally to a corporate dwelling place. As our faith grows so grows our desire for that transformation of our body in the resurrection, for deliverance from the presence and results of sin in these earthly bodies. It is a “*house*” or body “*from [literally “out of”] heaven*”, even as it is “*a building of [out of] God*” (vs. 1). That renewed body comes to us directly from God’s hand and power, either in the resurrection of the righteous dead at Christ’s return for His church in the Rapture, when their souls will be (re)united with their renewed bodies, or in the transformation of the bodies of the righteous living when “*caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air*” (I Thess. 4:17). Paul has spoken of the same change elsewhere;

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump . . . the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor. 15:52).

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

“We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2).

5:3 *If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.*

5:4 *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*

Vs. 3-4 – “*If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked*” – Paul spoke in vs. 2 of our earnest desire to be clothed with our glorified bodies. In speaking now of being “*found naked*”, he seems to refer to the in-between state of a saint after death and before Christ’s return. For a child of God to die is for his soul “*to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*” (vs. 8). His “*earthly house of this tabernacle*” is of course dissolved in decay after death, but he does not yet have his resurrection body, which he will only receive at the time of Christ’s return for His church in the Rapture. So in death the soul of the saved while in the Lord’s presence and until the resurrection will be in a “naked” condition, without a body. Paul implies that this is not a preferred condition. “*Not that we would be unclothed*” he says in vs. 4, “*but clothed upon*”. First prize for Paul was that his mortal, earthly body might be immediately swallowed up with his “*house which is from heaven*” in Christ’s return, thus never passing through death at all and never needing to be “naked” for a time.

5:5 *Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.*

5:6 *Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:*

Paul of course did not speak here based upon any clear vision of the timing of Christ's return, for that timing is known only to the Father (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). Paul spoke out of his own desire, though he has long since passed through the veil in death. But in so expressing his heart we are taught by his example the attitude we should carry as believers. We live in certain assurance of Christ's return to the catching up of dead and living saints, and we live in hope of the any moment nature of it.

Vs. 5 – It is God Himself who is working out such wonderful things in us and in our behalf. It is *“He which raised up the Lord Jesus”* who *“shall raise up us also”* according to His promise (4:14). And as mentioned in 1:22, He has already given the indwelling Holy Spirit to every believer as a token or guaranteeing deposit that He will fulfil all of the rest of the things He has promised. Compare Ephesians 1:13-14.

Vs. 6 – *“Therefore we are always confident”* – The

word translated “*confident*” here can also express the notion of good cheer. “*Knowing*” what Paul knew by faith, his attitude never fell from cheerful confidence. Faith had a constant and comprehensive impact on his attitude and actions. He was “*therefore*” always up. Paul was not basing this happy confidence on his earthly constitution or conditions. It was purely a by-product of his faith. “*Therefore*” he was never down or glum or low. Conclusion; *By faith* it must therefore be possible to always be up and never down! Please note in these early verses, 2 times the word “know” (vs. 1, 6) and 2 times “confident” (vs. 6, 8).

“Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” – While still “*at home*” in the first abode of our physical body, we are away from our final home with the Lord. The word behind “*absent*” here carries the particular idea of “away from home”. Thus in verses 6-9 Paul contrasts the thought of “at home” and “away from home”. In Christ we are a people with two homes, for though we live as strangers here below yet “*our conversation*” or citizenship “*is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 3:20).

Vs. 7 – “*(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)*” – Again,

5:7 (*For we walk by faith, not by sight:*)

5:8 *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be
absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

we walk according to our faith in the sure words of God. The first home of this temporary, earthly body we can see “*by sight*”. Our final home of our eternal, heavenly body we can see only “*by faith*” in God’s promises. And not only do we see it by faith, but we “*walk*” or conduct our lives according to our knowing of “*things which are not seen*”. Again, it is motivations for ministry Paul relates here, things that moved him to carry on, though at times it was harder than hard for him. His life was all assurance of hope, and his heart all happy, confident, and thankful.

Vs. 8 – “*We are confident, I say, and willing rather*” – Again Paul affirms his happy confidence born of his faith. Knowing the One who would meet him upon death, he thought it better to be away from the home of his earthly body and with the Lord, even though that be the “*naked*” condition of his soul without a body. So his first preference was the Lord’s return before his death with his mortal body transformed immediately into an immortal, incorruptible body. His second choice was to die before the Lord’s return to enjoy the Lord’s presence

5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

though “naked”. His third choice was to remain living and groaning within the trials of life on earth.

5:9-11 – Judgment Seat of Christ

Paul’s faith gave eyes to his soul to see things unseen, things to come. In this way he could see the coming resurrection, and he could see the coming judgment of the just as well. It was another motivation to action.

Vs. 9 – “*Wherefore we labour*” – The Greek word behind “*labour*” is a combination of the two words *phileo*, meaning to love or be fond of, and *timao*, meaning honour. So the root idea of the word is to be fond of honour, to be motivated by a desire to be honoured. We are activated in this life in view of the honours we may receive before our God. And the verb here does not express momentary action, but relates the ongoing nature of a lifestyle of such righteous ambition.

“That, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him” – That whether at home in this body or at home with the Lord we might be well-

5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

pleasing to Him. That by every means and in every place life finds us we might have His smile.

Vs. 10 – “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” – This is a “*we*” judgment, referring to believers rather than unbelievers. And notice that the reference here is to “*all*” believers. As well, this is no optional event, for “*we must all appear*” there. It is a divine appointment all the righteous of all time must keep. The word behind “*appear*” expresses more than just the idea that all will be present there. The thought is that all will be made manifest or brought to light there. Nothing will be left hidden that has not been confessed before those who were wronged, either God or man. All will come to the light of fullest exposure and examination in that day. Nothing will come short of being fully dealt with. Remember the similar thoughts in I Corinthians 3, where this judgment of the just is presented as an examining fire.

“*That every one may receive the things done in his body*” – Where the word “*all*” in the first phrase

*5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we
persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God;
and I trust also are made manifest in your
consciences.*

takes in all of God's true children, "every one" encompasses each and every individual. All must be dealt with personally there. And all will be handled fairly and put right before the Lord and others then. Both "good or bad" will be handled with equity, nothing missed. Where reward is due, it will be given to those who are truly worthy, for Jesus returns bringing His reward with Him (Rev. 22:12). Where loss is appropriate, loss will be the outcome, as fully as is deserved. Where there are gains, we know how gracious is the Lord to make those gains glorious, filling to overflowing with abundance as is His way (Lk. 6:38). None gives better than He. Where there are losses, how great will therefore be the losses, in losing out on the great gains our God wished to give, that we might have had from Him.

Vs. 11 – "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" – Because we know the Lord for who He is therefore we are moved to action, not only for our own sake, but now for the sake of others as well. If you knew the bridge ahead was washed away

would you try to warn the speeding train? Of course you would! How could you not? If you knew the tsunami was due to hit would you try to warn the people on the beach? How could you not? Again, this is not about what we know by sight, but what we know by faith. It is not about what we are able to see with our physical eyes, but only with our eyes of faith, those *“things which are not seen”* but we know to be true and real. So by faith we know that there is judgment coming, of which all men will have a part. In this portion we see the promise of the *righteous* examined and put right at Christ’s judgment seat. At the end of Revelation 20 we see promise of the final judgment of the *unrighteous* at the Great White Throne Judgment. We know of these approaching events. And we know as well of the Lord’s penetrating awareness, that nothing could escape His gaze, that *“all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Heb. 4:13). And we know that for every soul who is not safe in the Saviour it is in fact *“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*. Their doom is most certain, for *“He will not at all acquit the wicked”* (Nahum 1:3). Therefore knowing what we know and loving as we love, and knowing even that part of our judgment will concern the nature of our care for others, having become quite convinced of such things we cannot help but to be active in

seeking to persuade others. And when we are not so active it can only be for one reason; because we do not really believe. “No, but it’s just that I’m shy”, some might reply. No, I’m afraid not. If you knew your mother or your son was on that speeding train you would not be too shy to shout a warning with all you had in you. It is not shyness, but that you will not believe what God says in His words. “No, but I just do not know what to say”. You know enough, and you have God’s promise back of it. We must be careful not to deceive ourselves. A life of faith is an activated, motivated life of obedience, with a clear knowing;

- That the resurrection is real.
- That we may please our God with our lives.
- That our own personal judgment is a fixed appointment and draws near.
- That all others will face the same.
- That the Lord is a fearful Judge for the lost.
- That we can actually make a difference for others and for ourselves.

Being persuaded, we persuade. Being unpersuaded, we evade.

“But we are made manifest to God” – Our God fully knows what we are. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight” (Heb. 4:13). “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). All is naked and exposed before Him, right down to the things you think about in the “secret” place of your heart. As Paul proclaimed in his first letter to these people, “. . . until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (I Cor. 4:5). All exposed! All put right!

“And I trust also are manifest in your consciences” – Paul suspected his sincerity was in fact evident to all there. Certainly it was evident to those with a humble willingness to see it.

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Ponder Points

Consider how Paul’s thoughts here help us to understand the condition of saved souls after death and before the resurrection. Do the souls of the righteous dead fall into an unconscious state upon death? If this were so why would Paul speak of the nakedness of our being present with the Lord

without a body? What difference would it make if we have no conscious awareness there? Obviously we will be awake and aware and active in anticipation of the resurrection when our soul will at last be reunited with our resurrection body.

As well, Christ's presence will be a place of greatest joy, for though "*naked*", it is a condition far more preferred over life here on earth. Compare in Philippians 1:23 Paul's preference for death, "*having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better*".

“... that they which live
should not henceforth
live unto themselves,
but unto Him which died for them,
and rose again”

(II Cor. 5:15)

Class 9 – II Corinthians 5:12-21

5:12 For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

It is a particularly important portion we now come to, for there are huge theological themes touched on here.

5:12-21 – Ministry of Reconciliation

Vs. 12 – “*For we commend not ourselves again unto you*” – Paul had presented his passion and purpose and had pointed out his own labours in view of Christ’s judgment seat and his work of persuasion in view of “*the terror of the Lord*” (vs. 9 & 11). Thus again he was perhaps mindful of some there at Corinth who suggested that he was too given to self-promotion (3:1).

“*But give you occasion to glory on our behalf*” – Though Paul was not recommending himself to them, he was recommending himself to their other mentors through them. This could have been spoken tongue-in-cheek or with a touch of sarcasm,

a beginning to Paul's speaking "*foolishly*", which he will pursue further later (11:21). It is as if he presumed they needed fuel for arguing in his favour before those "*false apostles*" active among them.

"Them which glory in appearance, and not in heart" – Paul seems to express the nature of those who were opposing him there, men who were more given to surface appearance or outward show than a heart genuinely motivated by the truth of God. The point will be raised again later (10:7). Paul was suggesting that he and those with him were every bit the equal of what his opposers showed on the surface, *"that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we"* (11:12-13). Yet the difference was that God's true servants were genuine before God as well, while the others were inwardly false and motivated by selfish interests.

Many there are who live a surface religion rather than a heart relation to God. Paul has been relating things that motivated him in ministry, and none of them had to do with outward appearances. That his opponents were so motivated was the revelation of the falseness of their religion. It always is.

Vs. 13 – *"For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God"* – The term "*beside ourselves*" speaks of

5:13 For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

madness. Again Paul likely referred to accusations of insanity spoken against them at Corinth. It would not be the first or last time men reverted to personal insults when unable to effectively counter the views of another. Yet such accusations meant as little to Paul as they do to any soul who is stable and established in Christ's love. Paul makes no denial of being a mad man, only that if out of their heads it was all for the Lord. And if there was any soberness or soundness of mind in him then it was all for them. Again, he and his comrades were their "servants for Jesus' sake" (4:5). Though it seems Paul's character was not protected from attack by his friends there at Corinth as it should have been, yet his commitment to their best remained as strong as ever. His love was an active commitment to the best for others regardless of response.

Vs. 14 – "*For the love of Christ constraineth us*" – "*Constraineth*" here is the idea of being compelled or pressed by obligation. The verb in the original Greek is written in an ongoing sense as well ("is constraining"), suggesting a driving force ever in

5:15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

Paul's awareness. Compare Jeremiah 20:7-9. The context (vs. 15-16) indicates that this "*love of Christ*" speaks particularly of the compelling power of Christ's love for us rather than of our love for Him. Because He is the Lord of glory and gave His life for us, therefore we are moved.

"Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" – Because mankind is dead in trespasses and sins therefore it was necessary for the Saviour to meet man there in death that He might lead a following to life.

Vs. 15 – *"That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves"* – *"They which live"* refers to all who have come to eternal life by believing in Jesus. Paul relates here what was the constraining influence on them. If our Saviour did not live for His own pleasure but rather gave Himself to death in our behalf, then how could we who have found life in Him now live for ourselves, as we did before we knew Him? Christ's loving sacrifice impels us to follow in His self-sacrificing way. Any lesser response expresses unfeeling ingratitude.

5:16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.
5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Vs. 16 – “*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh*” – In Christ Paul had eyes only for his risen Saviour, and therefore he did not look upon men in the same way others did. The “*appearance*” (vs. 12) or significance of men made little difference to him anymore. The heritage, race, colour, income, learning, or status of a man is lost in view of the need of all to be reconciled to God. If it is *God* who actually stooped so low to meet my need, then I should certainly be willing to go to the very lowest of humanity. Compare Paul’s attitude toward the other apostles in Galatians 2:6.

“*Yet now henceforth know we Him no more*” – Where before Paul’s conversion he had known of Jesus of Nazareth and assessed Him according to a human reckoning, yet now, having come to life in Jesus Christ, Paul looked upon that Eternal One in an entirely different manner.

Vs. 17 – “*Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature*” – Every saved soul is a new creation.

Where before there was spiritual death there is now life, as if risen from death to a new existence. This does not refer to an ongoing transformation, as that mentioned earlier, coming to us as we behold “*as in a glass the glory of the Lord*” (3:18; Rom. 12:2). This rather speaks of the immediate, complete inward transformation of new birth, that which takes place the moment a soul believes in Jesus.

Oh consider the monumental significance of that little word “*if*”. All of the blessing or cursing of one’s eternal existence rests upon it. “*If*” no, then there is no blessing, hope, inheritance, heavenly treasure or pleasure or promise whatsoever. “*If*” yes, then there is every blessing and privilege in heavenly places in Christ, and into eternity.

Consider how in Christ all things have indeed become new (borrowing a bit from F.E. Marsh);

- New Aim – To please the Lord (vs. 9).
- New Attitude – To live for Him who loved us (vs. 15).
- New Approach to Life – We walk by faith (vs. 7).
- New Activity – The ministry of reconciliation (vs. 20).

- New Appointment – Ambassadors (vs. 20).
- New Assurance – Glory (vs. 1-8).
- New Arch-Enemy – Satan.

“Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” – Verb tenses become important here. The Greek verb behind *“passed away”* is written in a momentary form (aorist), suggesting no process or ongoing action but a momentary event. The verb behind *“are become”* is written in the perfect tense, speaking of action begun in the past with the effects continuing to the present. From the moment of our salvation in Christ our old existence passed away. And since that critical moment we have continued in a state of all things having become new in Him. Though our *“old man”* remains within us, yet the *“new man”* of God’s new creation is now within as well (Eph. 4:22-24). The sanctification process for the believer is now a matter of putting off *“the old man with his deeds”*, and putting on the new nature, *“which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him”* (Col. 3:5-10). Thus there is a completed aspect of our transformation from the moment of our salvation, and there is an ongoing aspect that continues to the grave.

Vs. 18 – *“And all things are of God”* – The same *“all*

5:18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

things” that became new in we who are saved (vs. 17) Paul now affirms as sourced from (out of) God. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights”* (James 1:17).

“Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ” – The “us” here obviously refers to believers, those who have received God’s offer of reconciliation in Jesus. This could not be true of all men.

“Reconciled” and *“reconciliation”* appear 5 times in the 3 verses of 18-20. The idea is similar to Romans 5:1, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*. In reconciliation God’s wrath against sinful man is satisfied or propitiated through Christ’s death in our behalf or in our place. The moment any individual believes upon Jesus Christ as his only hope for salvation, that soul is *“justified”* or made righteous before God. The very righteousness of Jesus Christ is given to him or accounted to him. And as a result that justified soul is put utterly right with God, as if he had never sinned. All who are so

5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

“reconciled”, who before were “alienated and enemies” in relation to God, now have found “peace with God” (Col. 1:21).

“And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” – Not only has “our Father” given to us “every good gift” for our own benefit, but He has given to us what is meant for the benefit of others as well. Over and over again God seeks to impress upon us the truth that His benefits were never meant to go only as far as you and me personally. He has always meant for receivers to become givers, that those blessed in Christ should become involved in actively blessing others. The two concepts are spoken in the same sentence here, as if with the same breath; “Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation”. That we live and that we give both come together in God’s thinking. We are to pass on what we have received.

Vs. 19 – “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” – Jesus was not on His own mission in coming to make a way for man to God.

It was and is God's work from start to finish. Again, the same "*all things*" that became new in every true child of God is all "*of God*" (vs. 18). He is the One graciously making all the moves and sacrifices, though He is the One who was offended.

Consider the obvious here, that man's need for reconciliation with God implies a problem in man. It assumes a severance between God and every soul, and that all are so separated and in a similar condition of need ("*dead*" in fact, vs. 14). The conclusion of it is that every soul is therefore responsible to see to his need for reconciliation with his Creator. Every sinner must renounce his opposition to God and His way and accept God's terms of mercy. Every soul must trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation from sin.

"Not imputing their trespasses unto them" – Again, this is not spoken of all men but only of those having found reconciliation with God. The sins of the redeemed are removed from their account and applied to Jesus Christ, who carried them away in death. By this means the saved soul is no longer accountable for his sin and is freed from guilt before God.

"And hath committed unto us the word of

5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

reconciliation” – The literal phrase behind the English here is “and having placed in us the word of reconciliation”. Again, “*the word of reconciliation*” placed within is part of that “*treasure*” deposited in the “*earthen vessels*” of our earthly existence (4:7). This is not about what we are capable of, but only about what we carry. And this is not only the gift of reconciliation, but “*the word of reconciliation*”. Again Paul returns to the thought of not only our receiving but our speaking, of our passing on to others what we have received. In one sense Paul refers to that particular call to ministry he had received from the Lord from the moment of his conversion (Acts 26:17-18). Yet more broadly he suggests what is the purpose of all who have entered into God’s grace in Christ. We all have deposited within us the true and powerful gospel message. We alone who have believed in Jesus carry the answers for which the world seeks in their innermost being. We have found the only way of reconciliation to the only true and living God. Therefore it would be utterly unthinkable that we would not seek to make such precious words known as widely as possible.

Vs. 20 – *“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ”*

An ambassador comes as a representative of his master. Paul and company considered themselves Christ’s own representatives here on earth, speaking for Him with His authority. Consider how exalted is such a position and responsibility as ambassadors of the King of kings Himself. It is an opportunity far more glorious than to represent any earthly parliament or president, congress or king. Again, all who belong to Jesus Christ are such ambassadors in a measure, both in our words and works.

“As though God did beseech you by us” – That God was in Christ (vs. 19) implies that He is now in us, making His offer of reconciliation. When it is God’s true child, coming with God’s true gospel, pleading for reconciliation to God, it is the same as if God Himself were doing the pleading. Though men may not consider it so, the vital point is that God considers it so! The hearer will be handled according to his response as if he were so responding to God Himself. Remember in Luke 10 how we see the same in the case of the disciples sent out two-by-two to the cities of Israel. Jesus sent them to *“every city and place, whither He Himself would come”* (vs. 1). If those representatives of Jesus were received in a city, there would follow the

blessing of Christ's own presence and work there. But every city rejecting Christ's disciples would be visited only with God's judgment (vs. 11-12). The way they handled the message and messengers of Christ was as if handling Christ Himself in the same manner.

"We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" – We come even with the sense of begging the unsaved to grasp God's opportunity to "be reconciled" to Him. Yet we come with a *command* that men be reconciled, for the verb here is written as a command behind the English. Again, as God's ambassadors we come with the authority of God Himself. For *"God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent"* (Acts 17:30). All who hear are held accountable by God to believe and receive. As well the verb behind *"be ye reconciled"* is written in a momentary sense rather than a continuous sense. This is not a process men must enter into, but a moment of decision and turning to which all must come. These words, combined with vs. 11, suggest the earnestness with which we plead the unsaved into the kingdom. This is no mere announcement but an impassioned plea. The fact that we are to come in this manner suggests that the unsaved world is not likely to immediately embrace the message upon hearing it. Thus

persuasion is necessary and appropriate. The gospel is a message of urgency. Therefore there must be a measure of urgency about our witness. This important element comes clear in this portion. Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was a compelling message, one that brought stunning effects upon those hearing. In defending himself against those criticizing him, Jonathan Edwards responded in this way; "If we should suppose that a person saw himself hanging over a great pit, full of fierce and glowing flames, by a thread that he knew to be very weak, and not sufficient to bear his weight, and knew that multitudes had been in such circumstances before, and that most of them had fallen and perished; and saw nothing within reach, that he could take hold of to save him; what distress would he be in? How ready to think that now the thread was breaking; now, this minute, he should be swallowed up in these dreadful flames? . . . or held over it in the hand of God, who at the same time they see to be exceedingly provoked? . . . no wonder that they cry out in their misery."

Now look simply at this verse my friend and consider the instruction we receive from it. What is our primary reason for being on this earth? Are we here to be entertained or to provide social benefits

5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

or reforms for the troubles of men? No! We are here as God's ambassadors seeking to move men to reconciliation with God.

