

# DON'T MISTAKE MEEKNESS FOR WEAKNESS

## Commentary on the Book of 2 Corinthians

by Paul G. Apple, September 2004

### GOD VINDICATES THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTERS BY TRANSFORMING THEIR APPARENT WEAKNESSES INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (12:9)*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Preaching Christ ... to center attention on Jesus Christ
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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## **BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS**

**Dr. Daniel Wallace:**

I think that Dr. Daniel Wallace does an excellent of providing a background study so I am going to refer you to his work.

[http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=1203](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1203)

# OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

## DON'T MISTAKE MEEKNESS FOR WEAKNESS

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (12:9)*

**GOD VINDICATES THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTERS BY TRANSFORMING THEIR APPARENT WEAKNESSES INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER**

**LOOK AT 4 AREAS WHERE GOD TRANSFORMS APPARENT WEAKNESS INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER**

### **I. (1:1-11) INTRODUCTION: THE WEAKNESS OF PHYSICAL SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST –**

**PHYSICAL SUFFERING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD'S GRACE AND POWER TO BE DISPLAYED IN COMFORT AND DELIVERANCE**

**(INSIGHT INTO PAUL'S APOSTOLIC CALLING AND PASTORAL HEART)**

*“that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (1:9)*

A. (:1-2) Greeting: Apostolic Calling

B. (:3-11) Pastoral Heart: The Sufficiency of God's Comfort in Our Own Desperate Trials Equips Us to Comfort Others in Their Trials

1. (:3-7) Universal Principle: The sufficiency of God's comfort in our trials equips us to comfort others in their trials

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### **II. (1:12 – 7:13) THE WEAKNESS OF PERSONAL INADEQUACY –**

**PERSONAL INADEQUACY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GLORY OF**

## **THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY TO BE DISPLAYED IN MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS**

### **(PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IN HIS MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND HIS COMMITMENT TO RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS)**

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (4:7)*

- A. (1:12 – 2:13) Ministry Integrity for the Apostle Paul Means that He Has the Best Interests of the Corinthian Believers at Heart
  1. (1:12-14) Integrity in Ministry Leads to the Testimony of a Clear Conscience
    - a. (:12) Confidence of Integrity --
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    - a. (1:15-16) Paul Made Plans to Visit Corinth
    - b. (1:17-22) He Made These Plans with Full Integrity of Commitment
    - c. (1:23 – 2:4) He Chose to Change His Plans – to Spare Them Apostolic Discipline
  3. (2:5-13) The Goal of Church Discipline is Forgiveness and Restoration – Not Excessive Punishment
    - a. (2:5-6) Enough is Enough – Warning Against Over-Punishing
    - b. (2:7-9) Forgive and Restore – Instruction Regarding How to Forgive and Reaffirm Love
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  2. (3:1-3) The Commendation for Effective Ministry is Changed Lives
    - a. Unnecessary Types of Commendation
    - b. The Only Valid Commendation for Effective Ministry = Changed Lives
  3. (3:4-18) The Ministry of the Spirit (New Covenant) Far Surpasses the Glory

of the Ministry of the Law (Old Covenant)

- a. (3:4-11) God Makes Us Competent Through the Spirit to Reflect His Glory in New Covenant Ministry
- b. (3:12-18) God Grants Converts the Liberty Through the Spirit to See His Glory Reflected in Bold New Covenant Ministry

C. (4:1 – 5:10) Ministers of the New Covenant Should Never Lose Heart

1. (4:1-6) The Gospel Ministry (Proclaiming the Glory of Christ) is Too Precious to Give in to Discouragement)

- a. (4:1-2) Ministry Integrity Protects Against Discouragement
- b. (4:3-4) Lack of Results Do Not Detract from the Preciousness or the Effectiveness of the Gospel
- c. (4:5) It is Not About Us – The Focus of Gospel Ministry is the Proclamation of the Glory of Christ
- d. (4:6) God Can Make Things Happen in a Big Way Any Time He Wants – The Precious Stewardship of the Gospel Depends on Sovereign Enlightenment

2. (4:7-18) The Prospect of the Ministry – Future Resurrection and Reward Enable Us to Endure Present Physical Suffering in the Ministry Without Losing Heart

- a. (4:7-12) Showcasing Jesus Instead of Ourselves Requires Dying So Others May Live
- b. (4:13-15) Spreading Grace to the Glory of God Requires Proclaiming the Power of the Resurrection
- c. (4:16-18) Suffering Affliction With Perseverance Requires Focusing on the Eternal Weight of Glory

3. (5:1-10) The Longing For the Resurrection Body Motivates us to Focus on Spiritual Ministry Even at the Expense of Physical Suffering – Future Glory Inspires Courage and Commitment in Living to Please our Lord

- a. (5:1-5) Present Suffering Should Intensify the Longing for Future Glory (The Resurrection Body)
- b. (5:6-10) Two Results of This Longing for Future Glory

D. (5:11 – 6:13) Reconciled Relationships and Ministry Integrity Are the Keys to Intimate Partnership in the Gospel

1. (5:11 – 6:2) God's Work of Reconciliation in Christ Motivates Us to Pursue a Ministry of Reconciliation –

5 Motivations to Pursue Reconciliation:

- a. (5:11-13) Constrained by the Fear of God – Accountability Drives Our Ministry Urgency and Integrity
- b. (5:14-15) Constrained by the Love of Christ – Christ's Love Makes Us Minister Unselfishly
- c. (5:16-17) Constrained by a Radically New Perspective – We Evaluate Men from a Spiritual Perspective

- d. (5:18-21) Constrained by a Heart for Reconciliation – Our Changed Relationship with God is the Basis for Our Reconciliation with Fellow Christians
    - e. (6:1-2) Constrained by Urgency – Profitable Christian Service Depends Upon Immediate Reconciliation
  - 2. (6:1-13) Transparent Integrity of Ministry Removes All Obstacles to Partnership in the Gospel
    - a. (6:1-2) Seize the Opportunity for Partnership in the Gospel
    - b. (6:3-10) Commendable Conduct in the Ministry Paves the Way for Partnership in the Gospel
    - c. (6:11-13) Affectionate Open Dialogue Expects Reciprocation
- E. (6:14 – 7:16) Intimate Partnership in the Gospel Requires Avoiding Contamination and Repenting
- 1. (6:14 – 7:1) Avoid Intimate Partnerships with Unbelievers that Would Hinder You From Growing Closer to Your Heavenly Father and Manifesting Your Christian Distinctiveness
    - a. (6:14-16a) Separation is a No-Brainer
    - b. (6:16b-18) Cleanliness is Next to Godliness
    - c. (7:1) Holiness is Not Outdated
  - 2. (7:2-16) Spiritual Leaders Rejoice with Comfort and Confidence Over Genuine Repentance
    - a. (7:2-4) Introduction: The Anticipation of Genuine Repentance (Leading to Full Reconciliation) Evokes Deep Emotions of Confidence, Comfort and Joy
    - b. (7:5-7) Divine Comfort Relieves Intense Ministry Pressure
    - c. (7:8-10) Godly Sorrow Produces Genuine Repentance
    - d. (7:11-12) Genuine Repentance Can Be Recognized By Others
    - e. (7:13-16) Conclusion: Genuine Repentance Evokes Deep Emotions of Confidence, Comfort and Joy

### **III. (8:1 – 9:15) THE WEAKNESS OF POVERTY THRESHOLD – GENEROUS SACRIFICIAL GIVING –**

**POVERTY OF FELLOW BELIEVERS PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD’S GRACE AND SUFFICIENCY TO BE DISPLAYED IN GENEROUS CHRISTIAN GIVING (OFFERED FREELY FROM THE HEART AND ADMINISTERED WITH INTEGRITY)**

**(PAUL’S PLEA FOR PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF FELLOWSHIP IN GOD’S GRACIOUS WORK OF GENEROUS GIVING)**

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”*

(9:8)

- A. (8:1-15) Good Intentions in Giving Must Be Consummated According to Your Ability – Or Ideally Beyond Your Ability
1. (8:1-5) It is Commendable to Give Beyond Your Ability –  
Example of the Macedonians – Their Strong Desire to Give
  2. (8:6-11a) It is Commendable to Excel in This Gracious Work of Giving –  
Call to the Corinthians – Their Duty to Consummate Their Good Intentions
  3. (8:11b-15) The Rationale for Giving According to One’s Ability is the  
Principle of Equality (Not Shifting the Burden to Yourself) –Factors to Consider  
in Giving
- B. (8:16 – 9:5) Christian Giving Must Be Administered with Financial Integrity and Offered from Prepared Hearts
1. (8:16-24) Christian Giving Must Be Administered with Financial Integrity
  2. (9:1-5) Christian Giving Must Be Offered From Prepared Hearts
- C. (9:6-15) God Guarantees a Return on Spiritual Investments – the Promises of God Promote Generous Giving Which Binds Believers Together in Glorifying God
1. (9:6-11a) 5 Promises of God that Promote Generous Giving
  2. (9:11b-14) There are Immediate Returns on Spiritual Investments –  
Generous Giving Binds Believers Together in Glorifying God
  3. (9:15) Benediction: *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.”*

#### **IV. (10:1 – 13:10) THE WEAKNESS OF PAINFUL PERSONAL ATTACKS –**

#### **PAINFUL PERSONAL ATTACKS AGAINST SPIRITUAL LEADERS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY TO EASILY BE DISTINGUISHED FROM COUNTERFEIT AUTHORITY**

#### **(PAUL’S AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF HIS LEGITIMATE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY)**

*“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.”*

(13:10)

- A. (10:1-18) The Reality of Paul’s Authority –  
When Necessary, Spiritual Leaders Must Defend Their Legitimate Authority Against Misrepresentations by False Leaders
1. (10:1-6) His Readiness (and Reluctance) to Exercise His Authority –

Spiritual Leaders Carry a Big Stick --  
Reply to Charge of Weakness

2. (10:7-11) His Powerful Personal Presence –  
Consistent with His Strong Letters –  
Spiritual Leaders Should Never be Underestimated –  
Reply to Charge of Insincerity

3. (10:12-18) His Legitimate Sphere of Authority –  
Reply to Charge of Pride

B. (11:1-15) Marks of Apostleship #1: Humility in Ministry --  
Humility in Ministry (Demonstrated Here by Preaching the Truth Without Charge)  
Differentiates the True From the False Apostle