Vs. 21 – *“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin”* – Jesus went to the cross without personal sin as the spotless Lamb of God (Heb. 4:15; I Jn. 3:5). Yet in fulfilment of the O.T. image of the sin of men placed upon an animal before its death, or upon a scapegoat before it was led away to the wilderness, even so the sin of mankind was placed upon Jesus Christ on the cross, that in His death He might carry sin away.

“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (I Pet. 2:24).

“We have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

It seems our sin was placed upon our Saviour in God's sight at the point when Jesus cried *“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me”* (Ps. 22:1).

“That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” – Not only is the sin of the believing sinner removed and placed upon Jesus at the moment of salvation (vs. 19), but here is a further aspect in that great divine transfer. At that same moment of faith the righteousness of Jesus Christ is applied to the believer or imputed to his account (Rom. 4). In that most gracious exchange the believing sinner’s sin is placed on the Saviour, and the righteousness of Christ becomes the believer’s eternal possession.

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Ponder Points

There is a prominent preposition in this portion. It is the Greek preposition *huper*, from which we get the word hyper, meaning above or beyond. There is a group of 3 of them found in vs. 14-15 and another group of 3 in vs. 20-21. When this preposition is written in the particular form in which we find it here (with genitive case) it has the meaning of “in behalf of” or “for the sake of”. In the first group the fact that Jesus died for us or in our behalf repeatedly features. In the second group what we do for Jesus features. In His behalf, even in the representative (ambassador) sense of in His stead or in His place, we plead with men to be reconciled to God, as if God Himself were pleading through us.

Communicating this representative sense back to vs. 14-15, we understand that Jesus died, not only for our sake, *but in our place*. He died instead of us, as our representative Head. And because He took for us what we deserve, therefore we speak for Him what He would speak for the good of others. His death in my behalf demands my death in His behalf and in behalf of others (John 12:24).

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:24-26)

“Behold, now is
the accepted time;
behold, now is
the day of salvation”

(II Cor. 6:2)

Class 10 – II Corinthians 6

6:1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

Paul continues his theme of God's ministry among men. He dealt with the motivations and message of ministry in chapter 5, and now focuses in chapter 6 on the nature of God's ministry.

6:1-10 – The Way of True Ministry

Vs. 1 – “*Receive not the grace of God in vain*” – Paul speaks to the believers at Corinth as one who had given his life to the Lord's ministry of reconciliation. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, all believers are meant to be given to this same work of reconciliation to one degree or another. We may not all be called to full time ministry as Paul was, but we have all received from the Lord not only the *gift* of reconciliation but “*the word of reconciliation*”. All who are in Christ carry that treasure in the earthen vessels of their earthly existence. What we have from the Lord is meant to be spoken and furthered. To not so respond is to receive the grace of God “*in vain*”. It is to make it of no purpose beyond our own benefit.

6:2 (*For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*)

Again, it is to be more bottle than channel of the Lord's precious gospel message. Hear God through His apostle pleading with us to become a part of His great and gracious purpose.

Vs. 2 – *“Behold, now is the accepted time”* – Paul begins with a quote here from Isaiah 49:8. It comes from a portion where Isaiah prophesied of Messiah, that Servant of the LORD, in His birth and ministry. Messiah would come both *“to bring Jacob again to Him”* and *“for a light to the Gentiles”*, both *“to restore the preserved of Israel”* and to *“be My salvation unto the end of the earth”* (49:5-6). That era of Messiah's coming Isaiah proclaimed to be *“a day of salvation”* when God would be willing to hear and help; a window period when He would run to the cry of those calling upon Him. Paul now points to this current era of Messiah's coming, death, and resurrection and says *“This is it, folks! This is the very era of which the prophet spoke. A day when God is ready to bring His salvation to every soul who cries to Him for it”*. *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom.

6:3 *Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

6:4 *But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,*

10:13).

Vs. 3 – “*Giving no offence in any thing*” – Since this is in fact that day of fulfilled prophecy with Messiah now revealed, since this is such a day of opportunity when so much has come clear and when God may be called upon, since it is a day when God is beseeching “*by us*” that all men be reconciled to Him (5:20), therefore oh the folly if we who belong to the Lord should muddy the pure waters of opportunity He has made available to all men. Oh the shame if in such a day we should bring blame upon God’s name and ministry through any offence arising out of our selfishness!

How could we ever in any way
Live for ourselves in such a day,
Bringing offence upon the cross,
Limiting gains, enlarging loss.

Vs. 4 – “*But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God*” – The approving of God’s ministry and ministers comes of His ministers conducting

6:5 *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours,
in watchings, in fastings;*

themselves in an approving manner. Paul now begins to relate the commendable example of he and his helpers, and this not only in some things but “*in all things*”. In giving himself as “*a living sacrifice*” to the Lord Paul gave his all. He did not give some of himself to the Lord while keeping some bits for himself. It is all the opposites of selfish living here.

There are differing ways of seeing the many things Paul mentions here;

- Vs. 4-5 – Nine afflictions endured with much steadfast endurance.
- Vs. 6-7 – Nine virtues.
- Vs. 8-10 – Nine contrasts.

Or perhaps,

- Vs. 4-5 – Negative events.
- Vs. 6 – Positive character.
- Vs. 6-7 – Divine resources.
- Vs. 8-10 – Opposing extremes.

Vs. 5 – “*In stripes*” – Paul later speaks of suffering “*stripes above measure*”, that “*of the Jews five times*” he had received “*forty stripes save one*” (11:23-24). As I understand it Roman law specified no more than forty lashes with the whip when punishing a man for severe crimes. Therefore the custom was to give only 39 brutal lashes upon the back to ensure the limit was not exceeded. Rome also prohibited Roman citizens, which Paul was, from being so handled without the opportunity to give answer before Roman authorities (Acts 22:25-29). That Paul was so beaten “*of the Jews*” on several separate occasions suggests their violations of Roman law in their bitter hatred of him. Crimes Paul likely never reported. At Philippi Paul and Silas were unfairly beaten with rods before being cast into jail (Acts 16:22-23). Paul held them accountable only so far as to demand their release at the hands of the magistrates themselves.

“*In imprisonments*” – We have record only of Paul’s night in the jail at Philippi up to the point of his writing this epistle. The plural indicates there were other unrecorded imprisonments.

“*In tumults*” – Referring perhaps to disturbances stirred through the effect of the gospel, such as the uproar at Ephesus raised by Demetrius and the

6:6 *By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,*

other suffering silversmiths there (Acts 19).

“In watchings” – The thought here is sleeplessness. We read elsewhere that Paul laboured night and day throughout the days of his ministry, earning a living at night for the opportunity to preach Christ in the day. As well, much of his praying may have taken place while others were sleeping.

“In fastings” – Perhaps referring to times of lack when they were forced to go without food (Phil. 4:12).

Vs. 6 – *“By pureness”* – Paul carefully kept himself a clean *“vessel unto honour”*, one *“sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work”* (II Tim. 2:20-21).

“By longsuffering, by kindness” – The root idea of the word translated *“longsuffering”* here is “long wrath”. It speaks of one who is *“slow to wrath”* or not easily given to frustration or annoyance with others. It is that ability to continue to graciously deal with people in kindness, even with those who are more difficult to endure.

6:7 *By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the
armour of righteousness on the right hand and on
the left,*

“By the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned” – The indwelling Spirit in His fullness was the source of Paul’s ministry power. And wherever the Spirit of God is given freedom to work, the love of God results. Compare Galatians 5, where first on the list of *“the fruit of the Spirit”* is love. Compare I John 4, where the key identifying feature of the true Spirit is love. Compare in I Peter 1:22, *“obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren”*. In many other places in the N.T. we see the same affirmed. As a child of God walks in the Spirit, genuine love will more and more become evident in his heart and life and responses.

Vs. 7 – *“By the word of truth, by the power of God”* – The power of God becomes evident in the effective working of His words. The Ephesian believers heard and believed *“the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”* (Eph. 1:13). That word proved to be *“the power of God unto salvation”* for them, as it is *“to every one that believeth”* (Rom. 1:16). The living word of God, as the divine seed, is able to give new birth (I Pet. 1:23).

6:8 *By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;*

“By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” – Paul refers here to the *“the whole armour of God”* described in Ephesians 6, that offensive and defensive means by which we are able to stand up to the struggle for God’s truth on this earth. We must be equipped with God’s armour if we would be able to stand and fight, if we would make any kind of a difference for the Lord here below. And we must take on *all* of it, on every hand, if we would succeed. We cannot have all except *“the sword of the Spirit”* or we will make no advance. We cannot have all but *“the helmet of salvation”* or we come only to personal loss in the end. We cannot have all but *“the shield of faith”* or we have no means to cope with the painful darts of doubt the evil one throws at us. We must have it all if we would win for God.

Vs. 8 – *“By honour and dishonour”* – The wise of earth understand by faith the noble nature of our labours for Christ. Yet at the same time our *“preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness”* (I Cor. 1:18). The unwise look upon our efforts as dishonourable, even with disgust. For they have no eyes of faith to perceive the true worth

of God's words.

“By evil report and good report” – Those who understand speak well of our work, while those who do not understand make it out to be a senseless thing, even a kind of evil. Those who love the darkness hate the light of God's truth (Jn. 3:19-21), and thus they tend to hate and malign all who seek to shine God's light in the darkness.

“As deceivers, and yet true” – Those who are wrong look to those who are right and call them wrong. What else can the deceiver do but call truth deception? And what higher commendation here below than to be called “deceiver” by deceivers? Thus, while by believers Paul and company were labelled “*true*”, by deceivers they were labelled “*deceivers*”. God and the wise have the ability to sift through the false labels. And by faith we know that God will sort it all out and put all things right in the end. But for now, our only way forward is “*in much patience*”. Jesus gave warning that men will “*say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake*” (Matt. 5:11). Expect it. Do not ever be surprised with it. And beyond mere endurance, Jesus commands our rejoicing with greatest joy at such times. For we join the company of His great ones when we so suffer.

6:9 *As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;*

Vs. 9 – “*As unknown, and yet well known*” – They were men labouring among common people while the great ones of government and popular interest in society knew nothing of them or their work, would think nothing of it even if they did know of them in fact. Yet they were men “*well known*” by the Lord! His eye followed every detail of their efforts. For it was the things of His interest they were about. We have considered in the past the image of Paul quietly entering the bustling, lusty city of Corinth at the first; just another unknown body crowding their busy streets. Yet he was known and sent there by the God of heaven, bringing the vital message, “*the word of reconciliation*”, the way of deliverance from their pagan pursuits. God’s true servants have seldom been among the known and celebrated of earth, yet their work is all the interest of the Almighty.

“*As dying, and, behold, we live*” – Paul says “*behold*” as if surprised that they would still be found among the living. For as he before mentioned, in the course of their ministry they were “*always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake*” (4:10-11). Compare in Romans 8:36 “*For Thy sake we are killed all the day*

6:10 As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

long". Though always in peril of their lives for the Lord they lived and continued according to the Lord's permission, not that of their enemies'.

Vs. 10 – "*As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing*" – It is an interesting paradox of the Christian experience that we live ever in grief for those in need, yet ever with joy in our Saviour. Jesus was a "*man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*", yet He rejoiced in His heavenly Father.

"As poor, yet making many rich" – Though in this life we possess little, it is not for this life or the things of it that we live. In Christ we have found riches untold, which we only multiply as we spread them to others (Prov. 11:24-25). If we would be used of God in His ministry of reconciliation we must be willing to turn from the pursuit of this world's wealth and seek by God's grace and supply to bring the riches of Christ to others. Compare Christ's example in 8:9.

6:11-18 – The Purity of True Ministry

6:11 *O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.*

6:12 *Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.*

Vs. 11-12 – “*O ye Corinthians*” – Paul would move them to follow God’s sacrificial way of ministry. He has sought to *lead* them by the good example of he and his companions. He now seeks to *push* them with a touch of censure. It was as if Paul stood open-mouthed without words to describe the swelling of his heart in compassion for them, in spite of the wayward direction of some there and their cutting criticisms of him.

“*Ye are straitened in your own bowels*” – “*Straitened*” here is the idea of constricted, in contrast to the enlarging of the heart mentioned in vs. 11. “*Bowels*” expresses the seat of emotion or affection, as we would speak of the heart. Where heart enlarging suggests a swelling of emotion or compassion, heart constricting suggests the opposite, those pulling into themselves and away from compassion for others or largeness of heart. Paul indicates that his heart was not in any way constricted in relation to them. Only in some there at Corinth was there such a constricting of the heart.

6:13 *Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.*

Vs. 13 – “*Now for a recompence in the same*” – Paul speaks to them as if speaking “*unto my children*”. As the consistent love of a parent is willing to ride out difficult times with difficult children and still remain enlarged in heart toward them, and as that kind of steadfast love strongly pleads for a response of the same in return, even so Paul pleads compassion for compassion from these difficult children, that they might see fit to respond in kind to the unwavering love shown to them. It was not so much that Paul pleads for his own reinstatement to their favour, but that they would let go of their petty doubts and selfish interests and “*go on unto perfection*” (Heb. 6:1). This was not about Paul’s popularity, but about God’s ministry. This is about their leaving behind things that would hinder their usefulness in God’s great purpose of reconciliation. So perhaps the parental suggestion here could refer to their heavenly Father as well, who had so blessed them in grace and love; that being enlarged in heart toward the Lord, as He was toward them, they too might turn fully to His service, willing as well to endure all hardships “*in much patience*”.

Vs. 14 – “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with*

6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

unbelievers” – Again, it is a question of fitness for ministry, effectiveness in carrying God’s “*word of reconciliation*”. Not only will impatience in the rigors of ministry give offence, bringing blame upon God’s name (vs. 3-10), but impure, inappropriate associations will have the same devastating effect. Therefore the strong warning now given. The indication here is that some among them at Corinth were so involved, and Paul would call them out to purity of associations. The imagery here comes from the O.T.;

- “*Be ye not unequally yoked*” – Differing animals were not to be put together in one yoke (Deut. 22:10).
- “*With unbelievers*” – God’s people were not to marry those who did not believe in the God of Israel (Deut. 7:3; I Cor. 7:39).

The point is that saved and unsaved should not be too closely bound together in any kind of partnership, whether marriage, business, or otherwise. Even too close a friendship between

saved and lost could perhaps walk the border lands of this warning as well. The many contrasts given in the following verses to highlight the point display the great importance placed on this matter.

“What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” – Those who are saved have been justified or made righteous, as if clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. The unsaved are still immersed in the darkness of their sin, having no forgiveness or cleansing from God or relation to Him.

“What communion hath light with darkness?” – In the redeemed soul of the saved it is as if the light of day has dawned in their understanding and awareness of things eternal (Eph. 5:8). *“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”* (Prov. 4:18). In the unsaved soul it is still as the thick blackness of darkness in the land of Egypt during the plagues, and *“they know not at what they stumble”* (Prov. 4:19). What sharing could the one have with the other?

Vs. 15 – *“And what concord hath Christ with Belial?”* – *“Belial”* is used here as a name for Satan. For a believer to be in close union with an unbeliever is in

6:15 *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

6:16 *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

a sense to unite their differing masters, as if putting Jesus Christ in union with Satan.

Vs. 16 – “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?*” – It was Israel’s treachery before the days of the judgment of her captivity that they actually used the temple, constructed in honour and love for God, as a place to worship the false gods of their idolatry (Ezek. 8).

“*Ye are the temple of the living God*” – In a corporate sense the church of all believers is the dwelling place of God the Spirit (I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22). And as well, in an individual sense every believer is a temple of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19; Jn. 2:21).

“*As God hath said . . .*” – Paul now strings together a series of O.T. quotations demonstrating God’s ancient purpose to indwell His people. These are promises spoken of Israel’s final regathering, yet Paul applies such promises to us in this age. It is

not that national Israel has been replaced by the church, or God's words cannot be trusted. It is that the same principle of separation applies to all of God's children in every age. Our holy God will not be united with things unholy. Therefore the choice is ours whether we want Him or the world.

Compare;

- Leviticus 26:12 – *“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people”.*
- Jeremiah 32:38 – *“And they shall be My people, and I will be their God”.*
- Ezekiel 37:27 – *“My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My people”.*

Vs. 17 – *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord”.* Compare;

- Isaiah 52:11 – *“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”.*
- Ezekiel 20:34 – *“And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a*

6:17 *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out”.

It is a violation of God’s righteous law to “*put no difference between the holy and the profane . . . between the unclean and the clean*” (Ezek. 22:26; 44:23). It has ever been God’s purpose that His holy people and things be clearly distinct from the profane things of the world. The violations of this principle under such banners as Christian unity and outreach are not of God! He would have both end and means consistent with His holy nature.

“*Touch not the unclean thing*” – This after the O.T. concept of the defiling nature of things unclean (Hag. 2:10-13). Not only was it wrong to use such things, it was wrong even to touch them. Every smallest compromise with evil must be strictly forbidden if we would have the Lord’s smile and close fellowship and power.

Vs. 18 – “*And will be a Father unto you*” – Such precious promises of close, abiding relation to the God of heaven!

6:18 *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

Compare;

- II Samuel 7:14 – *“I will be his father, and he shall be My son”* – This spoken of David in God’s covenant with him concerning his throne. As we have entered into God’s covenant with Abraham in Christ, even so we have in a sense entered into David’s covenant as well. In Christ we have access to the blessing promised to Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 12:1-3), and in Christ we have entrance into the kingdom of David’s Son.
- Isaiah 43:6 – *“Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth”*.

Through this portion we understand that purity of associations is a prerequisite for God’s presence and usefulness in His ministry. We should have no involvement with evil doctrines or practices, and we should have no involvement with those who maintain such involvements.

“Now I rejoice,
not that ye were made sorry,
but that ye sorrowed
to repentance”

(II Cor. 7:9)

Class 11 – II Corinthians 7

7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

7:1 – Personal Separation

This first verse of chapter 7 follows on the commands and promises coming out the end of the previous chapter. There in chapter 6 it was more a matter of purity in our relations or associations. Here it is a question of our personal purity. With this verse Paul concludes his discussion of our separation from impurity if we would be pleasing to the Lord and useful in His work, and he concludes here as well his particular focus on the gospel message and ministry begun at the end of chapter 2.

“Having therefore these promises” – Hear the confidence in Paul’s words. He does not speak only of *hearing* God’s promises but of *“having”* them. For God to promise is for God to give, and for us to hear is as if the things promised are already in our possession.

Paul's encouragements here are in view of those surpassing purposes of the Lord (6:16-18) to dwell with us and walk with us and be our God and we His people and to receive us and be our Father and we His children. A patchwork of precious promises from the prophets, displaying the truth that it has been the Lord's purpose from of old to dwell among and even within His people. Yet with such great possibility of close union with our holy God comes the responsibility to shun evil; to avoid or remove ourselves from close union with those who are not right with God (6:17), and to remove from ourselves all defilement "*of flesh and spirit*" as Paul now suggests. "*Let us cleanse ourselves*" is written in a momentary sense (aorist) in the Greek, implying an immediate work. The Lord expects no process, but a vessel simply made clean. Compare the same momentary sense in the word "*purge*" in II Timothy 2:21. "*All filthiness*" is singular here, suggesting every stain. Paul does not refer to evil in general, but to the removal of *every defiling stain*, a thorough job of it, whether in our outward practice and words ("*flesh*") or our inward thoughts and purposes and choices ("*spirit*"). Our resolve must be to "*cleanse ourselves*" from all such in making actual appropriate changes, and we are to allow the Lord "*to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" as we "*confess our sins*" before Him (I Jn. 1:9).

7:2 Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God” – Here is now the positive expression of the same. The *perfection* of holiness is to be our purpose, down to every touch of evil in our character. Some may think a little evil is an allowable thing, since they have given up so much for the Lord in putting many things right in their life. Some may even think a little evil is a good thing, in their attempt to make Christ more “real” or “relevant” or attractive to the worldly. But all such thinking is quite simply inconsistent with *“the fear of God”*. Our God wants *every part* of us, that we might be pure in every respect, with His perfect righteousness. The command of the Lord Almighty to His people has always been *“ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy”* (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26). Any smallest aspect of our thoughts or conduct that we suspect may be displeasing to Him is a violation of this principle of perfect holiness.

7:2-3 – Plea for Their Love

Vs. 2 – *“Receive us”* – The word Paul uses here suggests the idea of making room for him. He says it with a note of insistence, that they must allow him into their care. And this because he had never

- 7:3 *I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.*
- 7:4 *Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*
-

wronged or ruined or abused any among them. Compare his words in 6:11-13, “*be ye also enlarged*”. Compare Samuel’s similar approach to the people of Israel in I Samuel 12:3-5.

Vs. 3 – “*I speak not this to condemn you*” – Coming back now from his note of demand in the previous verse, he would assure them that he did not look upon them with scorn. He had room in his heart for them with a kind of love that would be willing to die with them, and already was dying to self for them.

7:4-16 – Pleasure in Their Love

Vs. 4 – “*I am filled with comfort*” – There is a remarkable change of tone at this point, as if this was the moment when Titus arrived there in Macedonia and Paul at last received word of the good attitude among the believers there at Corinth in response to his first letter. For now he is suddenly all bright and boldness and boasting

7:5 *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh
had no rest, but we were troubled on every side;
without were fightings, within were fears.*
7:6 *Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast
down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;*

concerning them. God's apostle was not only joyful but "*exceeding joyful*", absolutely brimming over with delight. In his joy Paul lost all concern for any trouble he had endured in their behalf. All that he had suffered was well worth it to know that they had come right. It is as the Apostle John's words in III John 4, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*". Nothing thrilled him more. It was the same overwhelming joy that Paul here describes. Where he might have been angry and scolded them for having put him through such trauma as they had, there was no anger for his pain, only joy in their gain.