1. (11:1-4) Reality Check –  
Discernment Should Anchor Believers in Their Devotion to Christ

2. (11:5-12) Counterfeit Test –  
Humility in Ministry (Demonstrated Here by Preaching the Truth Without  
Charge) Cannot be Counterfeited

3. (11:13-15) Deceitful Disguise –  
False Apostles Make Every Effort to Look Like the Real Thing

C. (11:16 – 12:13) Marks of Apostleship #2: Weakness Fortified by Grace --  
Severe Pressures in the Ministry Make Weakness the Platform for Exalting Christ's  
Grace and Power

1. (11:16-21a) Introduction: Boasting in the Lord's Grace and Power Can Look  
Like Weakness and Foolishness to Others

2. (11:21b-33) Perseverance Through Severe Pressures in the Ministry Cannot  
be Explained Apart From the Grace and Power of Christ

3. (12:11-13) The Marks of Genuine Apostleship Should Have Made Such  
Boasting Unnecessary

D. (12:14 – 13:10) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority for the  
Purpose of Loving Edification (Including Discipline When Necessary)

1. (12:14-18) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority from Pure  
Motives –  
Motive of Love vs. Exploitation

2. (12:19-21) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority for Pastoral  
Purposes –  
Purpose of Edification and Correction vs. Promoting Self



3. (13:1-10) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority Through Severe Discipline When Necessary

**(13:11-14) FINAL CHARGE / GREETING / BENEDICTION**

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” (13:14)*

How can I embrace Weakness and Boast in it to Showcase God’s Power and Grace?

- 1) **Physical Suffering** for the cause of Christ – *Rejoice!*  
*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*  
We know Him as our **Deliverer** and our **Comforter**
- 2) **Personal Inadequacy** – *be made complete*  
We know Him as our Sufficiency; He makes up whatever we lack  
Makes us sufficient to be ministers of the New Covenant
- 3) **Poverty Threshold** – Generous Sacrificial Giving – *be like-minded*  
Share with your brothers and sisters in Christ as they have need
- 4) **Painful Attacks** – *live in peace*  
Or those in spiritual authority will be forced to exercise severe judgment

Precious Promise: *“and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”*

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” (13:14)*

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1: 1-11

TITLE: *SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT*

**I. (1:1-11) INTRODUCTION: PHYSICAL SUFFERING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD'S GRACE AND POWER TO BE DISPLAYED IN COMFORT AND DELIVERANCE**

**(PAUL'S APOSTOLIC CALLING AND PASTORAL HEART)**

*"that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (1:9)*

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT IN OUR OWN DESPERATE TRIALS EQUIPS US TO COMFORT OTHERS IN THEIR TRIALS**

**INRODUCTION:**

**Kent:** How does one begin a letter when relations between the parties have been strained? What does one say when mistreatment has occurred, and previous overtures at reconciliation have been brushed aside? This was Paul's situation as he undertook the writing of II Corinthians, for his love for them was deep, his investment in their spiritual lives was great, and the issues involved had far-reaching implications for them and their church.

**(:1-2) GREETING**

A. God-Appointed Authors

1. Apostolic Leadership: Paul

*"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"*

2. Brotherly Teamwork: Timothy

*"and Timothy our brother"*

B. God-Sanctified Recipients

*"to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia"*

1. *"church"* = "assembly" = called out ones

2. *"saints"* = set apart unto God

C. God-Enabled Resources / Salutation

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

**I. (:3-7) UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE:**

**THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT IN OUR OWN TRIALS EQUIPS US TO COMFORT OTHERS IN THEIR TRIALS**

A. (:3) The Source of All Comfort --

The Comfort is Sufficient Because of Who God Is

(Chiastic structure – A B B A)

1. Thanksgiving to God for Who He Is

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

2. Description of Who God Is

a. Merciful by Nature

*“the Father of Mercies”*

**Kent:** This concept was rooted in Old Testament revelation, and found frequent expression among those who trusted God (II Sam. 24:14; I Chron. 21:13; Neh. 9:31; Ps. 51:1; 103:4; Isa. 54:7; Dan. 9:9).

b. Unlimited Capacity for Comfort

*“and God of all Comfort”*

Conclusion: Our Trials can never exceed the Ability of God to Comfort

B. (:4) The Benefit of All Trials

1. God’s Comfort is Fully Known Through Trials

*“who comforts us in all our affliction”*

**Zeisler:** Affliction, however, has to do with pain or difficulty that is threatening-suffering in which no good outcome can be predicted. The root idea of the word before us is pressure; unrelenting pressure that, like a bulldozer, threatens to crush and sweep aside everything in its path.

2. God’s Comfort Equips Us to Minister to Others

*“so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

C. (:5) The Sufficiency of Comfort in Connection with Christ

1. Sufferings in Connection with Christ May Be Abundant

*“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance”*

2. But Comfort in Connection with Christ Will Always Be Sufficient

*“so also our comfort is abundant through Christ”*

D. (:6) The Perspective of Encouraging Others to Persevere Under Affliction

1. This Perspective Applies to Our Affliction

*“But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation”*

2. This Perspective Applies to Our Comfort

*“or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort”*

3. This Perspective Applies Because of the Commonality of All of Our Sufferings

*“which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer”*

- E. (:7) Confidence in the Certainty of Sufferings and the Sufficiency of God’s Comfort  
*“and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”*

**II. (:8-11) PERSONAL TESTIMONY:  
THE SEVERITY OF OUR TRIALS MAKES US DESPERATE FOR GOD’S  
DELIVERANCE**

A. (:8-10) Peril of Impending Death

1. (:8) Situation Seemed Hopeless

*“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life”*

Paul is such a positive person; for him to “despair even of life” the situation must have been pretty bad.

**Hughes:** . . . it is very much of a piece with the major theme of the opening portion of this epistle, namely, Paul’s vindication of his own integrity. . . An incapacitating experience of this kind explained much, and called for sympathy rather than censure.

2. (:9) Desperation Focuses Our Faith in the God of Resurrection Power

*“indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead”*

3. (:10) Deliverance is God’s Specialty

a. Testimony of Deliverance in the Past

*“who delivered us from so great a peril of death”*

b. Hope of Deliverance in the Present

*“and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope.”*

c. Confidence of Deliverance in the Future

*“And He will yet deliver us.”*

B. (:11) Power of Intercessory Prayer

*“you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Christ's relationship with His Heavenly Father secures for us a similar relationship with "*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.*"
- 2) Both our sufferings and our comfort are experienced in abundance in association with Christ (vs.5).
- 3) Christ is our pattern in bearing suffering and affliction for the purpose of ministering to others and securing our salvation and comfort (vs. 6).
- 4) The God who raised Christ from the dead is the same God working with the same power who personally functions as our Deliverer so that "*we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What severe trials or afflictions have you experienced and how have these equipped you to minister to others? Have any of these painful experiences had a special connection to your testimony to Christ?
- 2) Do we demonstrate mercy in our dealings with others that corresponds to how God has demonstrated His mercy towards us?
- 3) Why does God place us in situations that are beyond our natural ability to cope? Why does He make us so desperate?
- 4) Is our hope and confidence firmly anchored in the *Father of mercies and God of all comfort*?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Gromacki:** Re 1:7 – Paul believed that what God had done for him He would do for others. He had a steadfast "hope," a firm conviction that the Corinthians would have victory through their sufferings. He knew that they would be "partakers" of suffering in the will of God along with Christ and Paul. With equal confidence, he knew that they would also share in the "consolation." Biblical consolation involves more than just feeling sorry for someone who is in difficulty; it connotes active encouragement and

help to see the person through his trouble. God never promised to keep us out of the furnace of trials. Rather, He has pledged to be with us in the fire and lead us out of the oppressive flames. . . No believer is alone in hard times; God is there beside him.

**Barclay:** The most extraordinary thing about this passage is that we have no information at all about this terrible experience which Paul went through at Ephesus. Something happened to him which was almost beyond bearing. . . But Paul saw that the terrifying experience he had gone through had had one tremendous use – it had driven him back to God. It had demonstrated to him his utter dependence on God. The Arabs have a proverb, “All sunshine makes a desert.” The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence. It makes us think that we are well able to handle life alone. For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity ten thousand rise to Him in days of adversity. . . The outcome of this was that Paul had an unshakable confidence in God. He knew now beyond all argument what God could do for him.

**Hughes:** Though the Apostle’s hope is firmly fixed on God, yet he also relies on the prayers of fellow-believers on his behalf, especially of those to whom, like the Corinthians, his ministry of the Gospel has closely linked him. Their supplications play an important role in his expectation of deliverance. Prayer is indeed a mystery, but it is stressed over and over again in the New Testament as a vital prerequisite for the release and experience of God’s power. It is true that it is *God* who delivers, and that God stands in no need of human prayers before He can act on behalf of His afflicted servants. Yet there is the manward as well as the Godward aspect of such deliverance, and the manward side is summed up in the duty of Christians to intercede in prayer for their fellow-believers who are enduring affliction. But prayer is not a second “force,” in competition with or supplementary to divine grace, for its function and very attitude is precisely to emphasize the utter dependence and resourcelessness of man and the absolute sovereignty of the Father of mercies. In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. Thus the duty of prayer is not a modification of God’s power, but a glorification of it.

**Stedman:** 4 Reasons why believers experience sufferings:

1) First, it hurts because that is the way you discover what God can do. How are you ever going to find the comfort of God, the strengthening of God, if you are not under any pressure or stress? It takes that to discover what God can do, and God will keep on sending it until you begin to understand that, and begin to count on him, and find the release from within that he provides. Do not try to run from it -- like everybody else is doing. Face up to it, and do as Paul does, by seeing these as opportunities to understand and experience anew the strengthening of God. . .

2) Your sufferings are not sent for you so much as they are for someone who is watching you, and seeing how you handle the pressure that you are going through. . .

3) One of the major reasons God sends us suffering is to break the stubborn spirit of self-will within us that insists on trying to work it all out by our own resources, or run

to some other human resource, or in some way refuse to acknowledge that we need divine help. . .

4) Once again, suffering is sent to us to show us that we are not individuals living all alone in life. We are members of a family, we are members of a Body, and we need each other. When you have a difficulty or a trial, share it with others so that they can pray with you, for many prayers will bring great deliverance. . .