Vs. 5-6 – "*For when we were come into Macedonia*" – For Paul it was much bigger than just his encouragement in the news of their right heart. It was his joy in "*the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort*", even as he began this epistle (1:3). It was not so much the discovery that men did not let him down, but that God had shown Himself faithful to lift him up. And so Paul relates again the anguish in uncertainty they were carrying when first arriving

there in Macedonia, as if Paul now picks up the thread from where he left off in 2:13 (after having related in the parenthetical portion of chapter 3-6 that it is only through personal losses that the Lord works His gains through us). While facing all of the normal outward resistance of their message through the bitter hatred of those who opposed, they again were carrying the inward anguish of uncertainty concerning the situation at Corinth as well. There was “*no rest*” for them in their earthly existence. “*Troubled on every side*” is the way Paul describes his experience. It was again the image of the frail “*earthen vessel*”, battered and yet held together by God. As if a delicate little boat carrying the precious message of truth, lashed and tossed by wind and waves, seemingly ever on the verge of going down, and yet kept afloat by the Lord of the storm. Perhaps when we feel most like we are ready to come unglued, that is when we are most able to demonstrate the Lord’s reality and power in our lives. Perhaps it is then that we are accomplishing most for God’s glory. It was there from the very pit of despair that the Lord lifted Paul and company “*by the coming of Titus*”. Again, it was more about the comforting God than the coming of Titus. It seems that to know the assurance of the Lord’s comforting care was worth the anguish of any trouble for Paul. A true missionary spirit indeed!

7:7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

Vs. 7 – *“By the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you”* – Paul rejoiced not only to see Titus, but to see him encouraged. Obviously Titus was a man of a similar tender heart to Paul’s, suffering similar anguish in the troubles at Corinth, and knowing the same relief with the discovery of their change of heart. Paul was so encouraged to see him encouraged. Behold how they loved each other!

“Your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me” – Paul’s first epistle had a powerful effect among them through the Spirit’s application of the word to their hearts. There had been such a turning among them generally that they were now in great sorrow for the trouble they had caused Paul and others. They were earnestly yearning that Paul might know their continued love for him, the knowledge of which caused Paul to rejoice all the more. It was as the lover who has had no word from the one he loves for some time, no response to his letters. And then at last he’s overwhelmed with relief to discover that the post had been stopped for

7:8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

some reason, and he receives a great bundle of her delayed letters. Her love for him burns as brightly as ever. And now she's troubled to know he's troubled over her and she's rejoicing in his joy. Even so it was all Paul's joy to now know that they actually mourned over his sorrow.

Vs. 8 – “*For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent*” – It hurt him to say the things he had to say, to make them sorry with the hard words of his first letter. And for a time, in his uncertainty, he may have entertained thoughts of regret for having spoken so strongly. Yet now Paul was full of rejoicing that he had not only received back his friends but had found them now with a right heart, that God had done a work in them. We always take a terrible risk in rebuking those we love for their wrong. It may go badly. We may lose their friendship altogether as a result of our faithful words. But if we find them willing to hear, if there is a heart of repentance in them, then we have gained back a friend and a better one, one put right with God and man.

7:9 *Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.*

“Though it were but for a season” – Sometimes it takes a while for faithful reproofs to bear their good fruit in a soul. And it can be a season of waiting that is all anguish for the wise reprover. It is a case of the casting of our bread upon the water (Eccl. 11:1), as if we are casting or pushing away what we might like to keep but cannot. It is like spending in an investment that may give a good return or may result in complete loss. We must give it away if we would have the hope of a return. Even so to try to hold close a bad friendship or a friend gone bad, in not speaking fair reproof, is to never allow them the possibility of growth. To attempt to hold them close in such a cowardly manner will likely result in the loss of their “friendship” in the long term anyway. Paul’s investment into the lives of those at Corinth, in saying what needed to be said but what might push them way, had now come back with rich dividends to his greatest joy.

Vs. 9 – *“Ye sorrowed to repentance”* – Paul rejoiced that his reproof led to their sorrow, which led to their repentance. The KJV phrase *“godly sorrow”* is

*7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation
not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world
worketh death.*

literally “according to God” in the Greek behind the English, in the sense of toward God or in the presence of God. The point is that they had put themselves right before God. To be sorry before men and make surface changes is not enough, for it leads to no lasting change. Remember King Saul’s surface reforms without true repentance, and the deadly results (I Sam. 19 & 24). But with those at Corinth, reproof from God’s man moved them to sorrow and repentance toward God, who *alone* is able to bring lasting change. It puts God and His power on the side of the repentant one.

“That ye might receive damage by us in nothing” – How delighted Paul now was that he had gone to the trouble of speaking sharply in the effort to bring them right. To refrain from so dealing firmly with them would have amounted to his allowing them to suffer loss or detriment, allowing them to remain less than they might be. We only hurt those we deny the privilege of needed reproofs or discipline.

Vs.10 – *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation”* – Repentance comes of sorrow toward

7:11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

God. And repentance toward God is what brings all true release or deliverance. Every form of deliverance, including the salvation of a soul from eternal destruction, ultimately comes from God and arises only out of a soul coming through sorrow to a proper attitude before Him, bringing His forgiveness and cleansing. Every such dark passage of anguish, though painful at the time, which leads to a right relation to the Lord, is *“not to be repented of”* or regretted in any way for the happy restoration resulting from it.

“But the sorrow of the world worketh death” – Sorrow or sadness or anguish that is only spent in ourselves and never turns a soul to God for hope and help leaves one without hope still. It is a dead-end that can lead down to utter hopelessness and despair, with loss even of all desire to live. When coping with sorrow on our own the best one can manage through human counsels is a patch-up job; only a *surface* fix, but no *soul* fix; repair at best, but no restoration and rest.

7:12 Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.

Vs. 11 – “*What carefulness it wrought in you*” – When our sorrow is only before men there is too great an ability to hide aspects of what we are. But when our sorrow is before the Lord we understand how our evil is a crimson mess before the One who sees and knows all. When we stand by faith as if in the very presence of the God of all we understand that there is no escaping detection, that every aspect is as if a blazing beacon in His sight (compare John 2:24-25). Therefore there is need to deal completely with our sin before Him. Paul describes in this verse a thorough response in coming clean before the Lord. With all carefulness they cleared themselves through confession to God and men. Indignation toward sin, in themselves and in others, and fear toward God were the motivating forces working in them. This gave rise to the most earnest desire to satisfy every injustice according to God’s way. In so following through in the right way, they had in fact put everything right before God and men in the matters of concern Paul had confronted.

Vs. 12 – Paul was not taking up the cause of any

7:13 *Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.*
7:14 *For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.*

particular side. He stood only for the cause of love in seeking the best for all.

Vs. 13 – “*Therefore we were comforted in your comfort*” – How very relieved and grateful and happy he was with the news of them. And again, not only for their restoration to the Lord and to Paul’s friendship, but all the more were they pleased to see Titus so greatly encouraged (vs. 7). These were men who truly loved each other, rejoicing in the joy of others and sorrowing in their pain. Even as Paul commanded in Romans to “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (12:15). Again we see this man practicing what he preached.

Vs. 14 – “*For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed*” – By their good response they in fact rescued Paul from shame. Their very positive response gave support or credence to any boasting Paul might have made of a good work of God in them. They would have made a lie of his

7:15 And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him.

boasts if they had rebelled against his reproofs. But now even in such boasting they showed him to be true in his words concerning them.

Vs. 15 – *“His inward affection is more abundant toward you”* – How much easier it was to freely love them now with their tender hearts and response of obedience toward God and His servants. Obedience is a display of love, and draws love in return. Remember the great focus on this truth in the Lord’s final words to His disciples in John 14-15;

- *“If ye love Me, keep My commandments”* (Jn. 14:15).
- *“He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him”* (Jn. 14:21).
- *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”* (Jn. 14:23).

7:16 I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

- *“He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings” (Jn. 14:24).*
- *“If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (Jn. 15:10).*
- *“Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Jn. 15:14).*

Whether it be Jesus with the Father or a saint with his Saviour or a child with his parent, loving respect is shown to one in authority through willing obedience. And when such loving respect is genuinely shown how easy it is to return.

Vs. 16 – *“I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things”* – With a wrong-hearted response of disobedience comes an uneasy lack of confidence toward the rebel, and thus the need to bring tighter controls and demands and limitations to bear in an effort to force right responses. With a right-hearted response of obedience comes a happy confidence and ease of relationship. This is the confidence Paul speaks of and was feeling toward them here,

knowing that they were right in their hearts now. Compare in Proverbs 31 the resolve of the virtuous woman to do her husband *“good and not evil all the days of her life”* (vs. 12), and therefore his happy ability to *“safely trust in her”* (vs. 11).

It is such an important lesson we learn here. This chapter is all about comfort and exceeding joy in the context of repentance. Thus the truth is affirmed to us that a response of genuine repentance and simple obedience results in comforts and confidence and greatest joy for all concerned, both on earth and in heaven.

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Lk. 15:7).

Class 12 – II Corinthians 8:1-15

Paul now turns to another important reason for which he wrote this 2nd epistle to the church at Corinth. After having explained his actions and the nature of the ministry of “*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*”, he now turns to the important matter of giving. The great significance of this concern to Paul (and to the Lord) is obvious in that we find greater time and focus given to the principles of giving here than anywhere else in the Bible. Paul moves right into this discussion as if it were one with which they were familiar, because they were indeed familiar with it, for Paul had touched on the same in I Corinthians 16.

The effort to gather from the churches financial contributions “*for the poor saints which are in Jerusalem*” was a prominent aspect of the Paul’s 3rd missionary journey (Rom. 15:26). We are not told why the believers in Jerusalem were facing such financial hardships at that time. It may be that the Jewish hatred for Jesus and His gospel made it difficult for Jewish believers to do business among their own people. And it may be that God was beginning to bring His economic blight upon the Jewish nation for their rejection and murder of their Messiah (Deut. 28). Thus believers were suffering

*8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of
God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;*

with the rest. And so the Lord moved Paul to take up the cause of the needy brothers there, taking this concern to the churches of the Gentile world.

8:1-9 – Good Examples of Giving

In his encouragements to this church that they come to the party in this cause, Paul uses more the examples of others than reasoned arguments; first the example of the churches in the province of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), and then the ultimate example of sacrificial giving in Jesus Christ.

Vs. 1 – “*We do you to wit*” – “*Wit*” (past tense “wot”) is old English for to know or learn. Paul would have those in Corinth to know of the good response of the believers to the north of them.

“*The grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia*” – Paul begins to speak now of the sacrificial giving of those in Macedonia. Yet he put it in a way that speaks less of the good deeds of men and more of the good work of God in them. Every work of God through us is by the Spirit’s work

8:2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

in us, moving and motivating us to such responses as we allow Him to do so, leading us away from our natural selfishness. Every benefit we receive from God is a grace. And every benefit others receive from God through us is a grace as well, grace both to the receiver and to the giver in the blessing of being used of God for the benefit of others.

Vs. 2 – *“How that in a great trial of affliction”* – We read elsewhere of some of the difficulties these churches faced for their faith. The believers at Thessalonica *“received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost”*, suffering *“like things of your own countrymen, even as they [Jewish believers] have of the Jews”* (I Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4). The church at Philippi began under a dark cloud of persecution as well, with Paul and Silas condemned, beaten, and cast into prison (Acts 16). Acts 17 records similar responses in Thessalonica and Berea, which can only suggest ongoing struggles for the believers left behind. Every such trouble is merely God’s *“trial of affliction”* for the purpose of testing and displaying our faith (or lack of it), sifting the real from the false. These saints

8:3 *For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond
their power they were willing of themselves;*

responded to great troubles with an abundance of joy in obedience to Christ's commands (Matt. 5:11-12), displaying the reality and strength of their faith.

“And their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” – Perhaps in their believing in Jesus the prejudice of others against the gospel cut them off from business as well. Yet, though in great poverty, still they were moved of the Spirit to generous giving. As no trouble can rob true faith of its joy, so no level of poverty can rob true faith of its generosity. There simply is no such thing as being too poor to give. Thus we begin to see principles of biblical giving shining through in this portion.

***Principle – Godly giving can be sacrificial,
arising even out of poverty (beyond our ability).***

Compare Christ's careful attention to the widow who gave her last two coins (Mk. 12:41-44), and the sacrificial generosity of the poor widow of Zarephath who gave her last bit of meal (Lk. 4:24-26; I Ki. 17:8-16).

Vs. 3 – *“For to their power, I bear record, yea, and*

8:4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

beyond their power” – Paul affirmed that the believers of those northern churches gave toward the collection for the poor saints according to their ability, as fully as they were able to give based on their income. They gave in proportion to their individual ability. And then, even beyond their ability or what they could easily afford to give, they gave sacrificially.

“They were willing of themselves” – They were self-starters in this good purpose, needing none to push them to get involved. It was a desire arising from within, rather than pressed upon them from the outside.

Vs. 4 – *“Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift”* – Rather than Paul begging them to contribute, it was the other way around for those saints. They pled with Paul to please allow them to be so sacrificially involved. The implication is that Paul hesitated to accept the extent of their giving, perhaps feeling it too much in view of their great poverty. Yet it was them pleading with him to take it all for the relief of their eastern brothers.

Here were the ungrudging, cheerful givers Paul later describes (9:7). What an amazing example of the most incredible generosity! Where folks normally must be pushed to give according to their ability, or even to give at all, these were pushing Paul that he would receive from them beyond their ability! True Christian giving should be after this example of a voluntary willingness, rather than forced upon folks by the demand or coercion of men (vs. 8). Ministries that arm-twist folks into giving or send invoices requiring the payment of tithes do not conduct themselves according to the spirit of biblical giving.

Principle – Biblical giving should not be forced but should arise out of longing desire.

Someone once wrote, “There are three kinds of givers; the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint you must hammer it, and then you get only chips and sparks. To get water out of a sponge you must squeeze it, and the more you squeeze, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness”. The fact is, when folks are truly dwelling in God’s bosom there will arise in them a longing to give according to their ability, and even beyond their ability.

8:5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

8:6 Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

Vs. 5 – “*But first gave their own selves to the Lord*” – Even beyond what Paul was expecting or might have hoped, those believers of Macedonia not only gave sacrificially to the help of others, but they first gave themselves wholly and unreservedly to the Lord. Indeed such an earnest longing in them to so fully give is surely a result of that full surrender of heart. It is the way it should be, the proper order of things. When one who is not so consecrated gives in support of the Lord’s work there is too much danger of his giving for the wrong reasons, perhaps thinking he is making up for his evils in this manner, instead of dealing with them in God’s way through repentance and the cleansing available in Christ.

Principle – Biblical giving should be preceded by personal consecration to the Lord.

Vs. 6 – “*Insomuch that we desired Titus*” – Paul was looking for “*the same grace also*” to become evident in those at Corinth, for such is good indication of the Spirit’s inward gifting and work. Thus in

8:7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

sending Titus back to them Paul encouraged him to encourage them to the same nature of response he describes here, that as Titus had begun to do in their first visit, so they might allow him to lead them through to the fulfilment of it in his further visits.

Vs. 7 – “*See that ye abound in this grace also*” – See the union of human and divine working here. Though such a response is a grace gift or a work of the Spirit in a soul, yet it was to these believers that Paul speaks in seeking to move them to such Christian endeavours. As they had allowed the Spirit to work godly virtues in them, so Paul urges them to allow the Spirit to move them to willing involvement in this grace of giving as well, encouraging them to allow the Spirit to move them to want to do what is right. As they had allowed the Spirit to lead them not only to increased faith but to abounding faith, as they had abounded in their willingness to speak the gospel to those around them, as they had so grown in their knowledge of the truth, as they had abounded in their eager zeal in the Lord’s work on earth, as their love for Paul and others had so recently been re-ignited, as they

8:8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

had so advanced in such Christian fundamentals, even so Paul would see in them as well the expression of sincere, earnest, godly love in their cheerful willingness to give.

Principle – Biblical giving is a fundamental aspect of the Christian experience.

Vs. 8 – “*I speak not by commandment*” – Again, we do not give by the demand or command of men. We give out of a willing desire arising in us through the Spirit’s work within. Yet certainly the encouragements and example of others are very helpful inducements toward our right response in this regard. Paul was not telling them what they *must* do. But he has been holding before them the example of “*the forwardness*” of the Macedonian believers in this grace of giving. And their good example is indeed a motivating lead to follow.

“*And to prove the sincerity of your love*” – Again, Paul was not telling them what they *must* do. But he

8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

was suggesting that a love that is sincere will tend to spontaneously respond in this way. James adds his voice to this thought, suggesting that a living faith will be ready to help a fellow Christian in need (James 2:15-17). The Apostle John adds the searching question of the one who “*shutteth up his bowels of compassion*” from a brother in need, asking, “*how dwelleth the love of God in him?*” (I John 3:17).

Principle – Biblical giving proves the sincerity of love.

In fact, the very expression of love is active giving. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” (John 3:16).

Vs. 9 – “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*” – Now it is to the ultimate example of giving that Paul turns. That our Saviour would leave the unimaginable wealth of His Father’s immediate presence and be born to the poverty of humanity; that He would empty Himself of His evident equality with God and make Himself of no reputation, taking

the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7); that He would come to a world of men who did not recognize Him or welcome Him (Jn. 1:10-11); that He would humble Himself to appear as if illegitimate in His birth, impoverished in His life, and criminal in His death; that on the cross He would even take upon Himself the sin of mankind as He died for us (I Pet. 2:24), this is the ultimate of sacrificial giving! And that He would do all of this in order to lift we, the sinful, to the joy of cleansing and forgiveness and resurrection life and God's acceptance and presence; that by His loss we might actually become "*partakers of the divine nature*", gaining an eternal, heavenly inheritance (II Pet. 1:4; I Pet. 1:4; Eph. 1:18). All through His abounding grace! He came to give up His life that He might give us life. He left heavenly riches for the poverty of earth that we might leave the poverty of earth for heaven's riches. What absolutely infinite wealth we have received in "*the unsearchable riches of Christ*"!! (Eph. 3:8)

If the Son of God would give up and endure so very much for me, would I then refuse to give of my worldly possessions for Him? Again it is through "*the forwardness of others*", the forwardness of that most central and significant and glorious Other, that we are moved to follow in the same spirit of

8:10 And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.

sacrifice.

Principle – Biblical giving imitates Jesus.

8:10-15 – Good Advice in Giving

Vs. 10 – “*And herein I give my advice*” – Again, it was not a command but advice that Paul brought to them. He spoke only of what was “*expedient*” or best for them. It was not a case of using them for his own purposes. It was not a case of milking Gentiles for the benefit of the Jews. It is that there are such exceedingly precious promises from God for the one who chooses to give, promises Paul will highlight in chapter 9. It was for their sake that he so spoke;

- In the hope of seeing those promises of God fulfilled upon them.
- In strengthening their faith when they see God making their ends meet in spite of their giving.
- In the joy giving brings, to see others helped by our generosity, and in stirring their

8:11 Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.

prayers and thanksgiving (9:12).

“Who have begun before” – Paul fully acknowledged the early willingness of the believers there at Corinth to be involved in this project. The fact that they had not yet followed through could not diminish the truth of their quick readiness before. See how Paul would acknowledge every positive aspect in seeking to encourage them on to greater lengths for the Lord.

Vs. 11 – *“Now therefore perform the doing of it”* – Good intentions without follow-through become something of little worth, like a fine car without wheels. Abraham would never have secured the Promised Land for his people had he only resolved to go with God’s command, but never actually went. Ruth would never have met Boaz and entered into the line of Christ had she purposed to leave Moab and go to Judah, but failed to actually do it. Even so a soul with firmest intention to certainly believe in Jesus Christ one day will perish in an eternal hell as surely as the brazen rejecter, if his good intentions never move him to follow through on his

8:12 For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

8:13 For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:

purpose to run to the Lord while He may be found.

Vs. 12 – *“It is accepted according to that a man hath”* – Paul set no giving targets. He did not require of any that they give beyond their ability, as those in Macedonia had willingly done. He asked nothing more of a man than that he give in proportion to what he possessed or earned.

Vs. 13 – *“For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened”* – He did not wish for them to give to the extent of bringing hardship on themselves. The purpose in giving is not that the receiver should be enriched beyond the giver. The same principle should be true of pastoral support as well. A church congregation must never be expected to give such that their pastor is enriched above the living standard of his own people. It must only be a matter of seeking to bring him level with them, rather than setting a “man of God” up with ridiculous material wealth.

Vs. 14 – *“But by an equality”* – The abundance of

8:14 But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:

one supplies for the lack of another, that the other might one day be able to help someone else in need. What goes around comes around. As we help others in our times of greater financial strength so the Lord will see that there are others to help us in our lean times.

Principle – Biblical giving is based on the concept of equality.

This is not communism, because our possessions are not removed from us, nor are our gifts forced from us. Perhaps it could be considered a sanctified form of socialism, seen in its fullest extent in Acts 2.

It is evident as well that the principle here concerns our care for fellow saints, not for all the world. In Romans 12:13 as well Paul encouraged our “*distributing to the necessity of the saints*”.

Principle – Biblical giving meets the needs of brothers in Christ.

8:15 As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.

Vs. 15 – *“He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack”* – As Paul so often does, he turns to the old Book to offer support for his thoughts. He quotes here from Exodus 16:18, describing miraculous effects in God’s provision of the manna in the wilderness. It seems the Lord ensured there that everybody ended up with an equal portion in the daily gathering of the manna, or at least that the hunger of all was satisfied, regardless of the actual quantity of manna each was able to gather, whether more or less. Paul seems to suggest from this that through our Christian generosity we should seek to ensure a similar sort of equality or distribution among believers, certainly that none should be short of their daily need while others possess much more than they need for today. Compare his similar thoughts with their feasting together in the latter half of I Corinthians 11.