**Zeisler:** The outcome of this, says Paul, is "patient endurance" (v.6) of the same sufferings we suffer. The result of comforting is that one is made capable of enduring when the pressure increases, when the weight descends with all of its threatening qualities. That is what the word "comfort" means, by the way. When we think of being comforted, we think of being patted on the head, being given a cheerful word, etc. But this is not what Paul means by that word. The word "fortify" conveys a much clearer idea of what he is referring to. He is talking about being fortified, strengthened, given power to endure our afflictions. When you go hiking in the mountains, you will notice that your bag of potato chips (essential trail food), which has been packed at a lower altitude will bulge out almost to bursting point because there is less air pressure at the higher elevation. The reverse would also be true. If the bag was packed at altitude, it would collapse at sea level because the pressures are unequal. In spiritual terms, fortification, comforting, makes us equal to the pressure of affliction. God is supplying us with the strength to bear up under it.

**Deffinbaugh:** Those who experience the sufficiency of God in times of suffering do not resent their affliction but treasure it as God's appointed means of drawing men close to Him, the "Father of mercies." Asaph learned this lesson, as did Job. Peter, who bristled at the mere mention of suffering by our Lord, wrote his first epistle on the subject, telling his readers that those who suffered for Christ's sake were blessed (1 Peter 4). Paul finds his former status and success as an unbelieving Jewish leader are "dung," but his sufferings in Christ are a precious treasure (Philippians 3:1-16). James instructs us to "Consider it all joy, . . . when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2). Suffering is intended to draw us near to the heart of God. And so it is with Paul, who in the midst of unbelievable suffering, writes these introductory words to his epistle praising God for His mercies and comfort in the midst of his trials and tribulations. . .

Suffering for the sake of Christ is not a curse but a blessing, if we respond as Paul does and as many other saints of old have done. Suffering is a stewardship, which we may misuse and misappropriate, or which we may utilize for our good and God's glory. Suffering draws us closer to God and closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Suffering always comes with the promise of divine comfort and thus provides us with the fuel for worship and praise. . .

What a difference our Lord brings about regarding our perspective on suffering. The world abhors the thought of suffering and cannot imagine how a loving God can allow it. God uses suffering to teach us how evil sin is and how devastating its consequences. He used the suffering of our Savior to forgive our sins. He continues to employ

suffering to draw us closer to Him and to one another. Suffering for Christ's sake is not an enemy but a friend. Suffering is not something we need to seek, but it is something we should accept, knowing it comes from our Heavenly Father, who is the "Father of mercies," and the "God of all comfort."



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1: 12-14

TITLE: INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY

**II. (1:12 – 7:13) PERSONAL INADEQUACY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY TO BE DISPLAYED IN MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS (PAUL’S CONFIDENCE IN HIS MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND HIS COMMITMENT TO RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS)**

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (4:7)*

**BIG IDEA:**

**INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY LEADS TO THE TESTIMONY OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Key passage in Paul’s defense against attacks on his integrity as a minister of the Gospel. (cf. my thesis from college on Sincerity in the writings of John Bunyan)

**I. (:12) CONFIDENCE OF INTEGRITY -- HE HAS BEEN SINCERE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH THEM**

A. The Value of a Good Conscience

*“For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience”*

**Guzik:** In this section, Paul defends himself against the accusation that he is fickle and unreliable. Here, he simply states that he has a clear conscience before God, and trusts that the Corinthian Christians will understand.

B. The Vital Components of Integrity of Ministry

1. Looked at Positively

a. *“in holiness”*

b. *“and godly sincerity”*

2. Looked at in Contrast

a. *“not in fleshly wisdom”*

b. *“but in the grace of God”*

C. The Fishbowl of Spiritual Ministry

1. On Display Before the World

*“we have conducted ourselves in the world”*

2. Critically Examined By the Church  
*“and especially toward you”*

**II. (:13-14) TRANSPARENCY OF INTEGRITY --  
THE MORE THEY KNOW HIM, THE MORE THEY WILL SEE HIS  
SINCERITY**

A. (:13) Open Book

*“For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end.”*

B. (:14) Mutual Appreciation/ Boasting

*“just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) Carrying out ministry (as well as living our whole life) *“in the grace of God”* requires that we repudiate any confidence in the flesh (in our own wisdom and strength and righteousness) and fall completely at the foot of the cross where we see the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

2) The integrity of Christ during His earthly ministry is the best example of what Paul is testifying to here: look at His holiness, His godly sincerity, His avoidance of fleshly wisdom as He wrestled with Satan in the desert, the testimony of His conscience when unjustly accused, the consistency and transparency of His life lived out in truly a fishbowl environment.

3) The goal of Christian ministry is to disciple others ... to grow them up into Christlikeness so that both the discipler and the disciple end up looking more like the Master. As this is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit there will be cause *to be proud* when we stand together before our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly we do not want there to be any unresolved problems of reconciliation between our Christian brothers.

4) The *“day of our Lord Jesus Christ”* is not here yet, but is fast approaching. Any suffering or affliction on account of the gospel is very brief. There is an urgency to conduct our ministry in a manner that will be applauded by Jesus Christ Himself. At that day everything (including our motives in ministry) will be made manifest before Him who knows us all intimately right now.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When we are misunderstood, do we immediately react defensively or do we allow God to search our conscience to see if there is any area where we have indeed acted improperly? Is seeking a clear conscience before God our first step in dealing with the situation?

2) In what way is "*fleshly wisdom*" contrasted with "*the grace of God*"? How can we tell which one we are relying on as we minister for Christ?

3) What about our life is not consistent with who we profess to be before others? How can we become more transparent before others and prove to be authentic in our Christianity?

4) In what sense can we boast in one another in the Lord?

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### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** He sees no deviation from his normal pattern of behavior. He consistently seeks to be an open, out-front person who is not trying to hide anything, who is not trying to resort to guile or what he calls "fleshly wisdom," manipulating, here. He has done something that has, apparently, offended some of these Corinthians, but he wants them to know that, as far as his standing before God is concerned, his conscience is clear. Then, he hopes to make them understand.

**Deffinbaugh:** False teachers, especially those who pride themselves for their fleshly wisdom, always have a camouflaged message. They never really mean what they say. They speak of the deity of Christ, but it is not a fully divine Christ of which they speak. It may well be a Christ who is as god-like as we can become. They speak of resurrection, but not a physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. They speak of angels and salvation and eternal life, but they mean something far different from what the Bible teaches. They not only deceive with their own words, they also twist the very words of Scripture (see 2 Peter 3:16). Paul's letters are meant to be taken at face value. Paul obviously lays a foundation here for arguments yet to be given. Some seem to accuse Paul of saying one thing and meaning another, in particular as it pertains to his coming to Corinth.

Paul's boasting has a present dimension, which is the result of his clear conscience regarding his conduct in the world and among the saints. But he also speaks of a boasting that is future. Paul speaks clearly and simply, and many of the Corinthians understand him. He hopes they continue to understand in this way until the end (verse

13). If they do, they will understand that in the “day of our Lord Jesus,” the day of judgment when He returns to establish His kingdom, Paul’s boasting will be in them, just as their boasting will be in him.

This sends a strong message to those who are ashamed of Paul and those with him, those who take pride in leaders who operate only in accordance with fleshly wisdom. Do some pride themselves (boast) because of such leaders? They will not boast in the “day of the Lord!” Do some proudly identify with Paul and the gospel he preaches? They will most certainly boast in him in the “day of the Lord.” And he will boast in them. Here, as elsewhere, Paul’s reward is people, those whose spiritual life and growth he has had a hand in bringing to pass.

**Willmouth:** Misunderstandings among Christians are often very difficult to untangle. They often start out as a small snowball that begins to roll down hill, and the longer it rolls the bigger it gets. What starts out as something that was clean and white, ends up large, uneven and full of dirt by the time it stops. Most misunderstandings, if handled properly by both the accused and those doing the accusing, never need to amount to anything if we would take the time to talk to one another. The Corinthians were allowing themselves to be caught up into lies and misunderstandings about Paul that were distracting them from serving the Lord as they should. In our passage today, we see how we should answer criticism that comes our way in ministry.

**Geoff Thomas:** This is the great lesson the apostle wants the Corinthian congregation to learn, and our own church must have a teachable spirit and learn it too. Paul’s critics had bad-mouthed him to the Corinthian church. He had not returned to Greece - as his plans had been, and because of that absence they were condemning him as a vacillator, saying one thing and doing another. It was so terribly obvious for them - such a simple matter. He was absent when he said he would be present, and because of that they attack the whole man. They condemn him for that, and Paul is warning the Corinthians about making superficial judgments.

**Hughes:** No man can be called upright unless his uprightness embraces every aspect of his activity. Honour and sincerity relate to the whole of life, not to a part of it. And so it is with Paul: the integrity of his character informs his conduct in its entirety. It extends therefore to his letter-writing; and it has become necessary for him to refer to this because his detractors in Corinth had been alleging that his letters were documents of insincerity, that he wrote one thing and meant another, that the man who was so impressive in his letters showed up very differently when present in person ... If the Corinthians are honest with themselves, they must acknowledge from first-hand observance that his conduct in their city was marked by transparent genuineness: well, so it is also with his letters; they can trust the plain meaning of what they read; there is no *double entendre*, no subtle misdirection. What they read from him is not incompatible with what they know with certainty about him.

**Gromacki:** Paul had a clear conscience. He could testify to the truthfulness of the claims that he was going to make about himself. First, his life was marked by

“*simplicity*.” This word (*aploteti*) indicates single-minded purpose. Paul lived for the glory of God and for the service of others. Second, he manifested “*godly sincerity*.” The word for “*sincerity*” (*eilikrineia*) literally means “judged by the sun.” Ancient jars and vases were examined for disguised cracks by holding them up against the rays of the sun. Paul knew that God could not detect flaws in his spiritual motivation. Men can fool other men, but they cannot fool God.

**Kent:** When we stand before Christ and give account of our deeds at His tribunal (5:10) all issues will be made plain. At that time Paul expects the presence of the Corinthian believers to provide him with abundant cause for glorying, for they were the fruit of his labors. Likewise the loyal Corinthians who had come to know him fully had found him to be a real cause for glorying, for he had labored faithfully among them and even now was deeply involved in promoting their welfare.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1:15 – 2:4

TITLE: *WHEN IS IT OK TO CHANGE YOUR MIND?*

**BIG IDEA:**

**A CHANGE OF PLANS DOES NOT NECESSARILY COMPROMISE ONE'S SINCERITY AND COMMITMENT**

**I. (1:15-16) PAUL MADE PLANS TO VISIT CORINTH**

A. (:15a) Good Intentions

*“And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you*

B. (:15b-16) Mutual Benefit

1. Paul Blessing the Corinthians

*“that you might twice receive a blessing.”*

a. On the Way to Macedonia

*“that is, to pass your way into Macedonia”*

b. On the Return Trip Back from Macedonia

*“and again from Macedonia to come to you”*

2. Paul Receiving Blessing From the Corinthians

*“and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea”*

**II. (1:17-22) HE MADE THESE PLANS WITH FULL INTEGRITY OF COMMITMENT**

-- the commitment which characterizes God, who fulfills all His promises

A. (:17-18) Paul's Word of Commitment Corresponds to the Faithfulness of God

1. No Problem of Indecision

*“Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?”*

2. No Problem of Contradiction

*“Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?”*

3. True to His Word

*“But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.”*

**Hughes**: Paul finds it incredible that any at Corinth could really have thought that a change in plan pointed to a change in character.

B. (:19-20) Christ Models the Integrity of Commitment

1. (:19) Christ is the Ultimate Standard for Integrity of Commitment

*“For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us – by me and Silvanus and Timothy – was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.”*

No vacillation / no Indecision / no Confusion / no Contradiction

**Hughes:** Nothing could be more incongruous than to suspect of insincerity the Apostle whose entire being was dedicated to the service and proclamation of Him who is the Truth and the Same yesterday, today, and for ever. The veracity of the Christ, by faith in whom, in accordance with the word of God, their lives had been completely transformed, was evidence conclusive to them of the veracity of him who had endured so much in order to bring the message to them.

2. (:20) Christ Fulfills All of God’s Promises

*“For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”*

C. (:21-22) The Rest of the Godhead Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

1. (:21) God the Father Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

*“Now He who established us with you in Christ and anointed us is God.”*

2. (:22) God the Spirit Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

*“who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”*

**III. (1:23 – 2:4) HE CHOSE TO CHANGE HIS PLANS – TO SPARE THEM APOSTOLIC DISCIPLINE**

A. (1:23 – 2:2) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for the Corinthians and for Paul

1. (:23-24) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for the Corinthians

a. (:23) Motive of Mercy (in not coming to discipline)

*“But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”*

b. (:24) Humility of Mutuality (rather than leadership by lordship)

*“Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.”*

2. (2:1-2) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for Paul

a. (:1) Discipline is an Occasion for Sorrow

*“But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.”*

b. (:2) The Sorrow is Mutual

*“For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?”*

B. (2:3-4) Loving Pastoral Exhortation Points the Way Towards Joy Instead of Sorrow  
(By giving them time to deal with their problems, Paul could make a joyful visit)

1. (:3) Pastoral Exhortation Based on Confidence of Follow Through

*“And this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all.”*

2. (:4) Pastoral Exhortation Flowing out of a Concerned Heart of Love

*“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.”*

**Hughes:** Genuine love always experiences profound grief when it perceives those who are loved falling into error and disloyalty; it always manifests itself in deep concern for their best and highest interests. By writing, rather than immediately coming to them in person with a rod, he lovingly afforded them an opportunity for self-examination, repentance, and reformation.

**Gromacki:** The usage of the two words of emotion plus the adjective “*much*” reveal that the apostle was not cold and heartless. Rather, the source . . . of the epistle was a compassionate, loving concern.

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### PREACHING CHRIST:

1) The Body of Christ has been designed to function in such a way that every time we are together corporately there is the expectation of mutual blessing – both the giving and receiving of blessing. This is due to our interdependency on what role each member in the body contributes. Christ as the Head of His body orchestrates the flow of these blessings.

2) Verse 19 shows that Christ Jesus as the Son of God was the focus of all of Paul’s preaching along with that of the other apostles and their delegates.

3) Christ is the ultimate standard for integrity of commitment.

4) All of the precious promises of God find their fulfillment in Christ who demonstrates the faithfulness of God to keep His Word.

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## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection between the faithfulness of God to His promises and our ability to make and keep commitments with integrity and sincerity?
- 2) Is my life characterized by overplanning or underplanning? Do I think that it is somehow unspiritual to make long range plans and set goals? Am I sensitive to how God might change my plans and cause me to go in another direction?
- 3) Why did Paul feel justified in delaying apostolic discipline in this case? How did he expect the Corinthians to deal with the problem they were facing?
- 4) How should faith contribute to joy?

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## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** Why did Paul change his plan? That is what the Corinthians wanted to know. Why did he say he was going to come directly to Corinth, and would come twice to the city, but instead did not come directly -- he went by way of Macedonia -- and he came only once? Well, Paul has been saying because the Spirit of God opened his eyes to see factors in the situation that made him change his mind. He could see that the great promises of blessing that God had for this church at Corinth would only be fulfilled if he did not come directly to Corinth, but instead went to Macedonia and waited for Titus there. So, convinced of the Spirit, and in obedience to what he saw of the Spirit's teaching in this regard, with a clear conscience, Paul changed his original plan and went instead to Macedonia instead of Corinth.

Two Reasons:

- 1) Because he wanted to spare them . . .

What he is saying is, he refrained from coming in order to preserve their freedom to act only as they were convinced the Lord wanted them to act, and not because he said so. Now this is a very important principle, because here the apostle is challenging one of the widespread misunderstandings in the church in our day. Paul says, "Look, I am not your boss. If I had come to Corinth the way I had originally planned, after having already paid you a painful visit, it's very likely that my powerful personality, my strong will, my position as a respected apostle would have put such pressure upon you that you would have obeyed me, but not out of conviction that was what the Lord wanted you to do. So I did not come, in order that you might preserve freedom to do what God wants, not what I want." If he had come he would have given them the impression that he had authority over them. But that is not true, he says, "We are not lords over your faith. We are not your boss. We have no authority to tell you what to do or what to say or how to act, but rather" (in a beautiful phrase he puts it), "we are helpers of your joy." That is wonderful, isn't it? Paul sees himself as a fellow worker, standing alongside them,

helping them to understand what God wants so they would enter into the joy of the Lord. But he is not their boss.

One of the major problems the church is facing in our day is the widespread tendency to misunderstand the nature of authority and leadership within the church, the practice of having somebody who is regarded as the ultimate boss, and everybody has to get directions and permission from him to do anything. I run into this everywhere. I have often said that if we Protestants are right when we say to the Catholics that God never intended to have one man, a pope, over the whole church, it is no improvement to have one in every church.

2) Because the Spirit led him to see that he had already caused pain enough by his letters and his painful visit . . .

Paul is like a skillful surgeon. The surgeon has to cut people, but a good surgeon cuts only as much as he has to. He derives no joy out of cutting people's bodies open to remove the tumor, or the cancer, or whatever. As soon as that is done, and thoroughly done, he stops cutting, because he does not like to create pain.

**Deffinbaugh:** We should first note that Paul's plans to visit Corinth are not complete or set in stone, and they are contingent upon the Lord's will. Paul tells the Corinthians what he hopes to do, not what he guarantees he will do. Paul's journeys described in Acts demonstrate that God's plans sometimes cause Paul to modify or set aside his own (see Acts 16:6-10). If the Corinthians dare to charge Paul with breaking his promise, they simply need to reread his words to discover that he made no firm promises. He speaks to them about what he desires to do, and generally about what he will do, if it is the Lord's will (see also Acts 18:21). . .

It teaches us that all of God's promises are sure, for they have been accomplished in Christ. God keeps His word, and so those who trust in Him and serve Him must also keep their word. They dare not make promises they fail to keep, for in so doing, they misrepresent the God who is ever faithful to fulfill all His promises. If we are obliged to keep all of our promises, we must certainly be cautious with regard to the promises and commitments we make. We must never make commitments we do not intend to keep or which we may not be able to keep. Those commitments we do make we should surely keep, even at great personal sacrifice. *"In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change"* (Psalm 15:4).

On the one hand, we need to be very careful about presumptuously making plans in a way that presumes upon God and upon the future:

13 Come now, you who say, *"Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit"* (James 4:13).

Yet we should also be on guard that we are not rigid about the plans we make and refuse to change our course when it becomes obvious this best serves others. In the

story of the Good Samaritan, no doubt the priest and the Levite had plans and stopping to help the wounded man forced them to set aside those plans. Many times I have found that I missed opportunities to minister to others because I had my own plan and I did not wish to change. Paul reminds us that plans may very well change out of love. I am suggesting that we may be unwilling to change our plans out of a lack of love for others and a selfish concern for ourselves.

**Copeland:** REASON FOR THE DELAYED VISIT (23-24)

1. To spare them, as God can confirm (23)
2. This is not to suggest an attitude of domination over them, for he views himself as one working for their joy, and he acknowledges that they stand on the basis of their faith (24)

**Willmouth:** Paul's real reasons for changing his plans (1:23-2:4, 12-13).

It was out of his consideration for the Corinthian church (1:23-2:4).

1) There was probably also the accusation that Paul had shown himself to be a spiritual dictator who tried to dominate his converts and their faith and did not hesitate to cause them pain.

2) In answering this charge, Paul solemnly invokes the God who is faithful (v23).

3) Paul makes it clear that he wanted to spare the Corinthians and himself further pain that he refrained from returning to Corinth from Ephesus after the so-called "painful visit." (v.24; 2:1-4).

A) Paul wasn't some tyrannical overlord, seeking to intimidate and domineer in matters of faith and conduct.

B) An apostle was obligated to serve his converts; he had no right to dominate them.

- It was his privilege to work with them to secure their "joy in the faith" (Philippians 1:25), not to lord it over them by causing them unnecessary pain.

- Paul wasn't motivated by power, but by the love he had for the brethren.