As well, care must be given that our giving be toward the legitimate needs of others and not to the support of their laziness. *“If any would not work, neither should he eat”* (II Thess. 3:10).

Principles of Biblical Giving

- Can be sacrificial, arising even out of poverty (beyond our ability).
- Should not be forced but should arise out of longing desire.
- Should be preceded by personal consecration.
- Is a fundamental aspect of the Christian experience.
- Proves the sincerity of love.
- Imitates Jesus.
- Is based on the concept of equality.
- Meets the needs predominantly of Christian brothers.

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The story is told of a rich man who asked of his pastor one day, "Why do people criticize me for being miserly, when they know I have made provision to leave everything I possess to charity when I die?" "Let me tell you a story," the minister replied. "A pig was lamenting his lack of popularity. He complained to the cow that people were always talking about the cow's gentleness and kind eyes.

He admitted that the cow gave milk and cream, but maintained that pigs gave bacon and ham and bristles and that people even pickled their feet. He demanded the reason for such lack of appreciation. The cow thought a while and said, ‘Maybe it’s because I give while I’m still living’”.

Class 13 – II Corinthians 8:16-9:5

8:16 But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.

Paul had strongly admonished the believers at Corinth in large-heartedness toward him and the others with him in chapters 6-7. This hope was then realized with the arrival of Titus in chapter 7, bringing word of their earnest love (vs. 6). With this assurance of a more gracious spirit among them Paul then turned to the matter of giving, for here is an important way in which we may “*prove the sincerity*” of our love. Their cramped hearts had in fact cramped their previous purpose to become eagerly involved in the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, which Paul was busy promoting at that time. But now with their change of heart it was a question whether they would prove that change by their return to liberality. Words of love are not necessarily love, until backed by loving, sacrificial action. Just as words of faith are not necessarily true faith, until backed by demonstrations of faith.

8:16-24 – Funds Faithfully Handled

Vs. 16 – “*But thanks be unto God*” – How continually

*8:17 For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.
8:18 And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches;*

we see in Paul a man so full of God's love for people. That he could see in Titus the same earnest care as in his own heart for those at Corinth was cause for great thanks to God. Paul was watching and mindful of the Spirit's working in others. And he was sincerely delighted with every indication, every advance. May the Lord lead us out of ourselves and our own selfish concerns to love like this man loved, to love with the love of the Lord.

Vs. 17 – *“For indeed he accepted the exhortation”* – Paul refers here to vs. 6. He had spoken encouragements to Titus toward seeking to lead the Corinthian believers to a generous response comparable to that seen among the Macedonian believers (vs. 1-5). Not only was Titus most willing for this, but he was already motivated to the same *“of his own accord”*. He was united with Paul both in heart and in purpose in this matter.

Vs. 18 – *“And we sent with him the brother”* – This unnamed *“brother”*, who was known and praised *“throughout all the churches”*, is an interesting

8:19 And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind:

consideration. It is possible only to guess at who this man was, yet Paul spoke very highly of him. The same is again mentioned but unnamed in 12:18. Though he was a man so well known by all, yet he apparently did not wish to be named in this letter of Paul to Corinth. Many have suggested that this was likely Dr. Luke, a man who tended to keep himself out of the focus of attention. It was obviously one who did not care about being known or praised among men, wishing only to encourage the church and exalt the Lord. And yet how far-reaching the influence of this intriguing “behind-the-scenes” man, to be so widely known for honour as Paul here testifies.

Vs. 19 – *“Who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace”* – This same man in fact was officially appointed by the churches to the task we see him quietly fulfilling here in overseeing the collection of funds. The word behind “*grace*” here suggests abundance. With a good deal of money involved in this collection it was important that measures be taken to ensure that the handling of the entire matter was above board.

8:20 *Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:*
8:21 *Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*

Vs. 20 – “*Avoiding this, that no man should blame us*” – Their purpose in the precaution of this trusted, appointed officer was to provide an evident accountability structure, that none would be allowed to personally profit from the proceeds, or even *appear* to so profit; that all funds given by the saints toward this specific cause might be fully applied to that intended cause; that none might find reason to accuse or blame anyone involved in this effort. For again, it appears there were some there at Corinth looking for cause against Paul. And again, it was Paul’s concern that they give “*no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed*” (6:3).

Vs. 21 – “*Providing for honest things*” – The Greek word behind “*providing*” combines the idea of taking thought and doing so beforehand. Thus the thought is similar to the English translation. As the word “provision” comes of the combination of seeing (vision) beforehand (pro) and thus to take precautions accordingly, even so the original word expresses the notion of giving thought beforehand

and therefore ensuring that wise measures are put in place. Paul was carefully thoughtful to take financial precautions, not only that he might *be* honest but that he might *appear* good and honourable as well.

“In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God” (6:4).

“By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (4:2).

“Not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” – Our precautions do not end with thought only for what the Lord sees. He would also have us to be concerned with the way things appear to others. This is a principle certainly true of the handling of church finances, but one extending as well to every aspect of our conduct. Compare similar thoughts and commands;

- *“Provide things honest in the sight of all men”* (Rom. 12:17).
- *“Abstain from all appearance of evil”* (I Thess. 5:22).

Paul’s purpose was to be above suspicion in every way, that he might be able to freely ask, *“Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?”*

(12:17-18), and know that the answer could only be “No”. Our purpose must ever be the same, both individually and as a church. Any suspicion of funds mishandled might bleed away the willingness of folks to contribute as well. So it was not only a matter of testimony, but of removing every hindrance to the willing involvement of all in an exercise pleasing to the Lord.

We find here an important practical principle of Christian conduct. It is the principle of good appearances. The point is that God would have us go the extra mile beyond honesty and moral purity, to ensure as well that our conduct *appears* honest and right in every way. Those of the world who are given to dishonesty suspect that all others are similarly motivated, and they know and look for the signs. Thus God’s children are wise to give forethought to the cutting off of all occasion for suspicion of wrong-doing. It is important that we carefully consider what our actions might lead others to think. The church leader handling the offerings without a system of accountability is inviting accusation of misappropriation. The unmarried couple spending time in seclusion or in the dark are inviting the suspicion of immorality even if they in fact remain pure. Compare Paul’s similar encouragement;

8:22 And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you.

- *“Walk honestly toward them that are without”* (I Thess. 4:12).
- *“Walk honestly, as in the day”* (Rom. 13:13).
- *“Give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully”* (I Tim. 5:14).

The Lord simply does not allow His children to lightly dismiss the opinions of others with thoughts such as, “Agh, I don’t care what others think!” or “My business is none of their business!” or “They can keep their grubby thoughts to themselves!” or “As long as the *Lord* knows the truth of what I am and what I do, what does it matter what people think?” Through His apostle, it is our God instructing us here to ensure that we are good, and *apparently* so, not only in His sight but before the eyes of men as well.

Vs. 22 – *“And we have sent with them our brother”* – *“With them”* here suggests a third unnamed man sent along with Titus and Luke(?). In carrying money there is safety in numbers as well as wisdom

*8:23 Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner
and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be
enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches,
and the glory of Christ.*

in accountability. A wise precaution in a day when thieves might be lying in wait along the way. Compare the many travelling with Paul when later leaving Corinth as they carried the combined collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). To live in trust upon the Lord does not exclude the use of wise practical measures.

Vs. 23 – “*Whether any do inquire of Titus*” – Here now are words of endorsement from God’s apostle freely spoken of men who had proved themselves faithful. What a very good thing it is to be thought of in this way by good men. How good the ornament of such a fine reputation, as Paul could boast of Titus and the others. How wise to be most careful in preserving such a good name, both before the Lord and before men. How wise to be willing for the extra consideration, to take the extra measures in seeking to keep ourselves above reproach before those the evil one might use to cast a shadow upon our character, and in so doing diminish the impact of our lives and ministry before some. Yes, it may be that the Lord knows you never get drunk. But

what will the world think when they see a beer in your hand or a bottle of wine on your table? Will they not assume you do the same as they? Yes, it is important what they think, what our actions lead others to assume about us. Yes, the Lord knows of your moral purity. Now make sure your family and friends know of it too, by your thoughtful caution in the way you conduct yourself with your friends. It will be assumed you do the same as those you hang out with. So be thoughtful concerning those you choose for close friends. It will be assumed you do the same things others do in the places you choose to visit. So be careful little feet where you go! It is worth all of the time and trouble, loss and expense involved in maintaining our good name and character. Proverbs proclaims the value of *“a good name”* even above *“great riches”* of *“silver and gold”* (22:1). The highest prize for any saint is to be known before all as one wholly given to *“the glory of Christ”*. Of course we will not be able to escape the false accusations of some, for so men of the world have treated God’s servants throughout the ages (Matt. 5:11-12). As they did to the Master, so they will do to the servant (Jn. 15:20). Yet false accusations are ultimately brought to light for what they are. It is God’s will for us *“that with well doing”* we may *“put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (I Pet. 2:15).

8:24 *Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.*

Vs. 24 – “*Show ye . . . the proof of your love*” – This verse is a bit of a summary of Paul’s advice in this portion. Still it concerned the collection from the churches for those who were needy in Jerusalem. And still it was the question of the involvement of those at Corinth in this vital cause. Titus’ purpose in returning to Corinth with the others and with this epistle was to prepare the believers there to “*perform the doing*” of what they had expressed eagerness to do many months before (vs. 10-11). Paul had boasted to others of the great readiness of the Corinthian believers to give (9:2), even as he began this chapter boasting of the performance of the Macedonian believers. And so Paul wanted these to prove their love sincere and his boasts true through their follow-through on this good purpose (vs. 8). Following on the thought here of a good name, even so it was now a question of their good name as well (and Paul’s). Would they prove themselves to be a people of their word? Would they prove Paul’s words spoken concerning them to be good? Words of commitment will always be easy to speak. The proof of realities will always be when we “*show*” by our actions the truth of our words. Even so, it is

9:1 *For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:*

the reality of our faith that the Lord is ever calling us to prove by our actions (James 2:18, “*show me*”).

9:1-5 – Readiness Encouraged

Vs. 1-2 – “*It is superfluous for me to write to you*” – Paul now suggests that the encouragements he wrote were actually beyond what was necessary. “Hey, you do not need me to tell *you* this, do you?” “Please pardon my waste of words in telling *you folks* such things”. Though speaking so strongly to them of right actions in this matter, Paul would assure them of his awareness that they did not really need him to so speak to them. See the wisdom here in this. Though he had approached them in this way because he obviously felt they needed his pointed instructions, yet he was careful to preserve their honour, giving them every credit or compliment he could honestly give. They were aware of the issues. They had shown themselves fully motivated already. He would have them to understand that he had not lost confidence in them. In this way Paul offers them an opportunity to save face, giving them the chance now to simply follow through on their plans, which were in fact *their own*

9:2 *For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.*

plans as Paul acknowledges. See how Paul handled the Corinthian believers here in the same way he did Titus. He had stated in 8:6 that the return of Titus to Corinth was as *“we desired”*, according to Paul’s encouragements. And yet in 8:17 Paul was quick to acknowledge that Titus in fact went *“of his own accord”*. Both Titus and the believers at Corinth had the push of Paul’s words behind them. Yet at the same time Paul would release them to follow their own purpose to do the same. He was quite happy to let *his* good desire for others be *their* own good desire for themselves. In his genuine lack of pride, Paul did not need to be seen as the motivating force behind the good actions of men. He would earnestly seek to move a man to do right. And then he would stand back and let the man respond according to his own desire. And when the right course was chosen, Paul would take no credits, but allowed fully that the other chose to do right *“of his own accord”*. This is not an accommodating of human pride, but a wise preserving of human honours.

9:3 *Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready:*

“And your zeal hath provoked very many” – Now it is as if Paul would even give to the Corinthian believers a measure of the credit for the good Macedonian response of which he had so boasted. “As your zeal led others to zeal, so let their action now lead you to action”. What a motivation to continue in well-doing to discover that the Lord had already used them to minister to others in this matter!

Vs. 3-4 – *“Lest our boasting of you should be in vain”* – Again, Paul had already given instructions to this church in his first letter in the matter of making ready their offering. In I Corinthians 16 he had explained that they should bring of their increase as the Lord prospered them to their Sunday meetings for collection, and that they should be doing this in advance so that all would be in readiness with no need for a hurried offering to be taken when Paul arrived. But it seems little had been done at Corinth in this regard. Therefore the concern Paul expresses here over the question of their preparedness. He did not want some from Macedonia, to whom he had boasted of the

9:4 Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.

eagerness in Achaia, to come south with him and find that nothing had been done in the intervening year. Paul wished to avoid the great disgrace and personal embarrassment this would cause, as if their zeal was really a figment of his imagination, as if the zeal of others was in fact stirred by something not true. Paul is careful not to suggest that the Corinthian believers would share in that shame, for they had not done the boasting. He, and those who had boasted with him, would carry the full brunt of the shame.

How persuasively Paul writes! Yet always gracious and cautious and with their best at the forefront of his thinking. He was always willing for them to receive the fame, while he the shame or blame; always willing to bear loss for their gain.

“I will very gladly spend and be spent for you” (12:15).

“We are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection” (13:9).

Vs. 5 – *“Whereof ye had notice before”* – Again, the

9:5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.

few sent ahead with this letter went with the authority to oversee the collection in anticipation of the coming of Paul and company, that they might “*make up beforehand your bounty [blessing] . . . that the same might be ready*” when the rest arrived. That the saints there should in fact perform what they had beforehand been encouraged to do is the point here, that they would follow through according to what they had before promised. Three times the word “*before*” or “*beforehand*” is found in this verse.

“*As a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness*” – Paul would have them give out of a genuine desire to bless others with their giving. And he would have them give abundantly rather than sparingly, which would reveal covetousness in them (vs. 6). To give grudgingly and sparingly demonstrates too great an interest in the selfish use of our funds. To give cheerfully and liberally displays our delight in blessing others as God has so abundantly blessed us.

“But this I say,
He which soweth sparingly
shall reap also sparingly;
and he which soweth bountifully
shall reap also bountifully”

(II Cor. 9:6)

Class 14 – II Corinthians 9:6-15

9:6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

The amazing emphasis on the matter of giving in this portion, particularly the promises involved, is truly stunning! I am personally motivated to active involvement in the grace of giving through passages like this.

9:6-11 – Promises in Giving

Vs. 6 – “*He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly*” – Paul illustrates his point through the principle of planting (sowing) and harvesting. The measure of what we reap or receive is in direct proportion to the measure with which we plant or give away. If we would have a good return we cannot be tight-fisted in the dropping of our seed, for the gathering will be proportional to the scattering. If we plant a little, we multiply back by a small measure. If we plant much, we multiply much back. Give sparingly, receive sparingly. Give bountifully, receive bountifully.

9:7 *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Vs. 7 – “*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give*” – Now it is a discussion of the proper motivation with which we should give. Our giving is to be according to what we purpose or choose in our own heart. Hear the apostle’s words here. One’s giving is to be “*as he purposes*”. It is to be as *we* determine to do with our income rather than according to the demand or command or coercion of others. Implied as well is the deliberate planning and decision, even *worship*, involved in giving. Other preferences or purposes will have to be set aside in order to make giving a reality in our practice. It must not be a mindless thing. Neither is giving to be done on a whim, perhaps giving more or less on the moment than we really would or should have given. Appropriate forethought and prayer must be applied, with due consideration both of our own ability and of the nature of the need on the receiving end. If you do not know the one in need and thus are unsure how they would use your gift it may not be best to give, certainly to give money.

“Not grudgingly, or of necessity” – Our giving is not to be born out of grief, with a grudging, resisting spirit, wishing we really did not have to do it. It should rather be done willingly and freely out of our own desire, as the Lord moves us. Thus it seems that if your giving is with cheerless grudging rather than with willing desire, if your compulsion to give is through some outside controlling factor or the brow-beating or preference or pressure of some spiritual leader or well-meaning friend, then perhaps the best advice is to not give in that circumstance. God’s blessing is not on winepress churches, who squeeze out the blood of the grapes through manipulative, guilt trip methods or who *demand* the giving of their people, sending bills in windowed envelopes. The Lord suggests nothing of the kind here. He lays out the opportunity for blessing before the reader to make his own willing choice. Yet He greatly encourages with the most tremendous promise.

“For God loveth a cheerful giver” – It is the *“cheerful giver”* that draws the smile of God. And please hear it with greatest clarity. God *loves* for us to respond in this way! He loves the one who so delights to give of his resources. It is the pleasure of our God that must be the primary reason for our giving, and doing so happily. Compare Isaiah 58, where the

9:8 *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

Lord makes promises to the righteous (vs. 8-9) who care for those in need (vs. 6-7). And there He expresses His desire that we “*draw out*” our soul “*to the hungry*” (vs. 10), that we should feel for them in the anguish of their affliction, that we would be genuinely glad for the opportunity to help in their time of need. So there are happy smiles all the way around the act of proper giving;

- On the *giver's* face, if his heart is right.
- On the *receiver's* face, for the blessing he receives.
- On the faces of *those looking on*, who witness a genuine work of God.
- On the *Lord's* face, who has stated His love for the cheerful giver.

Vs. 8 – “*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you*” – Here is where it really gets interesting. Paul turns now to the obvious question that might arise under such encouragements to give. If we give in this way will it not result in great personal loss? To this the Lord through Paul now

brings the most abundant answer. Let me give you a very literal rendering of vs. 8 from the Greek;

“Able [emphasis] is God all grace to abound unto you, in order that [purpose] in everything, always, having all self-sufficiency, you might be abounding into every good work”

Listen carefully! There is emphasis here on God’s *ability* to get to us everything we need. And what else could we expect when the Almighty expressly states His love for the happy giver? Is He going to allow such a habit to end in tragedy and loss? Of course not! How could one ever be a loser who is busy with what so pleases the true and living God? God is quite able, in His time, to cause all grace to abound to you, for the purpose that in everything, always, having all self-sufficiency you might be abounding into every good work. God is letting it be known to us that He is quite able to increase us as we abound in giving. Now some might hesitate to give because they doubt either God’s *willingness* or *ability* to make up their losses in giving. Yet it is both God’s attitude and ability that are so strongly affirmed by His Apostle here. We have no just cause to doubt either.

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all

things, may abound to every good work”

Do not miss the great focus on “*all*” and “*every*”, found five times in this verse. God does not respond only with some grace, but with *all* grace, *abounding* grace! Not just in some things, but in *everything*! Not just sometimes, but *always*! Not just some self-sufficiency, but all sufficiency! “*Sufficiency*” here speaks of the giver having enough, he being satisfied with enough for life’s necessities. Not just some good works, but *every* good work! And not just active in good works, but *abounding* in them! God brings to us a most adequate supply as we abound in every good work and that we might abound into every good work. And the “*good work*” under discussion here is that of bountiful giving. See well how God’s abounding of us is directly related to our turning His abundance to every good work in giving. He begins to enrich us when He sees that we are willing and beginning to serve as a channel of His abundance to others. Now understand that His abounding of us may involve the filling of us with plain old satisfaction with such things as we have. I do not need from Him such personal abundance when I have found true joy in being His channel of blessing to others.

Vs. 9 – “*(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad;*

9:9 (*As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.*

9:10 *Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)*

he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.” – Again Paul so characteristically turns to the O.T. for support, quoting now from Psalm 112 (vs. 9), that portrait of a righteous man. Two important points come across through this verse from the old Book;

- The righteous disperse or scatter their goods to others. They live to give as cheerful channels of bountiful blessing.
- They steadfastly remain. Their giving does not diminish them to the point of extinction.

Vs. 10 – *“Now he that ministereth seed to the sower”* – Again the apostle returns to the thought of God’s abundant supply to the one giving. And again he uses the figure of sowing. The point is that giving is no more a loss than is planting. Giving to the Lord and others does not throw things away, but puts seed into the ground, not as discarded things never to be seen again, but as planted seeds soon to spring up with a multiplied return. Again, a literal

rendering of vs. 10-11;

“And the One [God] further supplying seed to the one sowing both to supply bread into food, and to multiply your sowing seed and to increase the produce of your righteousness;)

In all being enriched into all liberality, which is working out through us thanksgiving to God”

There are five different words here in the original language expressing the idea of increase. Paul asks/expects of the Lord many things for the giver;

- That they might have bread enough to eat.
- That they might have more abundant seed with which to do more good.
- That the fruits of righteousness through their good deeds might abound.
- That enrichment might abound on every side.
- That it might become evident in every way that there are no *losers* but only *gainers* when God’s child gets his heart right and his hand open (vs. 11).

This speaks of exactly what a farmer does. Of the increase of his crop he keeps some that he might have enough to eat. And some he gives back to the

soil that he might further multiply his increase later. Even so the Lord both adds seed for the one planting it and supplies bread for the sower's eating. And again, the Lord multiplies back seed in the *proportion* with which one plants, either sparingly or bountifully. As the farmer's crop grows year by year so his ability increases to give more back to the soil for an even bigger crop. Paul exuberantly continues here what he began in vs. 8, piling words together relating the idea of increase. Between vs. 8-11 there are six different words in the original language expressing the idea of abundance of increase. That middle phrase in vs. 10 is thrilling as well, "*and multiply your seed sown*". The one Greek word for the two-word phrase, "*seed sown*", is *sporos* (spore). This is not the more normal word for seed (*sperma*) used earlier in vs. 10. *Sporos* refers more specifically to seed used in sowing. This is not grain for eating but seed designated as planting seed. Thus Paul's wish that the Lord "*multiply your seed sown*" refers to His multiplying of our sowing seed. He multiplies our sowing or our seed for planting when we plant, as we give. Again, the point is that as we give of our material wealth the Lord multiplies our ability to give of our material wealth. And He increases the produce or outcome of our righteous giving. And He does not forget to give "*bread for your food*" as well. He does not let the righteous

*9:11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness,
which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.*

giver go hungry in his life of happy generosity.