**Guzik:** "Anointed us . . . sealed us . . . a deposit:?" Paul refers to three aspects of the Holy Spirit's work within us.

i. *Has anointed us:* The only other place where the New Testament speaks about anointing is in 1 John 2:20 and 27. Every use speaks of an anointing which is common to all believers, not a special anointing for a few Christian superstars. The idea behind anointed is that we are prepared and empowered for service. The fact that we are

anointed means that we share something with the prophets, priests, and kings of the Old Testament, who were also anointed ones.

ii. *Sealed us*: In the ancient world, a seal was used to identify and to protect. If something was sealed, everyone knew who it belonged to (the seal had an insignia), and the seal prevented anyone else from tampering with the item. The Holy Spirit is upon us to identify us and to protect us.

iii. *A deposit*: The word deposit is the word for a down payment. We have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the fullness of what God will do. The Holy Spirit is just a pledge of greater things to come. As Christians, God has purchased us on the lay-away plan, and has given us an impressive down payment. He won't walk away from the final payment, because He has so much invested already!

**Harris**: His detractors were shrewd enough to convert the charge into one of capricious vacillation, levity of character (*elaphria*, translated "lightly"). His arbitrary changing of travel plans, they urged, was motivated purely by self-interest, with no concern for broken promises or for needs at Corinth. He made his plans on mere impulse like a worldly man, according to the mood of the moment, so that he could say, "yes, yes" one day and "No, no" the next day, or "Yes" at one moment and "No" immediately afterwards, with the result that he seemed to be saying both "Yes" and "No" in the same breath. That Paul is actually quoting the accusation of certain Corinthians seems

indicated by his use of the definite article with *elaphria* ("fickleness") and with the twice-stated (cf. Matt 5:37) *nai* ("yes") and *ou* ("no") (v. 17).

**Gromacki**: Paul lived by conviction, not by doubt . . . Paul was single minded in purpose and action. He stated his positive assurance in three areas.

*First*, he knew that what he preached about Christ was true (1:19) . . .

*Second*, he knew that the "promises of God" were true (1:20) . . .

*Third*, he knew that God had worked in his life (1:21-22).

**Barclay**: Paul used severity and rebuke very unwillingly. He only used them when he was driven to use them and when there was nothing else left to do. . . When Paul did rebuke he did it in love. He never in all his life spoke merely to hurt. There can be a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince at a sharp and a cruel word. But Paul was not like that. He never rebuked to cause pain; he always rebuked to restore joy. . . When Paul rebuked, the last thing he wanted was to domineer. . . Finally, for all his reluctance to rebuke, for all his desire to see the best in others, for all the love that was in his heart, Paul nonetheless will and does rebuke when rebuke becomes necessary. He does not want to do it but he will not shrink from it when it becomes imperative.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:5-13

TITLE: THE GOAL OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE GOAL OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION – NOT EXCESSIVE PUNISHMENT**

**I. (2:5-6) ENOUGH IS ENOUGH -- WARNING AGAINST OVER-PUNISHING**

A. (:5) There Has Already Been Sufficient Sorrow (difficult verse to exegete)

1. To the Apostle Paul

*“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me”*

i.e. not to me alone; not just to me

Sin inevitably causes sorrow ... whether repented of or not

2. To the Majority of the Corinthian Church

*“but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”*

Let's not compound the situation by adding sorrow upon sorrow . . .

Who is the individual who had sinned, caused such sorrow, had repented and now was deserving of forgiveness and restoration?

- older commentators assumed it was the person committing incest in 1 Cor. 5

- but context here seems to indicate it was some sort of ringleader that had risen up against the authority of Paul or of his missionary team

B. (:6) There Has Already Been Sufficient Punishment

*“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.”*

Shows that the entire church had not gone along with the prescription of punishment which Paul had laid out in his severe letter (written between first and second Corinthians and subsequently lost)

**Barclay:** Punishment should encourage and not discourage. It should aim at producing, not the despair which abandons the struggle of goodness, but the new view which inspires to a greater and a more successful struggle. In the last analysis, this can only happen, when we make it clear that, even when we are punishing a person, we still believe in him.

**II. (2:7-9) FORGIVE AND RESTORE -- INSTRUCTION REGARDING HOW TO FORGIVE AND REAFFIRM LOVE**

A. (:7) The Need for Forgiveness and Restoration

*“so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”*

- B. (:8) The Exhortation to Forgiveness and Restoration  
*“Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”*
- C. (:9) The Test of Forgiveness and Restoration = Test of Obedience  
*“For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.”*

### **III. (2:10-11) FORGIVENESS PROTECTS AGAINST BITTERNESS -- THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL**

(Mercy triumphs over Vengeance)

- A. (:10) Forgiveness Lies at the Heart of Christian Relationships  
*“But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also, for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”*

**Tasker:** He forgives the offender, however, not merely as a personal act, but because such forgiveness is necessary for the welfare of the Corinthian church, whose apostle he has been called to be.

- B. (:11) Satan Uses Bitterness to Drive a Wedge Between Believers  
*“In order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”*

**Guzik:** *Take advantage* (the Greek word *pleonekteo*) is used in four other verses in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 7:2, 12:17-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:6). It has the idea of cheating someone out of something that belongs to them. When we are ignorant of Satan’s strategies, he is able to take things from us that belong to us in Jesus, things like peace, joy, fellowship, a sense of forgiveness, and victory.

### **IV. (2:12-13) RECONCILIATION TAKES PRIORITY OVER MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY – THE PASTORAL HEART OF THE APOSTLE PAUL**

- A. (:12) An Open Door is Not Always the Right Door  
*“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,”*

**Hughes:** How long he remained in Troas he does not say, but it was sufficiently long for him to discover that there was an open door for the evangelical message. This door of opportunity was apparently still open on his return to Troas the following spring, as the incident recounted in Acts 20:6-12 indicates.

- B. (:13) A Troubled Spirit Must Always be Addressed  
*“I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”*

**Kent:** The reason for this restlessness was that Titus had not arrived at Troas. Apparently Titus was the associate who had been sent to Corinth with the severe letter, and Paul had hoped for an early return with good news from the church. Presumably Paul and Titus had planned to meet at Troas. . .

Paul could wait for Titus no longer. His restless spirit drove him to Macedonia, with the plan of encountering Titus on the way. His chief reason for wanting to find Titus was to hear recent news from Corinth. Not even the open door at Troas could entice Paul from his deep desire to meet the needs at Corinth. Surely there was no basis for suspecting his motives or his love for the Corinthians.

**Gromacki:** Thus, Paul ended this section as he began, by intimately expressing his concern. He wanted the church to know how he really felt about them and how those feelings affected his travel plans and treatment of the offender.

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### PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Forgiveness and Restoration lie at the heart of the ministry of Christ. He came to pay the ultimate price so that reconciliation might be accomplished. We are out of bounds if we are seeking punishment or revenge on those who have wronged us. Mercy must always triumph over judgment in our personal relationships.
- 2) In fact Christ is looking on as a witness, motivating us to respond to others with the same spirit of forgiveness and restoration that He has demonstrated to us (vs. 10).
- 3) What drove Paul relentlessly was the burden of bringing the message of the gospel of Christ to people who had never heard the good news before (vs. 12).
- 4) The Lord places a priority on relationships over r service.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does church discipline make us *sorrowful* or does it inflate our pride as we compare ourselves and judge ourselves to be more spiritual?
- 2) What are the practical steps involved in *reaffirming love* for someone?
- 3) Is there anyone to whom we should be extending *forgiveness* but have been reluctant to do so?



4) What are the *schemes* that Satan likes to use to take advantage of us? How do we protect ourselves?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Gromacki:** Their forgiveness was to disclose Paul's forgiveness, which in turn revealed the graciousness of Christ's forgiveness. Forgiveness is part of God's essence; He stands ready to forgive even before He Has been asked to forgive. A forgiving spirit does not keep count of the times that a person has sinned against him.

**Harris:** Verse 10 affords perhaps the clearest evidence that the offense was basically a personal act of effrontery against Paul or possibly his acknowledged or delegated representative. There was need for Paul's personal forgiveness, although, in deference to the penitent offender's feelings, he discounts the personal pain he himself experienced (v. 5) and deliberately understates the seriousness of the offense (v.10) lest anyone imagine that he considered himself virtuous in granting forgiveness so readily. All this would be inappropriate if he were describing a sin of incest (1 Cor 5).

The circumstances and purpose of Paul's forgiveness are then defined (vv. 10b, 11). First, forgiveness was granted "*in the sight of Christ,*" as Christ looked on as a witness and approved – Christ, who taught that willingness to forgive one's brother was a precondition for the receipt of divine forgiveness (Matt 5:12, 14, 15; 18:23-35). And in Colossians 3:13 (cf. Eph 4:32) Paul grounds the Christian obligation to forgive others on the Christian experience of God's forgiveness in Christ. Moreover, forgiveness was granted for the welfare of the Corinthians ("*for your sake*"), that is, to preserve unity and to relieve them of their patent embarrassment at not having acted against the offender before Paul wrote to them. They keenly felt their disloyalty to Paul (7:7, 11).

**Lenski:** This shows that each congregation is autonomous but that it is ever under Christ when it is exercising its autonomy. Expulsion and reinstatement, the ban and absolution are powers conveyed to the congregation by Christ (Matt. 18:17). Paul treats the congregation accordingly.

**Deffinbaugh:** If I understand Paul correctly, there is an important lesson for us to learn here from his example. Someone has sinned against Paul, and the church has taken disciplinary action against that person. The man has repented, but the church has not forgiven him and received him back into fellowship. Paul now mentions this situation in the context of his prolonged absence from Corinth. I believe it is Paul's desire to forgive this man and be reconciled to him, but first the church must acknowledge his repentance and reverse their disciplinary action. If Paul were to return before the church restored this man, he would not be free to have fellowship with him because he would be bound by the church's disciplinary actions against the man. When the church does restore the man, Paul can come and be reconciled and thus find joy and comfort in his reunion with him. The church must first act to restore him and then Paul can have a sweet reunion with him, as well as with the rest of the church.



**Stedman:** The sign that you really see that what you did was wrong is that you begin to see the hurt that you have caused by it; and it creates a sense of sorrow, of remorse that you have been the instrument by which many have been damaged in their faith or in their feelings. Therefore, the mark of true repentance is sorrow. I know that we are being taught oftentimes today that if you do something wrong, all you have to do is go and say to somebody, "Yes, I did that," then you instantly demand, in a sense, forgiveness. Well, it is true that the other person should forgive right away, but the mark that shows him that you are really repentant is that, accompanying that admission of guilt, is a sense of sorrow because of the hurt that has been caused. This is a quite different spirit than what we see at times today where people get angry if they are not forgiven instantly.

The mark of genuine repentance is that you do not really believe anybody ought to forgive you, that what you have done is hurtful, and you do not think you deserve forgiveness. Therefore, forgiveness is something that is always freely extended to someone who does not feel that he deserves it; and that is what is clear here

#### Outline: Discipline and Restoration

- I. The limits of discipline, 5-8
  - A. The extent of hurt, 5
  - B. The dimensions of discipline, 6
  - C. The sign of repentance, 7
  - D. The appropriate response, 8
  
- II. The elements of restoration, 9-11
  - A. Faithful confrontation, 9
  - B. Ready forgiveness, 10
  - C. Spiritual awareness, 11

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

TITLE: *HOW TO ALWAYS BE A WINNER WITHOUT ALWAYS WINNING SOULS*

**BIG IDEA:**

**GOD GUARANTEES VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST**

**INTRODUCTION:**

2:12-13 was a Transition passage

- wrapped up the issue of the explanation of Paul's change of plans and his heart for the Corinthian church
- introduced the forward advance of the New Covenant Gospel Ministry

**I. (2:14-16a) THE CONSEQUENCES (OUTCOME) OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY -- VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST DOES NOT DEPEND ON POSITIVE RESPONSES**

The Roman Triumph pictures our victory in proclaiming Christ

- A. God is always victorious (this truth is assumed)
- B. God always leads us in His triumph  
*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph"*
- C. This triumph is in vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ  
*"in Christ"*
- D. We are channels for the revelation of Christ to others in every place  
*"and manifests through us . . . in every place"*
- E. (Expansion of the imagery) -- We are a fragrance of Christ, not merely channels of that fragrance  
*"the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him"*
- F. God always appreciates this fragrance  
*"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God"*
- G. Those who are being saved respond positively  
*"among those who are being saved"*
- H. Those who are perishing respond negatively  
*"and among those who are perishing"*
- I. The fragrance is the same in all cases -- it has a different effect on different people

*“to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.”*

J. The victory is the same in all cases -- it is God's victory in which we share (He is accomplishing His sovereign purposes)

## **II. (2:16b-17) THE CONFIDENCE (SUFFICIENCY) OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY – VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST DOES DEPEND ON PERSONAL FAITHFULNESS**

Question: *Who is sufficient for these things?*

Answer: Those, such as the apostles, who demonstrate faithfulness in the following areas:

A. Faithfulness to the message

*“For we are not like many, peddling the word of God”*

B. Faithfulness to one's own conscience

*“but as from sincerity”*

C. Faithfulness to the authority of God

*“but as from God”*

D. Faithfulness in union with Christ

*“we speak in Christ”*

E. Faithfulness in the light of accountability

*“in the sight of God”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) The victory already accomplished by Christ cannot be stressed enough. Although we are engaged in a mighty conflict of unseen spiritual forces, the outcome is not in doubt and the victory is not ours to secure. We have been graciously granted victory by being united to the Victor Himself.

2) The knowledge of Christ is a precious, sweet aroma that should permeate those around us and accomplish God's purposes in the lives of those we touch.

3) The message of the gospel leads to either life or death – but in either case God is accomplishing His sovereign redemptive purposes and is ultimately glorified.

4) All of our testimony springs from Christ Himself as *we speak in Christ in the sight of God*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage take the pressure off of us when it comes to witnessing?
- 2) How do we measure victory? Do we have the outlook that God is always victorious and that we always share in that victory?
- 3) What type of fragrance of Christ are we? Does our message and representation of Christ differ depending on whether people respond positively or negatively to us?
- 4) Do we have a good conscience about our own faithfulness and sincerity in accurately proclaiming the gospel message from pure motives?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Pounds:** Paul had in mind the Roman Triumph. The picture is the triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome. In a Triumph procession, the victorious generals marched in a certain order through the streets of Rome to the Capitol. First came the city magistrates, state officials, followed by the Roman senate, and then the trumpeters. These were followed by soldiers who carried their spoils from the conquered land. Next pictures and models of the conquered citadels and ships were carried along in the parade. The white bull for the sacrifice followed, and then the captive rulers, their leaders and captured generals in chains who would be executed before the day was over at the sacrifice. Following them came the musicians and priests swinging their censers with a sweet-smelling incense burning in them. To the conquered victims the incense has the stench of death lingering all about them. To the victorious army the fragrance has the sweet aroma of victory. Finally, the conquering general rode in a chariot drawn by four white horses. His family and his army followed wearing their decorations and shouting lo triumphe! Lo triumphe!

**Deffinbaugh:** The ministry of the gospel is not easy. In truth, it is not even possible—in our own strength. Thus, some grow weary and discouraged, as we see in the first quotation. Others give in to the temptation to adapt (corrupt) the message of the gospel, hoping that in so doing a greater and more favorable response can be obtained. In our text, Paul clearly corrects both of these improper responses to the difficulties of the gospel ministry. . .

In contrast to Paul and others who preach a straightforward gospel, there are those who “peddle the word of God,” (2:17).<sup>18</sup> The gospel peddlers do not believe that salvation is the work of God, and they do not trust Him to give sight to the spiritually blind or to

give life to those spiritually dead. They are, however, very concerned with results. They want to be successful, and their motivation for such ambition is questionable. If the gospel is offensive, and no one receives it out of human motivation, there is only one solution for the gospel hucksters: modify the message to make it humanly appealing to the flesh, so that men receive the gospel for the fleshly benefits it seems to offer (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:18-19). If parts of the gospel are offensive to potential converts, the gospel hucksters change them, or at least they do not mention them. If a straightforward presentation of the gospel is "ineffective," then they employ the same methods Madison Avenue uses to sell soap and toothpaste. Do not tell people they are sinners destined for eternal torment; tell them that if they invite Jesus into their lives, things will go even better for them.

### **Zeisler:**

Although a fragrance is invisible, its influence cannot be stopped  
When the apostle uses the words "fragrance" and "aroma" in this figure of speech, he is remembering the priests who walked in the triumphal procession carrying incense burners, the scent of which wafted over the crowds. To the victorious general and his armies, the aroma was a pleasing fragrance which reminded them of the greatness of Rome, but to the defeated prisoners, being led in captives' chains, the aroma of incense had the smell of their impending death at the hands of the executioners. The aroma was a potent though invisible testimony to one of two realities: in the case of those facing death, the reality of tragedy; in the case of the victors, the reality of triumph. Christians are a pleasing fragrance ascending to God which reminds him of the benefits and the wonder of his own Son. This may also recall the Old Testament sacrifices, the aroma of which ascended as a fragrance to God. . .

The "so many" to whom Paul refers, the "super-apostles" who offer alternatives to authentic Christianity, have three characteristics.

- 1) First, they are "*peddlers*" of the word of God. This word was used in the first century of wine merchants who sold their watered-down wines at bargain rates on the city streets. These men knew how to package and sell their inferior products. They knew how to massage the egos of the Greeks, how to sell to the barbarians, how to appear inoffensive to the Jews. The "super-apostles" knew how to package the Christian faith by smoothing out whatever rough edges it had. The good huckster knows exactly what to say to his mark and thus insinuate himself into his confidence. Of course, a side benefit of peddling the word of God was their own profit. As their crowds grew larger, their own reputations grew.
- 2) Self-commendation – (next section)
- 3) Paper authority – (next section)

### **Stedman:** Different views of the victorious Christian life ...

There are a lot of people who have that view of the Christian life. They think, because they are Christians, because they happen to now be a child of God, a son of the King, they are going to be protected and kept from every single pressure and danger of life, and nothing is ever going to get to them. . .

Some people see the "victorious life" as a kind of a constant, visible demonstration of tremendous power so that no obstacle can stand in their way. They see it much like General Patton slashing his way across the countries of Europe in World War II, smashing all obstacles in his path, visibly triumphant all the way into Germany. They expect that. They expect to "feel" powerful, and to see the power of God let loose in such triumphant ways that all the obstacles are visibly crushed. But again, if that is what it is, Paul did not know anything about it.

If we can judge from his life, instead, the "victorious Christian life" is a feeling of weakness, with only brief glimpses of success, seemingly going from one battle to another, from one conflict to another without ceasing, with little sense of personal triumph at the moment. And yet that triumph is happening, and that is what Paul is singing about here. His life was making powerful impact. . .

The victorious Christian life is not one of continual victory in the sense of overcoming all obstacles and feeling triumphant as you go. No! No! It is one of anguish of heart at times, of deep inner doubts, of fighting with frustrations without and fears within. It is one of being opposed oftentimes, yet confident that the God who is within you is able to

work his work and do his will, that out of the fear, the frustration, and the failure is coming triumph and victory and the fragrance of Jesus Christ.

**Hughes:** It is characteristic of these intruders that they go about hawking or peddling the word of God, cheapening and degrading the message by the illegitimate admixture of foreign elements, judaistic or pagan, as a dishonest merchant adulterates wine with water; they seek only their own gain, irrespective of the effect of their teaching on others and careless of the momentous issues which are at stake; self-interest governs their outlook; accordingly they are unconscious of any sense of insufficiency for the task which they profess to fulfil, nor do they hesitate to batten like parasites on the all too gullible members of the church.

**Tasker:** Very different from the behaviour of these unscrupulous hucksters is the absolute sincerity that characterized the ministry of Paul. . . The Apostle's motives were wholly unmixed; he preached as one who had a burden laid upon him by God, who was conscious of the divine presence and enabled others to feel it, and who was so united with Christ, and so imbued with His Spirit, that any tampering with the message committed unto him would have been impossible.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

TITLE: *THE DIPLOMA OF CHANGED LIVES*

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE COMMENDATION FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IS CHANGED LIVES**

**I. UNNECESSARY TYPES OF COMMENDATION**

A. (:1a) Personal Boasting

*“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?”*

Prov. 27:2 *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth”*

How did Christ demonstrate His authority and His power to change lives?

B. (:1b) Lifeless Words on a piece of paper (cf. academic degrees)

*“Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”*

The Apostles were not polished graduates from some academic institution.

Not saying that sending churches should not provide letters of commendation.