Vs. 11 – “*Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness*” – In everything enriched into all liberality (rather than into all self-serving materialism). How repeatedly God’s abounding of us is closely related to our turning His abundance to every good work, to wise and generous giving to others. “*In everything enriched into all liberality*”! With seven times “*all*” or “*every*” and six words expressing increase, there is such major motivational emphasis here upon giving! Again, I am moved to give!

Now please understand that to give as a way to personal enrichment is foreign to this text. Yet we do find here the concept of giving as a means both to greater self-sufficiency and greater ability to give. Compare the account of the widow with Elijah in I Kings 17. The widow gave of her last bit of meal and oil to Elijah in the drought. It was an unreasonable step of faith in God’s promise through Elijah. And the result was just as unreasonable, in that her meal and oil never failed through the drought. As Paul teaches here in II Corinthians 9, she received

9:12 *For the administration of this service not only
supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also
by many thanksgivings unto God;*
9:13 *Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they
glorify God for your professed subjection unto the
gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution
unto them, and unto all men;*

both “*all sufficiency*” with her personal needs fully met, and she received a multiplied ability to continue giving, enough for Elijah’s support throughout those difficult days as well.

9:12-15 – Praise through Giving

Vs. 12 – “*But is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God*” – Not only does our generous giving result in the earthly, practical usefulness of ministry needs met, but it brings a heavenly, spiritual benefit as well. For it turns all praise and “*thanksgiving to God*”, both givers and receivers and readers of the happy account of it throughout the ages. Again, the *giver* is blessed with his faith strengthened as the Lord proves up on His promise to keep him supplied. The *receiver* is blessed in seeing God’s answers to prayer. And *God* is praised and thanked from both sides for making it all such a wonderful thing to be a part of!

Vs. 13 – “*They glorify God for your professed*

*9:14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you
for the exceeding grace of God in you.*

subjection unto the gospel of Christ” – Happy, liberal involvement in the collection Paul was busy gathering would be proof to the saints in Judea of a true work of God among the believers in Corinth. This would lead those on the receiving end to glorify God for a like heart among the saints in Asia, that they were not living merely an empty profession but were showing the reality of Jesus Christ in them.

Vs. 14 – “*And by their prayer for you*” – Seeing proof of true Christian love would move the receivers to prayer in behalf of the giver. Such an evidence of true salvation would lift their longing for a more abundant work of the Spirit in them.

“Which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you” – Giving toward the needs of others in Christ is a kind of sharing in Christian fellowship, even though such acts of kindness may reach over great distances and between those who have never seen or spoken to each other directly. Yet such a fellowship or sharing of concern and needs puts believers together and draws their hearts out for each other in prayer before the Lord.

Vs. 15 – *“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift”* – See how Paul brings to conclusion his thoughts on giving now with thanksgiving. And see how he ends as he began this section, with attention to God’s grace in giving to us (8:1). And see as well how God asks of us only what is true of Himself. For it is the most unimaginably, marvellous Giver of all who challenges us to follow Him in the same. Paul speaks here of the unspeakable gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ given to the undeserving world of men. How His good gift has caused so many to fill heaven with their praise and thanks. In Christ we have every reason to be thankful people.

“His unspeakable gift” – In so speaking of Jesus Christ Paul speaks of a gift unable to be fully spoken or narrated, something indescribable. Words fail in any attempt to fully commemorate or express it. What could we use to compare? How could we possibly express in any kind of full measure the wealth of what we have received from our God in eternal salvation? In Jesus we have found the most inexpressible spiritual riches because Jesus was willing to become poor in our behalf, that in Him we might become rich (8:9). How could we then be

stingy with our wealth or life here below when we have received so much with Him? We live in the very realm of God's gracious giving even as we live in the atmosphere we breathe. If we have been so benefited by the Lord with things eternal we should not hesitate to benefit others with the perishing things at our disposal. When we think again of how the Lord has changed us, how He changed those worldly Corinthians as He has you and me, how He has lifted our lives and loves from the dregs of the world's mire, how He fills us with genuine joy as we fully surrender to Him, how He makes life work and makes it our pleasure when we are truly given to Him and others, how He goes before us, filling the valleys of life and flattening the mountains, making so much easier for us what the unsaved find so trying, how He secures our eternity and then tells us about it in His grace that we might live in happy hope of the future as well, then we understand how full to overflowing we are in Jesus Christ! *All sourced in God's supremely sacrificial giving!* With the thought of it Paul's heart was overwhelmed with thanks for such an unspeakable gift, such a wonderful God!

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Ponder Points

Seven Principles of the Harvest

These principles apply whether planting good or evil. We are sowing every moment of our lives.

1. When sowing is done the reaping of a harvest *will* result (“*they shall reap*”, Hosea 8:7).
2. *What* is sown determines what is harvested, for we reap *in kind* what we sow (“*wind . . . whirlwind*”, Hos. 8:7), “*for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Gal. 6:7).
3. The *measure* harvested will *exceed* what is sown, for the produce is by nature a *multiplication* of the planting (“*wind . . . whirlwind*”, Hos. 8:7). “*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over*” (Lk. 6:38).
4. We reap in a *different season* than when we sow (“*in due [right, appropriate] season*”, Gal. 6:9). Thus a farmer’s patience is required in waiting on the Lord.
5. We reap a full harvest *if we persist* (“*if we faint not*”, Gal. 6:9). Compare James 5:7.
6. We reap in the same *proportion* with which we sow (“*sparingly...sparingly...bountifully...*”).

bountifully", II Cor. 9:6), "*for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again*" (Lk. 6:38). The *function* of the harvest is multiplication, the *factor* is determined by the giver.

7. We cannot do anything about *last* year's harvest, but we can about *this* year's. "*Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before*" (Phil. 3:13-14). Whether to bemoan or to boast of the past, such a backward look will only trip you in your forward progress for the Lord today.

Class 15 – II Corinthians 10

10:1 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

With chapter 10 begins the last major section of this 2nd letter of Paul to the church at Corinth. Where before he has been quite tender and personal, he now turns up the heat as he turns to deal with those who were seeking to steal his sheep. We hear more in this section of the kinds of things being said about Paul there at Corinth, and we get a feel for the kind of response Paul planned when arriving there. It becomes clear that these opposers were voicing doubts concerning Paul's apostolic authority in seeking to promote their own authority. In this chapter Paul defends his own authority. In the next he more seriously raises question over theirs. Far more than merely a personal defence, this is a defence of the integrity of the writings and teachings God gave through him.

10:1-12 – Reality of Paul's Authority

Vs. 1 – *“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”* – There is great focus here on this being a personal plea from Paul

himself. He comes first and foremost with the *“meekness and gentleness”* characteristic of Jesus. These are important character words Paul uses to describe himself, for they suggest the nature of Christ in him. The word translated *“meekness”* speaks of a mildness of manner that does not demand what it could demand. It expresses the fact that Paul did not respond in the way he might have and fully had the authority to do. Instead he came with patience in seeking to instruct and correct their error. Compare II Timothy 2:25. The word behind *“gentleness”* is similar, suggesting a fair approach with others that is willing to step back a bit from the strict demand of what is right for the better preserving of the spirit. Thus the notion of patient, gentle reasonableness is involved. The same word is translated *“moderation”* in Philippians 4:5 and *“patient”* in I Timothy 3:3 (KJV). See how Paul came with more of a beseeching spirit than demanding severity. There certainly should be more the quiet tranquillity than the red-faced rage in our leadership and dealings with others.

“Who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you” – This seems to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to something being spoken against Paul there at Corinth, similar to vs. 10. Though some were saying of Paul that he was

10:2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

all sweetness and humility when with you and only got bold and demanding when writing from a distance, yet Paul in writing (from a distance) comes now with great patience and reasonableness in pleading with them, that they please not force him to have to get tough with them when he arrived. So he was responding in the very opposite way to the accusation of some.

Vs. 2 – “*But I beseech you*” – Again he was earnestly asking of them that the larger group of them make the appropriate changes necessary before he came, that he might head off as much nastiness as possible while there with them. He fully understood that he would need to deal strongly with some there, the ratty agitators among them. But he wished to see the support for these dissenters stripped away as much as possible even now.

“*Some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh*” – Again, this was being suggested of Paul and company as well. Remember how the fact that Paul had followed through differently on his

10:3 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:*

stated plans had been used to accuse him of being flighty and unreliable, suggesting therefore that the things he purposed were “*according to the flesh*” (1:15-17). Here is indication of the same accusation again. It seems they were saying he was not a man who walked after God’s Spirit and therefore his words could not be trusted as the sure words of God.

Vs. 3 – “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh*” – Paul used different prepositions here, in the Greek, as in the English. Though they were conducting their lives “*in*” the flesh, in the sense of living in physical bodies, yet it was not “*after*” or according to the flesh that they were conducting their warfare in God’s great battle for truth. The picture of the Christian life as a warfare, we fighting alongside the Lord against the forces of evil, is a common one with Paul;

- He commanded Timothy to “*war a good warfare*” and to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 1:18; 6:12).
- He encouraged Timothy toward endurance and from entanglements “*as a good soldier of*

10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

Jesus Christ . . . that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (II Tim. 2:3-4).

In Christ we indeed are enlisted into a great spiritual conflict raging even now all around us. God and those with Him are striving for the strengthening and furthering of His church on earth, while Satan and those with him are subtly seeking to keep or remove every last soul he can from God’s good influence. Perhaps you say, “I don’t see that conflict!” Try leading a friend to Jesus. Try really praying and walking with God. You will soon see evidence enough of this ongoing battle for the souls of men.

Vs. 4 – *“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal)”* – The resources they were accessing in their earthly ministry were not “*carnal*” or fleshly strengths derived from themselves, such as academic credentials or personal magnetism or oratory polish, but powers received from above in dependence upon God. Paul could only be referring here to the same weapons mentioned earlier (6:7)

and outlined more fully in Ephesians 6.

“But mighty through God” – How well this was illustrated in the actions and words of David as he ran to face Goliath, saying, *“Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel”* (I Sam. 17:45). When has the world ever seen a bigger sword and spear and shield on a man? And yet *“the LORD of hosts”* so easily proved Himself bigger than that Philistine giant. The smallest among men is *“mighty through God”* when *“the LORD of hosts”* is his trust.

“To the pulling down of strongholds” – *“Strongholds”* here seems to refer to the inward fortresses of the thoughts or views or reasonings of men against the truth of God, taking in as well the institutions they establish to forward such follies. How many false religions have fallen to extinction over the ages because God’s truth eventually threw them down? How many nations once stood to oppose God’s truth and people and are now non-existent, while God’s people remain and remain strong to this day? Standing opposed to God’s truth and people is not conducive to a happy, healthy heritage.

Vs. 5 – *“Casting down imaginations”* – By way of

*10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing
that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,
and bringing into captivity every thought to the
obedience of Christ;*

explanation of vs. 4 Paul now clarifies that those “*strongholds*” are not physical castles but mental and spiritual citadels of resistance. “*Imaginations*” refer to the philosophies and speculations of men. These must be cast down through the proclamation of God’s truth, both within our own skewed thinking and in the twisted thinking of others as well.

“*And every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God*” – Paul speaks of proud bastions of thought or worldly reasoning lifted up against the true knowledge of the true and living God; strongholds standing as barriers to withhold “*the truth in unrighteousness*” (Rom. 1:18); standing in support of some falsehood, as a castle proudly stands to protect the surrounding country.

“*And bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” – Here is the purpose of all who are truly godly. A purpose they seek to forward in themselves and in their children and in all others they would influence for the Lord. It is the godly resolve that not only our outward actions might be brought at last to complete conformity to the Lord’s

10:6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

perfect will, but that even our inward thoughts and purposes might be brought to the same. That we would not just give God *some* of our thoughts and actions, but *all* of ourselves, in darkness as well as in the light, in secret as well as in church. In so doing, peace comes to individual hearts and lives, to the church, and to society. “*Bringing into captivity*” suggests the earnest, forcible effort involved in bringing inward reforms for the Lord. Compare in Proverbs 16:32 one able to rule over his own spirit deemed mightier than a conqueror strong to take a city.

Vs. 6 – “*And having in readiness to revenge all disobedience*” – The word behind “*disobedience*” here suggests the sense of failing or refusing to hear. How often disobedience is presented in the Bible as the inattentive refusal to really listen to the truth of God’s message (Jer. 11:10). Compare the Jewish leaders actually clapping their hands over their ears as they attacked Stephen at the end of Acts 7. We are even now in those last times prophesied, when people “*will not endure sound doctrine; but . . . they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*” (II Tim.

*10:7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?
If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him
of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's,
even so are we Christ's.*

4:3-4). Paul was giving all among them there at Corinth the opportunity to respond in obedience to the truth he presented. For when he arrived there he would be ready to punish all disobedience still present among them, presumably in a church disciplinary approach as described in I Corinthians 5 & Matthew 18.

Vs. 7 – “*Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?*” – Paul has pointed to this tendency in them already, even pandering to it in chapter 5, giving them “*somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart*” (vs. 12). He will do the same again in chapter 11 (vs.21ff).

“*Even so are we Christ's*” – Can a soul be more or less Christ's? Is it not true that to be in Christ is to be in? None are more in than others. Belonging to Jesus, Paul was not lacking anything compared to the next brother in Christ. It is a good lesson for those who propose stages or levels of encounter with the Spirit in the Christian experience, some saints baptized with the Spirit and some not yet so

10:8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

endowed. Paul affirms elsewhere that *every* true child of God is baptized with the Spirit into the body of Christ and is indwelt by God's Spirit (Rom. 8:9; I Cor. 12:13). He implies here no such distinctions as some would impose on Christ's body. He would not allow such exclusive thinking within our unity in Jesus Christ. All true believers are on level ground as God's apostle saw it, regardless of how the bogus "apostles" of our modern day see things.

Vs. 8 – Even though Paul should further talk up his ministry and even the apostolic authority given to him, as he had already done in a measure (6:4-10), yet he would not be ashamed of such a "*boast*", for how could one be ashamed of the truth? He had indeed been appointed an apostle by the Lord (1:1).

"Which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction" – Though spiritual authority is to be used in throwing down strongholds of error, yet with relation to the saints it is to be used only for their building up. As in the O.T. era, the worship of the true Lord of glory is to be renewed over the

10:9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

10:10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

10:11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.

ruins of the altars and idols of falsehood.

Vs. 9 – *“That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters”* – Paul’s purpose was not to terrorize or hurt the sheep. Again, his only purpose for them was that they should be built up to greater strength. For the wolves on the other hand it was quite another story. For them he let it be known that he would be in their face fighting for the sheep of his love.

Vs. 10-11 – *“Let such a one think this”* – Hear the arrogant, cutting insinuation of the sinister element there in Corinth. How loftily they dared to speak against God’s apostle, even as they did against God’s prophets of old. We see again in vs. 10 their attention to *“the outward appearance”* and their disapproving estimate of Paul’s physical presence. We have no idea what this means or what Paul looked like or the way he spoke. Obviously such things do not matter to God. Their words imply a

10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

weak timidity in Paul that was only courageous enough to say hard things from a distance, in a letter rather than in person. Like the schoolboy with a mouthful of hard words to shout from a distance, but quickly buttoning his lip with a gulp when the enemy walks right up to confront him directly. Paul would have such slanderers know that the hard things he had to say to them he would say in person! We can only assume that he did just that.

Vs. 12 – *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number”* – Paul did not dare judge himself worthy to be *“of the number”* or among those qualified to be a voice for God. God Himself did that judging, for Paul’s gifting and appointment were from God, not from men. Even his gospel message came directly from the Lord rather than he being taught by men. A fact Paul made plain in Galatians 1-2.

“But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” – Again, revealing the way of those there at

Corinth. When a man has God's gifting and appointment all comparisons and qualifications among men fall to irrelevance. "*Dung*" is the way Paul labelled all such in Philippians 3:8. When one finally recognizes how little it really matters what people think of him, he is at last freed to concern himself only with what God thinks. We are flattered to pride when we compare ourselves with other men. We are shamed to humility when we compare ourselves to God's perfect standard. At every point, what difference does it make how you and I compare to each other? Remember from Paul's first epistle to these people how he considered it such "*a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment*" (I Cor. 4:3). What others, even brothers, thought of him was the least of Paul's concerns, did not even wiggle the scale of his worries or register on his fretometer. He lived entirely before God's assessment, not man's. He was a man "*crucified with Christ . . . by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world*" (Gal. 2:20; 6:14). Paul was so wonderfully cured of the world and of the effects of pride!

10:13-18 – Reach of Paul's Authority

These next few verses are rather difficult of interpretation. Is Paul talking physical region or spiritual realm, or perhaps a bit of both? He seems

10:13 But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.

10:14 For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ:

to speak of his prior claim on the believers there at Corinth, thus suggesting the usurping or “sheep-stealing” of the following “*false apostles*” who came in after he left Corinth. The believers there were his to influence rather than that they should be following secondary teachers claiming to be from God.

Vs. 13-14 – “*But we will not boast of things without our measure*” – Paul would make his boast of that domain “*which God hath distributed to us*”. And indeed that area of influence granted to him by God did “*reach even unto you*”. The line God had drawn in tracing out Paul’s field of endeavour included Corinth, and none could argue that that church of believers was there through his work. He alone held the right to boast of a work “fathered” by him there. These were his spiritual children. No clutching, carping usurpers, slipping in behind him to talk down their true father, legitimately held that right. So unlike those illicit apostles there, Paul would

10:15 Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly,
10:16 To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

make his boast of that which he actually authored, rather than the deceitful work of plagiarists such as they.

Vs. 15-16 – “*Not boasting . . . of other men’s labours*” – Paul is obviously making a strong point here of comparing his more noble way with the way of the others. It seems they had begun to make the church at Corinth their own boast. As if brazenly snatching the harvest from the threshing floor of another, stealing from the one who did all the real sweaty work of planting and harvesting.

“*But having hope*” – Paul looked beyond Corinth even to “*regions beyond you*” where he might yet further accomplish the same in other areas. We know of his hopes of reaching even as far as Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). Yet to this purpose he could only look when he was sure of them at Corinth that their “*faith is increased*”, when he knew they were stabilized and growing in their faith, when they had

*10:17 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.
10:18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved,
but whom the Lord commendeth.*

rid themselves of their counterfeit counsellors and understood why. So in a very real sense Paul made the furthering of the gospel dependent upon their decision to pull themselves straight.

“And not to boast in another man’s line of things” – Repeatedly Paul returns to this point for he wanted them to get it! He and those with him were the legitimate counsellors of the Corinthian believers. And the spiritual charlatans who had moved in on them showed themselves bogus even by their back-door approach.

Vs. 17-18 – *“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* – Paul stated the same in his first epistle to them, and there he made the point that he spoke *“according as it is written”* (I Cor. 1:31). Perhaps he was thinking of the Lord’s words in Jeremiah 9:23-24. There is such a great deal to do with boasting in this epistle. The Greek word translated “boast” or “glory” is found 61 times in the N.T. in its various forms, and over half of those occurrences are found in this book of II Corinthians, a book involving only about 3% of the N.T. Boasting is obviously a major

theme here, especially in the 4 chapters of this last section (20 times or 1/3 of entire N.T. use). It seems clear their false apostle friends were making much of their credentials, carrying letters of reference from others among men (3:1), thus forcing Paul to “*foolishly*” lay out his truly valid credentials (11:21-33). But the fact that men would boast in themselves rather than making the Lord their boast should again be indication enough of their lack of security in God. Men have nothing in themselves with which to feel proud or qualified, no matter how many credits one might have to his name. It is the Lord who must be the focus of all of our glorying. It is the Lord who “*commendeth*” or appoints and removes spiritual leaders. It is the reality of spiritual gifts and fruits that show a man’s ministry to be valid (3:2-3), not letters or tickets issued by men. As some witty soul once suggested, “Some people have to carry their diplomas with them to prove they have been to college”.

“For I am jealous over you
with godly jealousy:
for I have espoused you
to one husband,
that I may present you
as a chaste virgin to Christ”

(II Cor. 11:2)

Class 16 – II Corinthians 11:1-15

11:1 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.

In this second letter to the church at Corinth Paul was dealing with the problem of men there who were teaching error. In their effort to do so they sought to run Paul down as well in order to raise question over what he taught. It is an old ploy, telescoping one's own worth by microscoping the worth of an opponent. In fact it is a dangerous tendency in all of us, in our pride. All slander is essentially a variant of the same, attempting to push ourselves up by stepping on the other. As a result of this tendency Paul even refused to receive money from the Corinthian believers lest he be accused of preaching for money. Yet in not taking their money it seems he was still accused of not loving them (vs. 11).

11:1-4 – Fear of Infidelity

Vs. 1 – “*Bear with me a little in my folly*” – There is an evident note of irony in Paul's tone here in referring to his efforts to gain their hearts as “*folly*”, and in the “*folly*” of boasting (vs. 21; 12:11). There

11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

is a note of sharpness or sternness as well in his sudden turn from wish to command. He not only wished them to endure him but insisted upon the same.