**Harris:** Paul is not here disparaging the use of letters of introduction. Their use had already become established within the Christian world (see Acts 18:27) and Paul himself had sought epistolary credentials from the high priest at Jerusalem before setting out for the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:2; 22:5). Also he himself gave what amounted to commendatory letters (Rom 16:1, 2; 1 Cor 16:3, 10, 11; 2 Cor 8:16-24).

**II. THE ONLY VALID COMMENDATION FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY = CHANGED LIVES**

A. Impressive Disciples – Changed lives evident to all

*“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men”*

B. Imitators of Christ – Nurtured by Good Role Models

1. Producing Christlikeness

*“being manifested that you are a letter of Christ”*

2. Using us as Spiritual Caretakers

*“cared for by us”*

C. Supernaturally Changed – by the Holy Spirit

*“written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God”*

D. Internally Transformed -- a Matter of the Heart (not external reform)

*“not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Jesus Christ came to change the heart of man ... to transform him from the inside out ... not to reform the externals. Initial conversion plays itself out in ongoing sanctification by the Spirit so that increasing Christlikeness is evident to all.
- 2) We don't have to worry about how others evaluate our ministry; the only one whose opinion counts is our Lord and Master. It is the Holy Spirit who commends men to positions of ministry leadership in the church.
- 3) Jesus Christ makes His disciples a "*letter of Christ*" by transforming them by His grace and writing His law on their hearts and enabling them to fulfill His righteousness. He took a bunch of fishermen and outcasts from society who had no formal training or academic degrees and transformed them into the pillars of His church.
- 4) Our shepherding work in caring for the flock is patterned after the Chief Shepherd who gave His life for the flock.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of commendation are we asking others to receive to validate our ministry? Are we overly impressed by the wrong type of credentials?
- 2) Is our life an open book – transparent to others – so that they can see the reality of our own changed life? Can we be accurately "*read*" by others, or is there a secret, mysterious side that we do not show to others?
- 3) Do we acknowledge the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as the one who changes and molds Christlike character or do we seek to take some of the credit and glory?
- 4) Are we satisfied with mere external reform and legalistic righteousness or are we truly concerned with the state of the heart?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Hughes:** Paul indeed has a letter of commendation the validity of which is beyond dispute, but it is a *human* letter: none other than the Corinthian believers themselves. This is a letter engraved in his heart, not flourished in his hand or carried in his luggage.



It is something far more intimate than an external document of paper and ink, and at the same time far more permanent. It could not be forgotten, nor mislaid. This letter of his, moreover, is "*known and read of all men.*" By no means least are the Corinthians themselves aware of its complete authenticity, for it is the transformation of their lives by the power of the gospel which, in striking contrast to their former manner of existence, presents incontrovertible testimony to the world at large of the genuineness of Paul's apostleship. By implication, the authenticity of the letters produced by the invading "apostles" is suspect and will not stand close scrutiny.

**Kent:** Paul and his helpers were more like *amanuenses* whom Christ had used to communicate His message. Christ was the One who had wrought the change in the Corinthians' lives. Through His power they had become His letter to the world, displaying what the gospel could do. As such they were no mere document written with ink but had been acted on by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Nor were they like the inanimate tablets of stone in the old covenant of law given to Moses. Rather Christ had written His message on tablets of human hearts. This concept was undoubtedly based on the Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:8-12). The new covenant mediated by Christ through the Spirit produced an inward change whereby God's Word was actually implanted in believers, not just externally imposed. This transforming work made the believers Paul's greatest recommendation.

**Stedman:** It is amazing, unbelievable, that these people would ever think that the Apostle Paul needed a letter of recommendation when he came back to them. After all, he had led these people to Christ, and yet here they more or less infer to him that the next time he came it would be very good if he brought some letters from John, or Peter, or James, or one of the real apostles. Paul is asking them, "Do you really mean that? Don't you understand? You are our letter of recommendation. Christ has written it on your hearts. He didn't use paper, or deliver it on stones, as he did with Moses on Mount Sinai. He wrote it on your hearts, and the ink he used was the Holy Spirit. As for me, I'm nothing but the postman; I just delivered the letter. God did the work." Paul wants these Corinthians to understand that the changes that had occurred in their lives, the freedom they were experiencing, the deliverance from evil habits such as immorality, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, thievery -- "such were some of you" {1 Cor 6:11a RSV}, he said -- all happened because Christ had changed them.

**Deffinbaugh:** I am not saying there is something evil about biblical and theological education. I am deeply indebted to Dallas Theological Seminary for the tools it gave me to better study and proclaim the Bible. Nevertheless, my degree from the seminary does not accredit me or my ministry. There are those who have graduated from this and other fine schools who have denied the faith and taught error. Here and elsewhere, Paul tells us what commends a Christian's integrity in ministry. A Christian's ministry is commended first by the practice of servanthood, rather than by an authoritative or authoritarian leadership style. Paul reminds the Corinthians in verse 3 that he "cared for" them. The marginal note in the NASB informs us that literally the word is "served." Those whom God has certified are servants, not "lords." Second, true laborers of Christ are marked by the integrity of their message and their methods. They are not

“peddlers” of the Word of God, but those who simply, boldly, and truthfully proclaim the truth of God’s Word in such a way that men turn to God and depend upon His Word, rather than upon those servants who proclaim it (see Acts 20:17-

32). [http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/2co/deffin/2cor-03.htm - P389\\_135101#P389\\_135101](http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/2co/deffin/2cor-03.htm - P389_135101#P389_135101)

Finally, true servants of God are evident when men are convicted and converted by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and whose lives are so changed that the world cannot help but notice. True servants of God may or may not have educational diplomas, but the fingerprints of God are all over them and their ministries.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:4-18

TITLE: *SURPASSING GLORY: CONFIDENCE ... BOLDNESS ... LIBERTY IN REFLECTING AND VIEWING GOD'S GLORY*

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT (NEW COVENANT) FAR SURPASSES THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW (OLD COVENANT)**

**INTRODUCTION:**

How to solve a crisis of confidence in the ministry; Who is adequate to be a minister of the Gospel? How can anyone really have a vision for the Glory of the Lord? How can New Testament ministry be effective?

**I. (:4-11) GOD MAKES US COMPETENT THROUGH THE SPIRIT TO REFLECT HIS GLORY IN NEW COVENANT MINISTRY**

A. (:4-5) Competent to Minister

Cf. Jay Adams' book: Competent to Counsel

1. Assurance of Confidence

a. Possession of Confidence

*"And such confidence we have"*

b. Provider of Confidence

*"through Christ"*

c. Orientation of Confidence

*"toward God."*

2. Source of Confidence

a. Negatively: Not from Relying on Self

*"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves"*

b. Solely from Relying on God

*"but our adequacy is from God"*

Cf. *"The Sufficient One"* as a name of God – Ruth 1:20, 21; Job 21:15; 31:2; 39:32

**Piper**: Here Paul explains why he has such an amazing confidence that he is actually an instrument of God in the great fulfillment of the new covenant promises. His confidence is not based on anything that comes from himself. Instead he says it is all of God, and the evidence is that he is not merely handing on written laws or traditions like the scribes and Pharisees. Rather, he is preaching Christ in the ministry and power of the

Spirit. And the result is new life. This new life is the authentication of Paul's authority as a minister of the new covenant.

**Barclay:** Paul is feeling that perhaps his claim that the Corinthians are a living epistle of Christ, produced under his ministry, may sound a little like self-praise. So he hastens to insist that whatever he had done is not his own work but the work of God.

B. (:6-11) Comparison of Surpassing Glory of New Covenant Ministry vs. Old Covenant

Transition: *"who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant"*  
Not just is God adequate in Himself, but He has made us adequate!

1. (:6a) New Covenant vs. Old Covenant

Cf. new and old wineskins; old covenant is worn out and obsolete; replaced by new covenant which is enduring  
Study OT promises of New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27

2. (:6a) Spirit vs. Letter

*"not of the letter, but of the Spirit"*

**Plummer:** in all this disparagement of *to gramma* there was no danger of seeming to disparage Christian writings, for as yet there were no Christian Scriptures.

3. (:6b-8) Ministry of Life vs. Ministry of Death

*"for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?"*

4. (:9) Ministry of Righteousness vs. Ministry of Condemnation

*"For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory."*

**Stedman:** Righteousness means being fully accepted, having a sense of being approved by God, of being honored and cherished by him. The nearest word I know to describe this is the word worth. God gives you a standing of worth. You don't have to earn it; you start with it. God tells you already in the new covenant, "I have loved you, I have forgiven you, I have cleansed you. You are my dearly beloved child. I intend to use you; you are part of my program; your life is significant. There is nothing more you can add to that. Now, on that basis, with the security of that acceptance, go back to your work." And you go with a sense of approval and security.

5. (:10) Surpassing Glory vs. No Glory in Comparison  
*“For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it.”*
6. (:11) Enduring Glory vs. Fading Glory  
*“For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.”*

## **II. (:12-18) GOD GRANTS CONVERTS THE LIBERTY THROUGH THE SPIRIT TO SEE HIS GLORY REFLECTED IN BOLD NEW COVENANT MINISTRY**

- A. (:12-13) Boldness Should Characterize New Covenant Ministry
  1. Boldness in Ministry Inspired by Assurance of Enduring Glory  
*“Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech”*

**Piper:** Now we should be able to see what the hope is that Paul has in mind. It is the hope of the new covenant promise. It is the confidence that the sovereign Spirit of God is at work in his ministry to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and to give life (v. 6) and righteousness (v. 9) and permanence (v. 11) to all God's people. God is at work! Not simply to tell them on tablets of stone what they must do but to do it in them!

Paul's hope is that God has now undertaken to fulfil his ancient promise to take out the heart of stone, to write his law on soft hearts of flesh (Jeremiah 31:33) and put his Spirit within them and cause them to walk in his statutes (Ezekiel 36:27). The age of fulfillment has begun! And the victory of God's purpose is certain because his Spirit is sovereign. He will create new hearts wherever he pleases. He will cause the obedience he requires. He will preserve permanently all that he calls. And the glory of his work will be great beyond anything the Old Testament ever knew.