Vs. 2 – *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy”* – Jealousy, like anger, can be a good and rightful thing when used correctly. It is that necessary emotional drive that pushes one to push others to what is right. Paul was right to want his spiritual children walking in the truth and led away from the error with which they were toying. And he was right to be passionate about it. It was a holy anger at those seeking to seduce them from the truth, and it was a holy earnestness for those loved ones being so led astray.

“For I have espoused you to one husband” – *“Espoused”* here refers to the Jewish concept of betrothal rather than marriage as we use the term. As we see in this context, they would only later be presented to Christ. With our salvation we become a part of Christ’s bride, and thus we are betrothed or promised or engaged to Him. Paul obviously felt

*11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled
Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be
corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

the bad influences at Corinth were tending to lead the believers away from strict loyalty to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as if following another lover while promised to Jesus.

Vs. 3 – “*As the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty*” – As Paul made plain in I Timothy 2:14, in Satan’s temptation in the Garden Adam was not deceived or fooled. It seems he walked into sin as so many a man has since, in order to keep the girl. Eve on the other hand “*being deceived was in the transgression*”. She was thoroughly tricked into sin. This is not to excuse her sin, for there were obvious warnings she ignored in setting herself up for her fall. But there was an element of blindness in her actions that was not present in Adam.

Paul was afraid for those people, that they were allowing themselves to be tricked by the Devil all over again, as Eve in the Garden. The word behind “*simplicity*” (KJV) is the same translated “*liberality*” and “*bountifulness*” in 8:2 and 9:11, the same we considered in 1:12. Again, the root idea is of something spread out, without any folds or

11:4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

wrinkles, thus without anything hidden in the folds. Just a wide-open, look-you-in-the-face honesty with nothing to hide. A single-hearted absence of self-seeking that easily spills out in a bountiful approach toward others. Paul was fearful that they, as Eve, were allowing their thinking to be subtly led away from a clarity of sincerity before the Lord.

Vs. 4 – “*Ye might well bear with him*” – Paul’s fear was not only centred in those bringing the false message, but in these who were allowing themselves to be influenced by it. With the deceivers he was angry, while for the deceived he was fearful. His aim at this point was to prick up their attention to where their current direction was taking them; that they not blindly allow themselves to be led like Eve to error and evil. Eve had everything she needed to make the right choice, had she not been so enamoured and tricked by the clever approach of the evil one. Paul would have them to see that they were showing the same weakness and leaning as she. Compare similar thoughts in Galatians 1:6-9.

11:5 For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

11:6 But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.

11:5-12 – True Servant

Paul gets quite personal at this point in his argument, in his effort to counter the words of those running him down there at Corinth.

Vs. 5-6 – *“For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles”* – Looking at himself objectively, Paul could affirm that he had received all of the gifts from God that any of the other apostles had received. For as he later reminded them, *“truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you”* through him (12:12). He was not magnifying himself but God, pointing only to what he had received from above. Again, as he later stated, *“for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing”* (12:11). As to his own personal worth, Paul saw himself as *“nothing”* or *“less than the least of all saints”* (Eph. 3:8). Yet as to his office, none could fairly dispute his apostleship.

“But though I be rude in speech, yet not in

11:7 Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

knowledge” – Again Paul refers to the things said of him there (10:10). Though it might be thought by some that his delivery abilities were lacking, yet the wise will know that the message he delivered bore every evidence of being sourced in God’s knowledge. Paul was not behind any other apostle in divine knowledge, divine message, or supernatural gifts. It was all there.

Vs. 7 – *“Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted”* – Again, the negative comments being spoken of Paul had to do with his lowly, unimpressive bodily presence (10:1, 10). There seemed to be a disparity between his weighty, bold approach in writing from a distance and his base or humble nature when present. And now he puts the question to them of whether he had in fact wronged them by coming to them in humility. For in so coming his purpose was only that he might lift them to the hope of eternal life in preaching the gospel among them. He lowered himself to be their servant that they might be exalted to life. Was he a sinner for coming with fear and trembling in search of their souls? And was he a sinner for bringing to

11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.

11:9 And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.

them “*the gospel of God freely*”, preaching to them without expecting them to cover his expenses while there at Corinth. As the Acts record shows, Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla in their tent-making business to help fund their mission there (Acts 18). It seems this failure to receive funds from them was being turned against Paul as well, somehow used as indication of a lack of love for them.

Vs. 8-10 – “*I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service*” – It is not that Paul actually misappropriated funds from other brothers. He was using strong terms here, speaking with a touch of irony for the sake of those seeking cause against him. Part of his financial support while working there at Corinth at the first came through a gift from the Macedonian churches, from which he had just come. This may explain the meaning behind Acts 18:5. Paul had already been preaching in Corinth as he was able, yet with the arrival of Silas and

*11:10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop
me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.
11:11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.*

Timothy from Macedonia, apparently bringing a money gift with them, Paul was then freed to turn from tent-making to give himself fully to the preaching of Christ.

“No man shall stop me of this boasting” – Again, Paul speaks with strong emotion. There is passion behind his choice of words. There is a place for holy passion when necessary in dealing with others. None could deny him the truth of his “boast” that he had kept himself from being an expense to them.

Vs. 11 – *“Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth”* – God knew the truth of the reasons for Paul’s actions. And God knew that fault could not be found with Paul in his dealings with them. That his good actions were being painted up as evil by his enemies, that his loving actions were being called unkind, was a matter of deepest concern to him. But if men could not be persuaded of the truth, Paul had *“committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously”* (I Pet. 2:23).

Vs. 12 – *“But what I do, that I will do”* – Paul stood

*11:12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off
occasion from them which desire occasion; that
wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.
11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

his ground and explained his reason. He had no plans to change his approach, unlike the flightiness with which he was being portrayed (1:17).

“That I may cut off occasion” – *“Occasion”* suggests the idea of a foothold or base of operations, a beach-head or secured base from which further attack can be made, as the Allied forces established at Normandy in WWII. Paul’s enemies there were looking for any cause against him, anything they could use to set him in a bad light. As much as was reasonably possible, Paul sought to deny them every such opening in highlighting his blameless character. Compare the same word in 2:11.

11:13-15 – False Servants

Driven by passion, Paul now momentarily turns from defence to offence, turning the heat of his holy zeal upon those spiritual frauds among them.

Vs. 13 – *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers”* – Those who are *“such”* or like that, the

kind who would be looking for a handle with which to destroy a godly man and ministry, can only be “false”. Though they claimed Christ’s commission it could not be so. “*Deceitful workers*” suggests those who were dishonest pretenders, coming with guile. Though they were men with every appearance of genuine earnestness, looking for all the world like sweetness and light, as if truly seeking and serving the Lord’s good purposes, yet in reality they were serving only their own selfish ends. Sincere servants have nothing to hide and no reason to be devious.

“Transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ”
– The word translated “transforming” suggests merely a surface sense of assuming the appearance of something or someone. As Christ’s sharp words in His woes spoken against the Jewish leaders, likening them to “*whited sepulchres*” or whitewashed tombs (Matt. 23:27). They may look and talk righteous but inside was only death and decay. The present tense of the verb here points to the ongoing efforts of these deceivers. Though they had assumed the holy airs of sanctified servants of Christ, God’s true servant and apostle now strips away their mask.

Vs. 14 – “*And no marvel*” – Nothing surprising or

*11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed
into an angel of light.*

marvellous or out of the ordinary here. It is an old, old story in fact that men would deceitfully disguise themselves, that liars should come presenting themselves as pure as new fallen snow, and bringing their discovered “truths” that would make liars of God’s true words and servants. It should not be surprising to us since the prince of darkness himself comes with the same masquerade. How very blunt the Lord in Revelation 2:2, commending the church at Ephesus for trying *“them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars”*. A stream of liars continues to flow through the ages and to this day, children of their father of lies, yet coming in the name of the Lord. God’s true saints can discern them through the Spirit and the Word, for Christ’s own sheep know the voice of their Good Shepherd from that of spiritual imposters (John 10:4-5, 8, 14, 27).

“For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” – God’s angels are defined by light;

- Because the brightness of light surrounds them (Acts 12:7).
- Because they are messengers of God, He who

11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

is light and dwells in light (I John 1:5-7).

- Because they convey the light-bringing truth of God's message to man.

Yet how interesting that the prince of darkness would transform himself into "*an angel of light*". Satan does not tend to come as Satan. He comes under false colours. He ever comes with a lie in his mouth. From the beginning it was so. In the Garden Satan came not as Satan but as the serpent, the most subtle of all beings at that time. God speaks to us in a forthright, up-front manner. The Son of God Himself came to us in person and spoke to us straight. But Satan comes always in a devious manner, hiding behind some brighter presentation.

Vs. 15 – "*Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed*" – Again "*no great thing*" answers to "*no marvel*" in vs. 14. Because Satan is what he is and does what he does therefore none should be either surprised or deceived that his servants come as servants of light and right; as if devoted to Jesus too (a different Jesus); as if full of the Spirit too (a different spirit from the Holy One);

as if ministers of the gospel too (a different gospel), coming with the lying assurance that they indeed are the ones who are right. They are men and women who must be discerned by their words and works compared to the Word of God, rather than by appearances, by the mask they wear. Again, do not miss the frankness of our God here. Those coming with another Jesus or spirit or gospel are not just mistaken souls. They are deceivers, men and women in Satan's employ. Every such deceiver is a child of their deceiving father. God's words are not soft on them by any means, and neither should we be soft on what they are and do. Not that we should be unchristian or rude in dealing with such. But it is not unchristian to clearly discern the potent evil of false teachers and to refuse to associate with them in any way (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10).

"Whose end shall be according to their works" – Being Satan's servants, their final destiny can only be as his. They shall perish with him at the last in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 15; Matt. 25:41). Remember God's pointed warning in I Corinthians 3:17 to any who would dare defile or mess with God's temple or saints.

We must be wise as serpents though gentle as doves. We must understand that Satan has

infiltrators planted among the true servants of God, tares sown among the wheat. This is a reality even now! We must understand that these moles will look good and talk attractively and sound and seem quite holy, perhaps even more appealing in some ways than those who stand for the truth. Yet they are the planting of the evil one, seeking followers among God's flock.

Understand as well the way God uses the successes of the evil one within His church. Satan is only really successful with those unable to discern the voice of the Good Shepherd from the imposters. Thus God allows Satan's efforts and "successes" to help sift the chaff from among His good wheat, the goats from the sheep, in purifying His people.

We must understand as well that the standard by which we judge those who are false (and judge them we must if we would have Christ's praise, Rev. 2) is the standard of;

- *God's* words (Isa. 8:20), yet ever mindful of Satan's willingness to twist God's words as well (Matt. 4:6).
- *Their* words (Deut. 13 & 18; Ezek. 13). God allows for no mistakes in prophesying. In fact God allows for no further prophecies at all

(Rev. 22:18).

- Their *fruits* (Matt. 12:34-35).

Standards by which they *cannot* be judged;

- Partial fulfilments of their words (Deut. 18:20-22).
- Amazingly miraculous deeds (Deut. 13; Rev. 13:3, 12-15; Matt. 24:24).
- Apparent godliness (*“angel of light . . . ministers of righteousness”*, vs. 14-15).

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Further warnings and instructions concerning false teachers;

Romans 16:17-18 – They serve their own bellies (appetites) and deceive the simple.

- Philippians 6:12-13 – Their god is their belly.
- I Timothy 6:3-5 – They see gain as a measure of godliness.
- Galatians 6:12-13 – They serve their own ego.
- Acts 20:29-32 – They will come from outside as well as from within the congregation of the saints.

Answers to the problem of false teachers;

- God's words of warning (Matt. 24:23-27) – Though they will be very believable, "*believe it not*" Jesus said.
- Faithful teaching (Acts 20:28, 31) – Protection against deception is through the watchful feeding of the sheep.
- Faithful leaders (Eph. 4:11-14) – God's gift of spiritual leaders are for maturing the saints to stability and service.

Class 17 – II Corinthians 11:16-33

11:16 I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little.

11:17 That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

As we know, much of the thrust of this book has to do with Paul's effort to prove himself among the Corinthian believers, particularly in these last 4 chapters. Over 1/3 of the book in fact is given to this end. Paul was under fire among these believers. Leanings had developed there in favour of certain "*false apostles*" (vs. 13-15). Therefore Paul found himself pressed to prove himself and his worthiness to be their mentor in competing for their hearts. Pay careful attention to the *way* Paul defends himself in these verses. It is of the most vital importance to take careful note of what "qualifications" he points to in making his case for the affinities of God's people.

11:16-33 – Paul's "Foolishness" of Boasting

Vs. 16-17 – "*That I may boast myself a little*" – Paul was not happy to follow this approach or to write what he wrote here. Repeatedly he refers to the

11:18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

11:19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.

foolishness of such an improper line of argument. This way of boasting was not according to his own nature, and so he begins by pleading for their understanding in this, that even as a fool they might receive him still, since they were willing to entertain other such boasting fools. In fact the suggestion seems to be that if they were willing to endure a great deal of foolishness from others, as described in vs. 18-19, surely they could endure “*a little*” foolish boasting from him.

Vs. 18-19 – “*Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also*” – Since it was the way of the spiritual frauds there at Corinth to glory in human qualifications, Paul proposed to meet them with the weapon of their choice. He stoops to come to men according to their weakness, in the same way that God comes to man in his weakness. God meets us even with our silly expectations at times, seeking to lead us to maturity (or even to pronounce condemnation, I Sam. 28). Again, there seems to be a facetious, even ironic tone in this portion as well. “Since others are boasting of themselves and

11:20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.
11:21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

making such headway among you by this means,” Paul seems to suggest, “I too will have a go at the same. Since you suffer fools so gladly, I too would enter into this rivalry of the ridiculous”. In speaking of their suffering of “fools” Paul again fires with force at his spiritual rivals there (vs. 13).

Vs. 20 – “*For ye suffer, if . . .*” – We get a picture now of the nature of the approach the spurious leaders there were using. Their leadership was strong and overbearing. Paul says to the believers there, “You are willing to endure if one comes with a lordly attitude over you, forcing you into servitude; if one strips you of your wealth; if one takes you like a fisherman takes fish; even if one slaps you in the face!” Seemingly the nature of events there faithfully reported to Paul. “If you would endure such abuses from them, surely you would be willing for a bit of humble foolishness from me,” Paul would suggest.

Vs. 21 – “*I speak as concerning reproach, as though*

11:22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.

11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

we had been weak” – Paul indicates that his form of response here related to the reproachful things being said of him there in Corinth (10:10). “Since they would so easily characterize me as ‘*weak*’ and ‘*contemptible*’, I too will show you a bit of boldness to vaunt myself, which you seem to prefer”. Yet I’m thinking Paul spoke with colour in his face, both in shame for being forced to such lengths and in jealousy against those who would steal the loyalties of those he loved. Again Paul affirms that such an approach is not the way of wisdom.

Vs. 22-27 – “I am every bit the equal of any man in all that they might point to as surpassing heritage”, Paul suggests. Compare Philippians 3, where he dismissed all such tokens as “*dung*”. So it becomes obvious that the rival teachers there were Jewish.

“(I speak as a fool)” – The word behind “*fool*” here is even stronger than that used in vs. 16, 17, & 21, this word shading in meaning toward a kind of insanity. This because Paul’s boast here is stronger. Where in vs. 22 he spoke of equalities,

11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

now he speaks of superiority (*"I am more"*). In great humiliation Paul felt compelled to speak of his labours and sufferings. In God's sight all boasting is excluded (Rom. 3:27). Yet Paul follows the advice of Proverbs 26:5 here in answering *"a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit"*. While clearly marking the absurdity of any human comparisons of quality or quantity of service, Paul reluctantly caters to the preoccupation there at Corinth with comparisons and appearances. And in so doing he describes a life without precedent in history, one that is absolutely astonishing! Note well the complete absence of any mention of triumphs here, only humiliations.

"In stripes above measure" – The following verses give the details of this form of suffering. Beating with rods was a Roman form of punishment. The use of the scourge or whip was the Jewish approach. The scourge was made of multiple straps of calf skin with which they would whip a man's bare breast and shoulders. The O.T. law specified no more than 40 such blows (Deut. 25:1-3), but the historian, Josephus, states that it was the custom to give 39 in case of a miscount. There was a real

*11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned,
thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have
been in the deep;*

*11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils
of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in
perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in
the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among
false brethren;*

possibility of death through such a beating. Yet the one handling the whip would be free of charge in the event of death, as long as he did not exceed the legal limit of 40 blows.

“Thrice I suffered shipwreck” – The shipwreck at Malta in Acts 27 came after Paul’s writing here, thus none of these terrifying events even received mention in Acts.

“In perils of waters” – Perhaps referring to rivers in flood after heavy rains. Bridges were rare then.

See how summary the Acts account was. Of the events described here, 11 were not even mentioned in Acts. And who knows how many other weighty hardships were not even mentioned here. Unlike most biographies, which tend to play up human endurance and achievements, God’s record of church history is more about our great God working through men than about great men working for

*11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often,
in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and
nakedness.*

*11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which
cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

*11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended,
and I burn not?*

God.

Vs. 28 – *“The care of all the churches”* – This difficult church at Corinth was a prime example of one requiring great care and consideration and sweaty prayer. The earnest rescue of the churches of Galatia from the false teachings of the legalists was the effort of Paul’s epistle written to them.

Vs. 29 – *“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?”* – Do not miss the words of the Lord Himself speaking through Paul here. This is Paul passionately feeling for others. Yet it is God’s passion through His man suffering together with His saints. “Who is struggling under the load of living the Christian life and I am not feeling the strain with him and for him?” says the Lord. “Or what child of God stumbles in his life, going astray in his choices, and I am not inwardly burning in anguish and holy jealousy for him?” Again, Paul (God) was jealous over them *“with godly jealousy”*

*11:30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things
which concern mine infirmities.*

[literally “with jealousy of God”] (vs. 2). Paul could not sit idly by, consumed with his own interests, while aware of believers who were in pain or in sin. It was a question of qualification for ministry and here is true qualification. See in Paul a shepherd heart of pity for those in a pitiable condition. Not the shackling of the sheep, beating them about in a lordly show of dominance. Here again is reflected the character and heart of God. God’s man loves, even to the willingness to die for those he loves. The hireling loves only himself, caring little, risking less (John 10).

Vs. 30 – *“If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities”* – Understand what is happening here. Paul is saying to them, “Since you are forcing my hand, pressing me with the expectation to boast in laying out my qualifications to compare with those in the other corner of your attention; since you would make it necessary for me to brag up my worth, let’s make a proper job of it, shall we?” And Paul then proceeded to turn the whole thing right around, glorying rather in things others would consider cause for shame. “I shall boast of things truly worth

*11:31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.*

boasting about,” he insists. And to what qualifications does he then turn their attention? His scholarly degrees? Not a mention. His great accomplishments? Not a word of such (though he will later refer to “*the signs of an apostle*” practiced among them). The great distances he had clocked as God’s seed-scattering carrier of the gospel to the Gentile world? The number of churches he had helped to begin? The tally of souls saved through his preaching? *None of the above!* He said, “If I must follow the foolishness of those you have lately been pandering to and boast of my greatnesses, well then here is my cv or résumé. I have been whipped with lashes beyond count. I have many times been a prisoner. I have died a thousand deaths. I have often been beaten with rods. Once I was even stoned and left for dead. Three times shipwrecked. Problems and perils on every hand I have endured. Weariness, pain, and discomfort the norm. *Forever inadequate to the task I am!* Merely an earthen vessel. Granted, it is not the kind of boasting you might be expecting. But it is the kind of boasting you *should* be expecting and therefore the kind I will speak. It is not of my personal prowess or power but of my weakness that I will boast. For it is the

*11:32 In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king
kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison,
desirous to apprehend me:
11:33 And through a window in a basket was I let down
by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

only boasting that really means anything. False “servants” of God boast only of their power, prestige, and pedigree, not of their problems, perils, and pains. They like to dangle their “qualifications” out there so conspicuously that none can miss them. But true servants of God boast of their *God*, who is strong in their weakness. In an age when Satan is so actively opposing God’s work, who is the truly great servant of God but the one suffering the greatest trouble. Paul will highlight this again in chapter 12 with the lesson of his thorn in the flesh.

Vs. 32-33 – “*Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands*” – Paul now relates a typical example, which depicts the life of God’s true servant.

“*The governor under Aretas the king*” – Paul refers to the days following his conversion when he began preaching Jesus Christ from the first in Damascus (Acts 9:19-25). The Roman provincial governor under the king of the land set up a continual guard in Damascus seeking to capture Paul. It was *the*

Jews who were offended and angered there in Damascus. They were the driving force seeking to end Paul's ministry before it had really even begun. Yet we now discover a bit more of the story behind the Acts account in that first major threat on Paul's life of ministry. It seems the Jews in demanding Paul's capture were pulling strings with the Gentile government of the province. So, as with Christ, it was Jews and Gentiles conspiring together against Paul from the first, from the earliest days of his Christian experience. And this of course became the story of his life thereafter. That both Jewish and Roman leaders were conspiring made escape from Damascus all the more difficult, and all the more miraculous when Paul did get away.

"Through a window in a basket" – God showed Himself quite able to deliver Paul from such a dangerous threat, in the same way that He later delivered Paul from the deadly conspiracy against his life in Jerusalem through the ears and brave testimony of his young nephew (Acts 23). God had called Paul to ministry from the time of his conversion (Acts 26:17-18). This implied a promise as well, that the man would live to see that ministry. Thus it was a case of God proving Himself good for His words there.

On the Side

Though by faith Paul knew he must survive this peril, still he was not slow to do what he could toward his own safety, using practical means to escape those who would see him dead. Paul did not depend on God to do for him what he could just as easily do for himself.

So why does Paul mention his Damascus experience here? Perhaps because it so characterizes the change that took place from the time he was saved, in relation to God and in relation to man, and because it so effectively showed the difference between himself and those false apostles promoting themselves at Corinth. The fearful Saul of Tarsus had been commissioned by the Jewish leaders to deal firmly with the Christians in Damascus. To this end he went, carrying letters of commendation (Acts 9:2), just as the false men there at Corinth carried such letters of commendation in their coming (3:1ff). In those early days before his salvation Paul had great human authority, even as his rivals at Corinth did now. *But God brought him low!* This is pictured from Paul's first encounter with God when he "*fell to the earth*" in the vision of

glory described in Acts 9:3-6. He was knocked down from his first point of contact with Jesus Christ. And the greatness of Saul among his people came down with a thump right there as well. It fell with his body to the road. His fall was a fall from the pedestal of earthly prestige among the unsaved Jewish world. And again, the “tumble” of his entire Damascus experience characterized the rest of his days as God’s apostle. Having come to Damascus as a fearful lion among men, he left as a lamb, in a basket, as a criminal, in humility. He came with high commendations and expectations. He left amidst condemnation and exasperation. Coming in he was the hunter. Going out the hunted, both by Jew and Gentile alike. From hater to hated, persecutor to persecuted. From one strong in himself, to a new awareness of himself as the weak child of a *strong God*, who was able to grant him deliverance even from earthly kings and governors. For Paul, Damascus was a let-down, with the nature of his escape visually expressing this. Yet it was the turning point upward for this great saint of God, the beginning of true glory before God and before the wise among men. One writer made the comment that some among the Jews later mocked Paul as “a basket escaper”. We can be certain that the lofty frauds at Corinth would have certainly carried something of that sentiment in their hearts.

It seems their attitude was more like the Saul headed into Damascus than like the one coming out. “He has lived the life of a pauper”, they might say, “of a renegade. He did not boldly escape on a mighty steed, but in a woman’s basket!” And to this Paul would heartily affirm, “Yes! From the start! Just like Jesus, that ‘Man of Sorrows’ and so acquainted with grief.” Helpless and weak to be sure. Hated and persecuted by the world. Even from the start the aim of Satan’s dart.

Now please consider carefully. It was a question of who was more likely to be carrying the true message of the lowly Saviour? The lofty or the lowly among men? Again, do you see the proof this incident offers? Who more likely to be the greatest threat to Satan’s domain than the one under attack from the beginning and ever since? Refusal to compromise the truth is what brings such trouble. Of what troubles could those pedigreed darlings in Corinth boast?

It is the glory of this religion of Christ that it does not take weak men and make them great and powerful, lofty and significant. Rather it takes “strong” men and brings them down, making them appear weak and foolish before the worldly wise. It takes weak men and makes them strong in their

strong God, who is in fact *their* God and happy to be called their God! This religion of Christ never makes the mistake of lifting a man to a *superior* place above the needs and concerns of common men. Rather it teaches weak men to sympathize with other weak men, to joy and sorrow with the lowly. The surface religion of the worldly wise would snort at such “qualifications” as Paul lays out here. Such men look for a loftier station among men, seeking to move men to bow to them (vs. 19-20).

What kind of Paul are you and I? The kind going into Damascus? Or the kind coming out?

“Therefore I take pleasure
in infirmities, in reproaches,
in necessities, in persecutions,
in distresses for Christ’s sake:
for when I am weak,
then am I strong”

(II Cor. 12:10)

Class 18 – II Corinthians 12:1-10

12:1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

In chapter 11 Paul had been forced to “*speak as a fool*” in boasting as he sought to fully win the hearts of the believers at Corinth away from their troublesome mentors. Yet his boasting was not as one might expect. It was more a celebration of his perilous experience than of his personal influence. Paul had made the decision that “*if I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities*” (11:30). For he would ever hold before us the great God who is so willing and able to work through little men.

12:1-6 – Paradise Found

Vs. 1 – “*It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory*” – Paul would not become involved in the useless vanity of highlighting his own strengths. There is simply nothing of any eternal benefit to be gained by it. Again, any tendency in this direction was forced upon him in his vying for their hearts. If he must boast, it would be in the weaknesses and humiliations of his Christian experience, in the

things wherein God is able to show Himself strong. Look well at a man who was just not into himself, not seeking to promote his own glory (Prov. 20:6). Paul's purpose or thrust or theme was all the Lord, and he merely a lowly servant. God is able and willing to lift and use such a man. And to and through such a servant God is willing to make His revelation known. Lofty, lordly, wilful men do not have or hear anything from God. Only to lowly ones does God reveal Himself. To this reality Paul now turns in relating God's revelations to him.

Though Paul tended to distance himself from the vision he now relates, it becomes evident later that he speaks of his own experience (vs. 7). This was no indication of Paul's greatness, but of his God who says, *"to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word"* (Isa. 66:2). But as well, it was indication of the man with whom God was intimately communicating and therefore the one truly living in God's bosom.

"I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" – "Visions" are divine or angelic visits of some type, whether while awake or sleeping. As when Peter *"fell into a trance"* in Acts 10 and saw a vision of unclean animals pronounced clean. As Paul's night vision at Troas of a man calling him over to

*12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago,
(whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of
the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one
caught up to the third heaven.*

*12:3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or
out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)*

Macedonia to help (Acts 16:9). As God's communication to Joseph through dreams (Matt. 1:20-23; 2:12-13). "*Revelations*" are supernatural disclosures of divine truth. As when a N.T. author was writing through the Spirit's work of inspiration, "*as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" (II Pet. 1:21; Gal. 1:12; II Tim. 3:16). Such works of God in and through Paul were further qualifying evidence of His apostolic authority over his opposers.

Vs. 2-3 – "*Whether in the body . . . or whether out of the body, I cannot tell*" – The experience Paul relates is of some type of heavenly transport which occurred over 14 years prior, where he was "*caught up*" or snatched away from earth into God's presence in "*the third heaven*" or "*paradise*". Not heaven as in where the birds fly (1st), or heaven as in the upper regions of our atmosphere and outer space (2nd), but "*the third heaven*", as in that place where God dwells. Some ancient views taught that there were as many as seven heavens, from which the term "seventh heaven" comes. Paul was taken

in this experience from earth to God's presence, even as the Apostle John later experienced something of the same on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 4ff). We might presume that they would have left their bodies behind while their immaterial being was so transported. But Paul makes the very strong, repeated point that he simply did not know if his body was involved in this transport. John describes his similar experience as being "*in the spirit*" (Rev. 1:10; 4:2), which would suggest his body left behind. The point here seems to be that the physical, tangible nature of the event was not an aspect that mattered. Yet this did not in any way diminish the very real, actual nature of the experience. Being there was just as real as life here on earth in the body. What Paul here describes must surely be as the experience of those who die in Christ, when in death they leave their body and are immediately "*present with the Lord*". Perhaps those raptured at the end of this age shall experience the same, when all true believers are "*caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (I Thess. 4:17). Yet the resurrection of their bodies will be involved in that event as well.

Vs. 4 – "*Heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*" – Paul uses an oxymoron

12:4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

here in the original, something like “unutterable utterances” or “unspeakable speakings”. No details are given as to the way in which the things heard were unspeakable or unlawful to repeat, whether too terrible or too wonderful. It is likely those inexpressible words spoke of the excelling wonder of things promised, which will one day be the possession of the saints in God’s presence, perhaps contributing to Paul’s conviction of the “*far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” to come (4:17).

Obviously these “*unspeakable words*” were things only for Paul’s ears. Consider how the Lord reserves His special communications for those close to Him;

- Psalm 25:14 – “*The secret of the LORD*” is only “*with them that fear Him*”. The rest of mankind have what they want in their own pursuits.
- Proverbs 2:1-9 – Only those who receive God’s words and hold them close and incline their ear to His wisdom and apply their heart to it and cry and seek after the understanding of

Him will find the fear and knowledge and understanding of God and of every good path.

- Daniel 10 – The vision and revelation of the heavenly visitor was only for Daniel, “*a man greatly beloved*”, not for those with him (vs. 7).
- Matthew 13:11-16 – Jesus spoke in parables to both conceal the precious pearls of His truth from those who would only trample them under feet, and to reveal them to true seekers.
- John 12:28-29 – Only Jesus understood His Father’s audible response to His prayer, while others did not know what they heard.
- Jn. 14:21 – Only to those who have and keep Christ’s commandments will He manifest Himself in a special way.
- Revelation 10:4 – Whatever “*the seven thunders uttered*” was only for the ears and heart of John, a man who “*wept much*” when none was found worthy to open and reveal the contents of God’s book (Rev. 5:1-4).

Though God has revealed much to all men, He has special things for those individuals who love Him, things not for others to know. He is the “*rewarder*

12:5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6), while the rest never discover what He wished to give.

Paul speaks of “*paradise*” here as if it is the same as “*the third heaven*” or God’s presence. But when Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross of being “*today*” with Him in paradise it would seem He was not referring to the third heaven of God’s presence but to “*Abraham’s bosom*”, that portion of Hades where the redeemed dead were residing until Jesus arose from death. Now the redeemed dead are present with the Lord the moment they are absent from the body (II Cor. 5:8). Thus perhaps paradise does not refer to a particular place, but to wherever that place of blessing is where the redeemed dead reside, whether with Abraham before Christ’s death and resurrection in victory or with Jesus now in the third heaven.

Vs. 5-6 – Even though Paul might wish to boast of himself, he would not play the fool in doing so. This was obviously aimed at those boasting opposers at Corinth. Paul would speak only the truth concerning God, himself, and others. He had no desire to lead folks to think anything more of him

12:6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

than he actually was in reality, nor did he wish for them to think less of him than he was (11:5-6). To lead others to think more of us than we really are is among the wood, hay, and stubble to be burned away when all is “*revealed by fire*” at the Judgement Seat of Christ (I Cor. 3).

12:7-10 – Thorn in the Flesh

In this “*thorn*” of which Paul now speaks we see the work of God in him, stepping in to provide a balancing factor, an aid to humility in keeping His servant from subtly developing a lofty view of himself.

Vs. 7 – “*Lest I should be exalted above measure*” – Twice Paul makes this point, at the beginning and end of this verse, that the trouble allowed to come his way was for the purpose of keeping his feet firmly on the ground, lest he be overly lifted or elated in himself, or lest he begin to exalt himself

among men due to the fact that God was often revealing His things to Paul. How easy it would have been, through Satan's insinuating suggestions, for Paul to begin to think of himself as the vital mouthpiece of God above all others. Spiritual pride is a very real danger we must all guard ourselves against. And one effective way God helps us to humility is through the afflictions, hardships, and handicaps we face. Again, God is able and willing to work with those who can honestly say with John the Baptist, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30).

Paul's reference to "*the abundance of the revelations*" he had received seems to identify the experience mentioned in vs. 2-4 as his own.

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh" – Men debate over what particular ailment Paul was referring to here. Obviously not much in the way of details are given, and therefore it seems the details do not matter. It clearly was a physical concern since it was something "*in the flesh*". And it was a painful thing, for Paul likens it to "*a thorn*", something with a sharp, painful point on it. In writing to the Galatians Paul mentioned as well some "*temptation which was in my flesh*". And he went on to suggest that the Galatian believers would

have gladly “*plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me*” (Gal. 4:13-15). From this we may perhaps deduce that Paul referred to some difficult eye condition.

Consider that Paul just did not generally speak about himself or his own concerns. Neither should we. Some folks are all caught up with themselves and their children and their issues, and given half a chance that is all they wish to speak about. Behold in this man the Lord’s way for us; more thoughtless concerning ourselves and more thoughtful concerning the Lord and others.

“*The messenger of Satan to buffet me*” – Paul saw his painful condition and the good discipline it provided as from the hand of God. Yet he understood that it was administered directly by Satan or his demons. It was another case of God working His good purposes by allowing the evil one freedom to work his malicious purposes. In the same way that what Job faced came directly through Satan’s efforts, yet through God’s allowance. Compare I Kings 22:19-22 where God’s purpose to bring an end to the life of wicked Ahab was put out to tender and granted to a lying demon.

Vs. 8 – “*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice*” –

12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul asked and asked again that the Lord might remove the difficulty he was facing. Only when he asked the third time did the Lord give him answer. We are not told how the Lord communicated with Paul. Compare Christ's three times request in the garden of Gethsemane that the Lord might remove the bitter cup of Calvary. In that event it seems there was no spoken answer from the Father at all, only the comfort of an angel sent to strengthen Him (Lk. 22:43).

Vs. 9 – *“My grace is sufficient for thee”* – Here is the sufficient answer in every trial for the one willing to hear it. The fact that the God of heaven, offended by human sin, has made His grace available to us in Christ is already far more than mankind could ever expect or hope for. Every one of us deserves nothing from God, except to experience the full measure of His wrath poured out in His righteous judgment. But in Jesus Christ, through our believing in Him, we have *“found grace in the eyes of the LORD”*. Therefore, living now in His grace and

in the sure hope of His promises, how could we *demand* more? How could we be grieved by His choices in what He allows to come our way? How could we become angry with Him in any eventuality? Though Paul longed for relief from whatever physical affliction he faced, yet the Lord had a purpose for it and therefore relief or healing was denied. The Lord expected that Paul should simply be happy in His grace. He expects that His gracious favour toward us in Christ should be fully enough for us to find fullness of joy, that we should demand nothing more at any point, in any trial or affliction throughout our earthly existence. Is that not the most back-to-front way of viewing things compared to the natural, selfish notions of man? As the Psalmist happily proclaimed, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn Thy statutes . . . Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me”* (Ps. 119:71, 75).

“For My strength is made perfect in weakness” – Here now was God’s reason for leaving Paul to suffer in his affliction. He would display Himself, His own power through Paul, rather than allowing any suspicion of anything done through Paul’s personal strength. The Lord Jesus Christ and His power are best seen against the backdrop of human weakness, humility, and even humiliation. In the horror of

Christ's great humiliation in His trials, beatings, and death it was God showing His strength and giving His most effective and powerful response against Satan, and against man's greatest enemy in death itself.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength because of Thine enemies" (Ps. 8:2).

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in mine infirmities" – Now it is Paul's response to the Lord's words. Having come to understand the reason for what he faced, and that Jesus could actually be glorified through it, how overwhelmingly willing he was to face absolutely any pressing hardship. He was honestly pleased with any loss if his blessed Saviour might gain through it. It is why Paul would boast in his weaknesses rather than in his strengths, as proud men are given to do. Because if in my lows Jesus is lifted high then let me live in the pit! Toward that end this man was willing for anything. What a very different kind of view on life from the norm! He was expecting nothing, demanding nothing, happy for anything. What a blessed existence, that simply does not allow any

12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

blow to knock it down.

Vs. 10 – “*Therefore I take pleasure*” – “*Infirmities*” speak of bodily weaknesses or handicaps. “*Reproaches*” speak of insults or injuries inflicted by those who are haughty. “*Necessities*” speak of facing lack or physical needs. “*Persecutions*” suggest violence inflicted against us because of our faith. “*Distresses*” speak of being under severe pressure. Paul obviously meant to cover every kind of negative experience. In every such hardship he was all lightness and brightness of heart, rather than gloom and heaviness. Such experiences only lifted rather than lowering his spirit. Again, how right-side-up his way from our up-side-down world. Compare Matthew 5:11-12.

“*For when I am weak, then am I strong*” – As he walked with the Lord, through the Lord’s strength he was able to endure and overcome anything. “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Phil. 4:13). In Christ and walking according to His will, Paul was equal to anything, content even

in life's lowest moments. *"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

Ponder Points

Three times the word *"unspeakable"* is found in our English Bible (KJV), and each time there is a different Greek word behind it;

- II Corinthians 9:15 (*avekdiegetos*) – God's *"unspeakable gift"* of Christ. Words fail to fully express the wonder of what we have received in Jesus Christ.
- II Corinthians 12:4 (*arretos*) – Unspeakable paradise. The wonder of it is too great for us to fully hear or grasp in our current existence.
- I Peter 1:8 (*aneklaletos*) – *"Joy unspeakable and full of glory"*, speaking of our faith and love in our unseen Saviour, leading our hearts to a joy that is simply overwhelming!

“And I will very gladly
spend and be spent for you”

(II Cor. 12:15)

Class 19 – II Corinthians 12:11-21

12:11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

12:11-12 – Signs of an Apostle

Vs. 11 – “*I am become a fool in glorying*” – Several times Paul has expressed this same concern in the previous chapter (11:1, 16-17, 23; 12:1), making it quite clear that every form of boasting is a fool’s game.

“*Ye have compelled me*” – It was they who had made it necessary for Paul to so promote himself before them. In the original Greek behind the English there is a touch of emphasis on “*Ye*” here, underscoring the point that “*You have moved me to this*”. They should have felt shamed to realize the distasteful response they had forced upon this old saint and friend.

“*For I ought to have been commended by you*” – The “*I*” has an underscore here in the original as well. Rather than Paul feeling the need to recommend his

12:12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

own worth or qualifications to his spiritual children there at Corinth, he of all people they should have been more inclined to recommend with honour to others, because of who he was to them and the benefit he had brought to them, and because of what they had seen in him (vs. 12). It was a strong suggestion of their impropriety. Their actions were as inappropriate as an unappreciative child talking down his parents to others, rather upholding them with the loving respect that is their due. These “children” should have felt shamed in forcing their “father” to the foolish need to so defend himself.

“For in nothing I am behind the very chiefest apostle” – Paul now chased a bit further his point in 11:5, that he had all that any other of the apostles had. Again, he spoke of practical abilities or gifts rather than natural abilities or worth. As to his personal worth, Paul was the first to proclaim himself *“nothing”*. The modern folly of a vital self-esteem is shown for the lie it is in this gifted apostle of God who would proclaim *“though I be nothing”*. He would magnify God rather than the least elevation of self.

Vs. 12 – *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you”* – In the course of his ministry there in establishing the church at Corinth we now discover that *“the signs of an apostle . . . in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds”* were in evidence through Paul. How interesting that Luke mentions nothing of this in his Acts account (Acts 18), only that Paul *“reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks . . . and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ”* (Acts 18:4-5). The focus of Bible history is upon the preaching of Jesus Christ, with a very notable tendency to play down such supernatural abilities at a time when they actually were in evidence. In fact there is little mention of these *“signs of an apostle”* in all of the N.T. epistles. Obviously such activities were not to feature as prominently as the proclamation of the gospel message. And that they were *“signs of an apostle”* would indicate that such supernatural abilities related particularly to the apostles. These were abilities for the most part given to those whom the Lord would especially authenticate and use to complete the Bible (Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4). And with the death of the Apostle John the era of the apostles was finished, with the N.T. brought to completion with the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:18). The Bible itself affirms that there were only 12 apostles (Rev. 22:14) who

12:13 For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.

founded the church (Eph. 2:20). They were men who qualified for their office partly in that they were those who “*companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*” (Acts 1:21). This of course cannot be true of any man after that initial, founding church era. And thus with the passing of the apostles passed away as well “*the signs of an apostle*”. Though God is able to do anything and often does show Himself through miraculous deeds, yet it is no longer as in the days of the apostles. Because there no longer are any apostles from that crucial foundational era of church history. Only those who are falsely so called.

12:13-18 – No Profit from Them

Vs. 13 – “*I myself was not burdensome to you*” – The only way the church at Corinth might be thought to come behind other churches in Paul’s dealing with them was perhaps in the fact that he did not expect them to support him while ministering there. This is a return to what he began in 11:8-12 (before suddenly firing a broadside at the false influences

*12:14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you;
and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not
your's but you: for the children ought not to lay up
for the parents, but the parents for the children.*

there). We learn from I Thessalonians 2:9 & II Thessalonians 3:8 that Paul practiced the same policy in Thessalonica as well. Yet they, with others in Macedonia, were quick to send financial help immediately after his departure (11:9).

“Forgive me this wrong” – Paul used the word “wrong” here with an obvious sharp barb of irony, referring to something that was wrong only in the eyes of some who were eager to find wrong in him.

Vs. 14 – *“Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you”* – Paul was lining up to visit *“the third time”* at Corinth. But again, there is no indication of a 2nd visit with them after his initial church plant there recorded in Acts 18. Whether Paul’s 2nd coming to them was an actual unrecorded visit, or this refers to his first epistle sent to them some time after his work in establishing the church there is difficult to discern.

Paul affirms that in coming to them again he would still not expect their financial support. Though it

seems this policy was being used against him in some way, far more damaging would be the accusation that he was making financial gains out of them. How very careful spiritual leaders must be when it comes to money. For the accusation of abuse of funds is one Satan is so quick to use with even a breath of suspicion. It seems either way Paul turned he met with accusation, whether taking their money or refusing it. And so he resolved to choose the less condemning of the two. Perhaps it was an effort by his opposers through accusation on the one hand to force him to the other. In shaming him for not receiving their money perhaps they wished to move him to receive financial support, that a charge of selfishly using them for personal gain might then be raised against him. Compare the subtle efforts used against Nehemiah in 6:10-13 of his book. His opponents paid his friend, Shemaiah, to attempt to frighten him into finding refuge in the temple, a violation of sacred propriety that would have become a *“matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me”*. So they attempted to move him to a wrong action that they might use this to diminish his influence before his people. Perhaps it was something of the same effort against Paul. God is our deliverance from every such subtle snare, if we are willing for His help.

*12:15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you;
though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be
loved.*

“For I seek not yours, but you” – Paul was not wanting access to their things. His one purpose was to lead them to God’s best, that he might present them *“perfect in Christ Jesus”*. Illustrating his actions from the family, Paul would not be like a grasping parent who uses his child’s assets and earnings for himself. Normal, caring parents put themselves at loss in putting money aside from their own earnings to provide for the needs of their children, rather than expecting that the children should be put at loss for the sake of the parents. Even so Paul’s interest was in spending for them. All toward seeing them come to heavenly inheritance and reward.

Vs. 15 – *“And I will gladly spend and be spent for you”* – For the good of their souls Paul was ready to spend all, and even to *“be spent”* completely in death for them. Even for such as these who had failed to return anything like the same favour, who had not stood up for him before the doubters and nay-sayers. How Paul showed himself like the Lord, who was willing to so fully spend Himself in suffering and death for we who were *“alienated and*

enemies” in our minds (Col. 1:21), for we who were “*dead in trespasses and sins*”, who were “*the children of disobedience*” and “*were by nature the children of wrath*” (Eph. 2:1-3). Compare Philippians 2:17 where Paul used the imagery of the O.T. drink offerings poured out in sacrifice in describing his willingness toward those people of his love, and with the same expression there not only of willingness but of *joy* in doing so. If his life poured out as a sacrifice to the Lord should bring the blessing of eternal benefits to them, then it was all his joy to be so spent. As that most precious ointment Mary poured out on the Lord, so Paul would gladly pour out for Christ and others what was most dear to him. Here is that death to self of which Jesus spoke in John 12:23-25. Here is the grain of wheat willing to fall to the ground and die that it might bring forth much fruit through its self-sacrifice. Here is the heart of true godly leadership (Ex. 32:32; Rom. 9:3).

“Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved” – It was good evidence in Paul of a true friend, that he would seek their best interests though risking the loss of their friendship. How often the same has been played out in family life, in the parent who has sacrificed in time and money for the good of their children, yet the worth of that benefit

*12:16 But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless,
being crafty, I caught you with guile.*

is largely ignored or denied by selfish, ungrateful children who do not return their parent's love. It is the picture Paul presents here, of his less than grateful children who would not show honour where honour was due, who would not happily acknowledge the real benefits they had received through their spiritual parent. Compare the encouragements in Hebrews 13;

- To remember your spiritual leaders and to follow their faith (vs. 7).
- To submit yourself to the leadership of those who *"watch for your souls, as they that must give account"* (vs. 17), that you not be a cause of grief to them, but a joy.

Vs. 16 – *"But be it so, I did not burden you"* – It was a fixed and settled thing that Paul had not received support from them. "Leave it." Paul says. "Let it be. Let's move on, shall we?"

"Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile" – Can you picture Paul saying this while rubbing hands together, squinty-eyed, and with a sly, rasping chuckle? Again, with wry irony he seems to

12:17 Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?

12:18 I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?

pick up and mimic sentiment being suggested of him there at Corinth. Judging by his immediate response in vs. 17-18, the thought seems to relate still to the idea of abuse of funds. Apparently it was being suggested that though Paul himself did not directly receive money from them it must be that his was a more crafty, under-the-table sort of approach, perhaps a system of financial benefits accruing to Paul, yet subtly worked through his minions.

Vs. 17-18 – “*Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent to you?*” – “*Make a gain*” in vs. 17 & 18 is in the sense of taking advantage of them. “Who among those ministering there in my behalf carried any different attitude toward financial gain than I? Name the Gehazi among my fellow-labourers who lied to gain what the master refused (II Ki. 5), and then perhaps funnelled funds back to my pocket.” Titus was among those sent to them by Paul’s request. Could they find any fault with Titus in this regard? Or with that unnamed brother sent with Titus who was held in highest esteem “*throughout all the churches*”? (8:18) Obviously Titus must have

*12:19 Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you?
we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things,
dearly beloved, for your edifying.*

been a man absolutely above reproach for Paul to use his example in this way. Oh the surpassing joy to be one with such a solid reputation for honour among men.

12:19-21 – Concerns in Coming to Them

Vs. 19 – *“Think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you?”* – “You may think that I am concerned largely with myself in so writing in my own defence. But do not make the mistake of thinking that this is about me or us, that we are vainly anxious to be held in high esteem by you. Understand that all that I have written, said, and done is all about *your* best.” Paul was not in need of their esteem, but rather they needed to properly esteem him. For so vital to their good growth in the Lord was the question of which spiritual food or feeders they would access. Even so the same is true with us. The question of our own spiritual strength or weakness has everything to do with whose feeding trough we choose to eat from. Therefore Paul makes a most solemn statement here that all was for their best, that none of his argument had to do with his own image before

12:20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

them. And this again was the kind of good indication of a true work of God for which they should have been looking. God's Spirit and spiritual leaders care for the good of others at their own expense. They are not concerned with self-promotion. Spiritual maturity brings us to this.

Vs. 20 – Paul was concerned that there would be a clash when he arrived, that the attitude among many of the believers there at Corinth would not be as it should be, as he wished it to be, and that his attitude and approach would not be one with which they were comfortable. The last thing he wanted was that his arrival and efforts to put things right there would send the church into such turmoil that the weak among them might be hurt, and even the unsaved around might become aware of the collision. It is the Lord's purpose that the world around us know that we are His disciples by our Christian love for one another (Jn. 13:35). Such a love must exclude the kinds of selfish responses Paul lists here, describing the way the unsaved and immature Christians respond to trouble. Paul

pictured the possibility of;

- “*Debates*” – Noisy contentions between brothers involving more heat than light.
- “*Envyings*” – Folks selfishly demanding the attentions and honours others receive.
- “*Wraths*” – The plural suggesting many stirred to anger over necessary confrontations.
- “*Strifes*” – Folks taking sides with others over issues, breaking up into factions within the church.
- “*Backbitings*” – Speaking against others in the church behind their back.
- “*Whisperings*” – A quieter, more secretive version of the previous.
- “*Swellings*” – Folks puffed up with pride, as was so characteristic of this church (I Cor. 4:6, 18-19; 5:2).
- “*Tumults*” – Confused, boisterous meetings where more damage is done than real benefit.

Paul’s earnest purpose for them he later states in his closing words, that they might “*be of one mind*” and “*live in peace*” (13:11). But lasting peace can

12:21 And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

only come through righteousness, through wrongs willingly put right in repentance and confession, both before God and others.

Vs. 21 – “*And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you*” – Paul seems to picture the possibility of being reduced to the humbling embarrassment of tears before them as he wrangled with some among them, striving to lead them to repentance. The response he surely hoped for was that received through Ezra’s tearful prayers when word of marital violations among the people came to him (Ezra 9-10). The offenders later came with hats-in-hand and with a heart to put things right.

“*Many which have sinned already, and have not repented*” – The verb in the Greek behind the phrase “*which have sinned already*” is literally “before sinned”. Yet the verb is written in the perfect tense, speaking of action begun in the past with effects continuing into the present. Thus Paul referred to those who were currently in a condition of having before sinned. Not having repented of their evil,

they were still in a state of having sinned. Until we repent of our sin before God we remain in a sinful condition in His sight. And neither time nor distance nor subsequent good deeds make the least difference in putting this condition right before the Lord. *Only genuine confession and repentance, agreeing with God concerning the wrong of our wrong, can put wrongs right with Him.*

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

“The uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed” – All three of these speak of lax morality. *“Uncleanness”* is a general term referring to moral impurity. *“Fornication”* suggests all illicit sexual relations. *“Lasciviousness”* speaks of one who with impudence acknowledges no restraint, one who lawlessly yields to any moral impurity he wishes. Such were the practices of some among the believers there (I Cor. 5; 6:19-20). Obviously the teachings of the false apostles currently in vogue among them did not have much influence in leading them to moral purity. Only God’s shepherd, a *good* shepherd, would demand of God’s sheep that such things be put right, risking all to attain the prize of their full surrender and restoration. May the Great Shepherd stir the same

shepherd heart within us, the same spirit of sacrifice, willing to risk all in leading others to right and light.

Class 20 – II Corinthians 13

13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

In this final chapter of II Corinthians there are interesting and obvious suggestions of Jesus Christ in His return. Look for them as we proceed through these final verses.

13:1-6 – Coming with Authority

Vs. 1 – *“In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established”* – This was the requirement of the O.T. law when it came to hearing a case against anyone, quoted from Deuteronomy 19:15. In the course of a trial the truth of *“every word”* must *“be established”*. No falsehood could be allowed to colour the judgment. Jesus then wrote the same principle into the process of church discipline as well (Matt. 18:16). There must be 2 or 3 agreeing, credible witnesses to convict someone of a crime or sin. Paul was making a very strong point in quoting this. He would return to them quite prepared to confront some with their wrong according to that process given by Jesus in Matthew

13:2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

18, even perhaps that there would be need for church hearings in order to establish all the facts involved (I Cor. 6:1-5). It was a serious, painful time Paul anticipated there. His reference to the use of witnesses suggests that the sins being committed among them were public.

Vs. 2 – *“I told you before, and foretell you”* – Paul puts great emphasis upon the fact that he had already told them before, and he was again forewarning them through this epistle of the way he would deal with them when he arrived.

“If I come again, I will not spare” – Again, quite the opposite of the way Paul was being accused (10:10), he would come in power and justice, no longer *“in all patience”* (12:12). Through the Lord’s help and the confirmation of human witnesses he would surely find out those who were at fault. And these would be dealt with appropriately, according to strict justice and without partiality. It would be with a view to the well-being of the church, rather than wishing to spare people shame and

*13:3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me,
which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

embarrassment. Being so clearly forewarned they all had their opportunity now to put things right before the Lord and others. Compare Jacob's handling of his sons at the last in Genesis 49. Some were not spared and came short and some were blessed in that final confrontation of his sons, based on their responses in life.

Do you begin to see here the image of Jesus Christ in His return to His judgment seat? He too will come again after He first came to establish His church. And He too, having visited first in person, visits again now through His written words, which clearly testify of His love and concern and assurance of the way He will indeed handle His own in His 2nd coming. *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God"* (Rom. 11:22).

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

Vs. 3 – *"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me"* – The plural *"ye"* indicates something of a

13:4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

common attitude among them of uncertainty concerning the complete trustworthiness of Paul's words. It is not that the trustworthiness of Christ was in question, but whether Paul was indeed Christ's vehicle of communication.

"Which to you-ward is not weak" – The Christ who was speaking through Paul was not weak in any way. None would escape Paul's awareness with the help of divine discernment. No offender would prove strong enough or clever enough to fight or charm his way out of appropriate judgment.

Vs. 4 – *"For though He was crucified through weakness"* – God allowed that His mighty Son and Saviour of mankind;

- Would empty Himself of the evident reality of His deity in His first coming (Phil. 2:6-7).
- Would come in the weak form of man, and even a poor and lowly one among men, even appearing as a criminal or enemy of society.
- Would appear to lose the battle against evil

and death on the cross.

Satan, through his followers and false religions, still mocks the weakness Jesus displayed in His life and death, that He would be put to death at the hands of mankind. If He were indeed God, as Christians claim, then how could He be weaker than His creation? And unbelieving Jews still suggest the sinfulness of Jesus. If He were indeed the spotless Son of God, as the N.T. suggests, then He never would have been condemned as a rebel against His own nation, and God would never have allowed Him to hang on a tree, to die the shameful death of one cursed. The missing links in the understanding of fallen man of course are that Jesus was not overcome by superior power, but willingly allowed Himself to be put to death. He in fact came for that very purpose, in fulfilment of all of the O.T. imagery of sacrifices. It was for the sin of fallen mankind that Jesus died, not for His own sin. It was with *our* curse laid upon Him, as upon the scapegoat of old (Lev. 16:7-10, 20-22).

“Yet He liveth by the power of God” – With His resurrection Jesus demonstrated His power over all;

- Over wicked mankind, both Jew and Gentile, who put Him to death, thinking they had defeated Him by their murderous actions.

- Over Satan behind them who so moved them against that promised One.
- Over man's greatest enemy in death itself.

If Jesus proved Himself so strong against the greatest enemies in existence, would He in any way be baffled as He led Paul in sifting through the mess of sin and sinners there at Corinth? Of course not! There would be no escaping His keenest awareness.

“For we also are weak in Him” – This has been much of Paul's theme in this epistle. We are not strong in ourselves. We are only weak followers of a strong God;

- 4:7 – *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us”*.
- 4:10 – *“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body”*.
- 12:10 – *“When I am weak, then am I strong”*.

“But we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” – In Christ we have eternal life. In Christ we too shall receive strength over death. In Christ we are strong in this life as well. Man in

13:5 *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

himself is weak against his enemies. But in Christ we have God's promise that "*we shall live with Him*" and that "*by the power of God*", even God's power "*toward you*" Paul adds. Again, in Paul's coming as God's apostle and representative in His stead it would be God's own mighty power directed toward them in His purpose for their purity, even as with Christ in His coming.

Vs. 5 – "*Examine yourselves*" – Therefore again Paul gave fair warning of the wisdom of their sorting themselves out ahead of time, before the Lord and among themselves. The same applies to us. It is God through His apostle giving *us* fair warning to look well to ourselves;

- Whether we are in fact "*in the faith*". A question of the reality of our salvation. Is it that true "*faith which was once delivered unto the saints*" that you have believed? Or is it another gospel of a spurious sort you have accepted?
- Whether we are walking with God in the light. A question of our sanctification or growth into

Christ-likeness.

Paul uses the verb form here of the noun (*“proof”*) used in vs. 3. Throughout this epistle he has been defending himself, handing them the lens and allowing their careful examination of him, his ministry, his authority. Now at the last he turns it around, demanding of them that they do the same with themselves. “Would you examine me whether it is indeed Christ speaking through me? Look now to yourselves! Examine yourselves and ensure that you are among those approved before God in truth. Be certain *“that Jesus Christ is in you”* and not only a mask that you wear.” In the Greek the word behind *“reprobate”* is the negative form of that behind *“prove”*, meaning *“unapproved”* or *“disallowed”*. To not be in Christ is to be disallowed by God. No man stands before God in his own strength or merits. To reject Jesus Christ, to refuse to believe in God’s only Son as your Saviour from sin is to stand rejected by the only true and living God, and this by God’s own testimony. Such a view does not come through the faulty teachings of men. It is right here in the inspired writings of God’s apostle. Consider yourself fairly forewarned! It is all about what is in you and what you are in. If you are in the true faith, that one based upon Jesus Christ, then and only then are you safe, as Noah

13:6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

and family safe in the ark against the approaching storm. And if it is Jesus Christ who is in you then and only then do you stand approved before God. Let's be honest with ourselves. What is the use in fooling ourselves. If you are not safe in Christ then *now* is the time to discover this, not later when it is *TOO LATE!*

N.B. that we can “*know*” we are saved. “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that he have eternal life*” (I Jn. 5:13).

“*He that believes on Him is not condemned; but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*” (John 3:18).

Vs. 6 – “*But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates*” – Obviously there were some doubts here or the point would not even be made. From the perspective of the false, the truth appears false. False teachers were suggesting Paul a false teacher, one disapproved by God. Yet he was in fact the one so evidently approved by God.

13:7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

13:7-12 – Prayers and Desires for Them

Vs. 7-9 – “*Now I pray to God that ye do no evil*” – While writing in the effort to win their hearts, Paul was asking God as well to work His will in them, to put within them the will to do His will. Always this man of God backed up his actions and passions with prayer to the Father for the sake of His children. His concern was that they might be completely weaned from every evil way and doctrine. Not only that they would sin less, but that they might be sinless, with no evil found among them.

“*Not that we should appear approved*” – Again, appearances were the last of Paul’s concerns. This was not about a fix of the students that the teacher might appear in a better light. It was not about teacher benefits at all. He had no selfish ends but only their good at heart. Let Paul and those with him appear “*as reprobates*”, as if disapproved by God. Paul was happy for this as long as his children there were led to good and godly responses. Let the leaders look the fool in the eyes of men, as long as the followers are led to faith. Let the parents go

13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

13:9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

without that the children might be fed. Let the leaders be weakened that the followers might be strong. Compare similar statements in earlier chapters;

- 1:6 – *“Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation . . . or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”*
- 4:15 – *“For all things are for your sakes.”*

Paul was all for them, all for others.

“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” – In dealing with them in discipline, nothing could be allowed or spoken except what was strictly according to truth (vs. 1). And all would indeed proceed according to the truth of God’s words.

“This also we wish, even your perfection” – This is similar to Paul’s statement of assurance in vs. 7, here the more positive side of the same. *“Pray”* (vs. 7) and *“wish”* (vs. 9) are the same verb in the

13:10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

original. In praying that they might “*do no evil*” Paul was asking for their “*perfection*” in Christ. The emphasis on this theme here reveals that this was Paul’s most earnest interest (Col. 2:28-29). He was no man of lethargy when it came to the quest for Christ-likeness in others.

Vs. 10 – “*Therefore I write these things being absent*” – Paul seems still to refer to the comments being made of him, that he wrote with greater power than he spoke in person (10:10). Again he seems to turn it around to suggest his pleading efforts in writing were toward the purpose of heading off the need to be severe when with them. How anxious he was to see all concerns sorted out ahead of time, that he not be forced to come with a stick. How much better if their own leaders would do the hard thing in dealing properly with those in the wrong among them, that their spiritual father might then be free to come to them in peace. As the mother who personally issues to her children the benefits of fair, severe discipline when needed rather than leaving it for their father to do when he comes home. That

13:11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

the children might look forward to his coming with confidence, rather than being ashamed and fearful before him with his return (I John 2:28).

Regardless of the nature of the approach Paul must use among them, he gives the assurance here that he would remain committed to building them up rather than tearing them down. Human wisdom, based on pride, does not know how to hold things together and build others up. As the foolish woman of Proverbs, it knows only how to pull a home apart with its hands (Prov. 14:1). God's wisdom, based on humility, is quite able to foster peace (James 3:17-18).

Vs. 11 – *“Finally brethren”* – A string of commands God's apostle now leaves with us, expressing God's desire for our lives.

“Farewell” – Literally the command to “be rejoicing”. The same verb is behind *“we are glad”* in vs. 9. Though difficult issues must be faced, our lasting joy is God's gracious purpose for His own.

“Be perfect” – This is the verb form of the noun behind *“perfection”* in vs. 7. Though their perfection was Paul’s prayer for them, and indeed a work of God in them, yet their own involvement was a part of that good work in them as well, expressed now in this command. We must strive with the Lord as He works to bring His good purposes to fruition in us.

“Be of good comfort” – Be encouraged! The command here points up the *sinful* response of discouragement in the Christian life. This is a common demand of the Lord;

- Joshua 1:9 – *“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”*.
- Isaiah 41:10 – *“Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God”*.

To refuse is to doubt the promise of His presence. At every point our God commands of us that we *“lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”* (Heb. 12:12) and go forward with greatest confidence in His presence, awareness, and care, or we in fact walk in disobedience!

“Be of one mind” – Be minded the same. Be

13:12 Greet one another with an holy kiss.

13:13 All the saints salute you.

13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

essentially united in thought and sentiment with other believers of like faith and practice, which will result in saints living “*in peace*” in God’s church and the fullness of God’s presence among us. Compare Romans 12:16 & Philippians 2:2.

Vs. 12 – “*Greet one another with an holy kiss*” – Kissing was their usual form of greeting in that time and place, even as we embrace or shake hands in our society. The precise practice or custom is not the issue as much as the principle behind it. We must show warm affection for each other. Compare I Corinthians 16:20.

13:13-14 – Closing Greetings

Vs. 13-14 – Note the obvious acknowledgement of the Trinity here. All three Persons of the divine Trinity are with us who are in Christ. God the Son came to make His grace available to us through God the Father’s loving purpose. And in Jesus Christ, and characteristic of this age, we walk in God the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We can have no

“*fellowship*” with an impersonal force, thus the Spirit as well has personhood. Three separate Persons and yet eternally one in the unity of a single divine Being; Creator of all, blessed forever, and we forever blessed in Him! Amen!

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Ponder Points

See the image of Jesus Christ speaking through His apostle here in chapter 13;

- Jesus visited us before and is lining up even now to visit again, as Paul there in Macedonia (13:1).
- In the meantime He has “come” to us again in the form of His written words.
- Through both the living and written Word mankind has been amply forewarned of the nature of Christ’s coming judgment (vs. 2). He will return as Judge, sparing neither sin nor sinners then. He will come with eyes “*as a flame of fire*” (Rev. 19:12). That the Lord has not dealt with sin more immediately leads men to believe that He *will* do nothing. As some thought of Paul, so some think of the Lord, that being absent He speaks through His writings in a “*weighty and powerful*”

manner, but in reality His threats mean nothing (“weak and contemptible”). But the truth is that He will not spare in His return.

- Though in His meekness Jesus appeared weak in His first coming, yet in His return He will be seen for the mighty One He is (vs. 3-4).
- Thus our opportunity to examine ourselves is now (vs. 5). When Jesus returns it will be too late to find refuge in Him. Then it will be too late to put our wrongs right. If still outside of salvation in Christ in that day we will then be found eternally disapproved!
- In that day all who ever considered Jesus a myth or misfit will know their error (vs. 6).
- Jesus ever lives now *“to make intercession for”* His own (vs. 7-9). And thus *“He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him”* (Heb. 7:25).
- In His absence He now sends His communication ahead in writing, bidding us to please not make it necessary for harshness in His coming (vs. 10). How He so greatly wishes that His children would put their hearts right before Him now. His earnest desire is that His under-shepherds would be striving for the same among His own, that He

might come in joy at the last rather than wielding the rod of discipline.

- Hear the Lord Himself sending His wish for us in our Christian lives here below in vs. 11. He ever hopes the best for us, desiring our comfort and peace as we seek to be perfect. He ever pleads and works toward our joy, our encouragement, our perfection, our peace and unity together, our best, always our best.

How I rejoice in my matchless Master!