2. Boldness Contrasted with Caution Exercised Under Ministry of the Law  
*“and are not as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away.”*

**Tasker:** This frankness, so characteristic of Paul's ministry, was not conspicuous in the ministry of Moses. This was not due to any moral failure on the part of Moses. It was inherent in the very nature of the revelation he mediated. He was concerned very largely with types and shadows, in which truth was very often wrapped up in mystery and symbol; and the mystery remained till the archetype was made known and the reality became visible.

Paul illustrates this from the Exodus story, and underlines the secondary inference that he has drawn from it in passing in verse 7. Moses, he says in effect, veiled his face not only because the Israelites shrank back from its brightness, but also because he knew that the glory upon it was fading; and in the providence of God, though not necessarily in the express and conscious design of Moses himself, the Israelites were not to see that the fading was symbolic of the ultimate abolition of the old dispensation.

. . In the providence of God the Israelites, under the Mosaic dispensation, were able to enjoy only a revelation that was preparatory to something better. The sacrifices enjoined upon them were temporary and inferior sacrifices, the blood of bulls and goats; those who offered them could not see the end to which they were pointing; viz. the perfect sacrifice of Christ, which inaugurated the new covenant, and so had as its corollary the abolition of the old.

B. (:14-16) Enlightening via Christ Contrasted with Hardening and Rejection of the Lord

1. Hardening

*“But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart”*

2. Enlightening

*“but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”*

**Guzik:** Paul says that the Jews of his day were unable to see that the glory of Moses’ ministry had faded in comparison to the ministry of Jesus. If the veil were unlifted, they would see that the glory of Moses’ ministry had faded and they should now look to Jesus. But since the “same” veil that hid Moses’ face now lies on their heart, they still think there is something superior or more glorious in the ministry of Moses.

C. (:17) Liberty Associated with the Spirit

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

**Stedman:** Freedom is being out in the open, it is having boldness, nothing to hide. That is what Paul is talking about. The man who is free is one who does not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve about himself. He can be himself. That is what freedom is. . .

This accounts for what many of us have difficulty understanding. It is the work of the Spirit to remove the veil, which is what is keeping us from seeing ourselves, and how futile it is for us to try hard to please God. There is another way of pleasing him -- accepting what he gives you. As long as you are trying hard, you never can lay hold of what he is ready to give. Therefore, the work of the Spirit is to help you to see how futile your efforts at trying have become.

D. (:18) Inward Transformation to Mature Christlikeness is the Goal

*“But we all, with unveiled face reflecting/beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”*

Commentators differ as to the meaning of the word “reflecting/beholding” here ...

**Kent:** Although the idea of reflecting fits the parallel with Moses who reflected the glory of God, the translation “*beholding*” is usually preferred. The ancient versions commonly understood it this way. There is no clear instance of the verb having the meaning “*reflect*” unless it is in the active voice (it is middle here). Furthermore, the passage speaks of believers who can now see clearly because the veil has been removed from them.

\* \* \* \* \*

### PREACHING CHRIST:

1) The one who has reconciled us to God the Father, has granted us free access and boldness to approach the throne of grace for whatever help we need is the one who has filled us with *confidence towards God* that we truly have the resources to effectively minister in the context of the glory of the New Covenant (vs.4).

2) Christ as the New Adam has made us *adequate* to serve as ministers of the New Covenant to extoll all of the blessings associated with the ministry of the Spirit. Whereas the Old Covenant was filled with types and shadows that pointed ahead to fulfillment in Christ, the New Covenant is one of surpassing glory and permanence (vs. 6).

3) Only the Lord is able to grant the freedom that comes from the enlightenment of a true knowledge of who He is and what He has accomplished in redeeming His own. This true knowledge removes the veil that obscured the vision of the Jews who were locked into Old Covenant realities and the fading glory of the ministry of Moses (vv. 14-16).

4) The identification of the Lord with the Spirit is an interesting one (v. 17). The ministry of glorifying Christ and hence the Father is now conducted by the Holy Spirit who grants the freedom and enlightenment that we need.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is holding me back from full *confidence* in the ministry God has called me to and in *boldness* in proclaiming Christ and fulfilling my ministry?

2) Am I completely open to others in how I reflect the glory of the Lord or do I put any type of veil over that presentation that obscures the truth?

3) Am I comfortable with the dominant role of the Spirit in this New Covenant dispensation or do I prefer the legalism of external righteousness?

4) Is this inward transformation presented as an instantaneous experience or as a gradual process in the life of a believer?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Chafer:** Not referring to different methods of interpreting Scripture – but to two dispensations with their different methods of divine rule – the ministry of the law contrasted with divine life, spiritual vitality, energy and power which are provided for the believer under grace . . . the blessing of the indwelling Spirit is an essential characteristic of this age (IV, p. 90).

**Piper:** What is his boldness. The word Paul uses here has three connotations. There are three aspects of boldness. You could probably come up with these yourself by asking what the opposite of boldness is.

1. First, the opposite of boldness is fear or timidity. And so one aspect of boldness is the courage of fearlessness.

Example: 1 Thessalonians 2:2, "Though we had already suffered and been treated insolently at Philippi, as you know, we had courage (same word in Greek!) in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition." Boldness overcame the fear of suffering persecution.

2. Second, the opposite of boldness is also shame. And so another aspect of boldness is the courage of being unashamed.

Example: Philippians 1:20, "It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage (same word!) now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." Boldness overcame the temptation to feel shame about the gospel.

3. The third aspect of boldness (not so much in English, but definitely in this peculiar Greek word, *parresia*) comes out when you see that often in the NT the opposite of boldness is guarded speech and minced words and indirect, vague, obscure communication. So the third aspect of NT boldness is direct, open, frank, straightforward, forthright, plain speech concerning the things of God. When a bold person speaks people know what he means; his cards are on the table; he doesn't seek to protect himself with obscurities or subtleties or euphemisms or generalities.

Example: John 10:24. The Jews say to Jesus, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." This word "plainly" is the same as the word for boldly in all these other places. So boldness overcomes the temptation to conceal the truth in vagueness. It is frank and plain and straightforward. It is not political and cagy and slippery



So when Paul says here in 2 Corinthians 3:12 that his great hope in the fulfillment of God's promises makes him very bold, I think he probably has in mind mainly this third aspect of plain and open speech (since the contrast is with the veiled ministry of Moses, vv. 13ff.) But since all three of these meanings are so closely tied together I think it would be fair to say that he means is this: since we have such a great hope, we are unafraid of what man can do to us, and we are unashamed of the gospel, and we are unwilling to cloak the word of God in palatable generalities and euphemisms that obscure the clear and sharp contours of the truth. "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold!"

**Stedman:** Paul is talking about confidence; and everybody in the world is trying to get confidence. Every time you turn on television, or listen to the radio, or pick up a magazine, you are constantly bombarded with suggestions on how to become a self-sufficient, confident, capable, well-adjusted person, able to handle life. There are all kinds of approaches, and almost all work on the same basis. Confidence, we are told, has to come from yourself. You have to somehow find in yourself the power to achieve and to be a success. You can build it up through courses you can take and skills you can develop. That is how you will prove to be a successful individual. The world understands, quite properly, that you have to have a degree of confidence. People who lack confidence, who are unsure of themselves, who are insecure, go stumbling through life and never make a good impression on anyone and are always losing and failing. Therefore, the great thing to aim for is to build up a deep sense of confidence. . .

The ability that is evident in my ministry, the changes that occur in people's lives because of what I am and where I go have nothing to do with my natural skills or ability. It's all coming from God at work in me." The old covenant is Paul trying to do his best on behalf of God; the new covenant is God doing his best through Paul. What a difference that is! That is the great truth we need to learn.

**Deffinbaugh:** A careless reading might cause us to explain Moses' actions in a way that does not square with the text in Exodus or with Paul's words in our text. We might conclude that Moses veiled his face so the people would not be overcome by the glow of his face. Putting on the veil in this case would be like dimming his high beam lights. The only problem is that we are told Moses left his face uncovered until after he spoke to the people. His face was only veiled from the time he spoke to the people (after his encounter with God) until the next time he again went into the presence of God. Why would he need a veil during this period of time? Paul tells us. It was because the "glory-glow" faded. The longer Moses was away from God, the more the glow on his face dimmed. Each meeting with God was like recharging the batteries which powered the facial glow of Moses. Moses did not want the people to see the glow of God's glory dimming, and so he covered his face during that time when the glory faded.

Paul's point is this: the glory Moses experienced in conjunction with the old covenant was a fading glory; in stark contrast, the glory which Paul enjoys in conjunction with the new covenant is unfading: "For if that which fades away was with glory, much more

that which remains is in glory” (verse 11, emphasis mine). Moses needed a veil because the glory of the old covenant, as great as it was, faded away. The messengers of the good news of the gospel need no veil at all, because the greater glory of the new covenant never fades: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (verse 18).

**Barclay:** The word that Paul uses for *new* when he speaks of the new covenant is the same word as Jesus used and it is very significant. In Greek there are two words for new. First, there is *neos*, and *neos* means *new in point and in point of time alone*. A young person is *neos* because he is a newcomer into the world. Second, there is *kainos*, and *kainos* means not only new in point of time, but *new in point of quality*. If something is *kainos* it has brought a new, fresh, different element into the situation altogether. Now, it is the word *kainos* that both Jesus and Paul use of the new covenant, and the significance is that the new covenant is not only new in point of time it is quite different in kind and in quality from the old covenant. It produces, not just a new relationship between man and God, but a relationship of a totally different kind.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

TITLE: NEVER LOSE HEART – AVOIDING MINISTRY BURNOUT

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE GOSPEL MINISTRY (PROCLAIMING THE GLORY OF CHRIST) IS TOO PRECIOUS TO GIVE IN TO DISCOURAGEMENT**

**PREPARATION SKIT:**

Here is a simple skit to introduce today's topic .. with apologies to C.S. Lewis – *The Screwtape Letters* --

*The Setting:* Satan's war room – He is discussing his battle plans with his top advisors –

*The Topic:* How to stop the rapid growth of the first century church

*The Strategy:* Get the Apostolic Leaders ... especially the Apostle Paul who has proven really effective ... **to quit the ministry**

*Satan:* I think we have the right strategy ... Jesus might have made a huge blunder ... all that time He spent in ministry and He only developed 11 key leaders to kick off his church ... It's easy to see where we need to attack ... it was good we got our mitts on Judas and had an inside mole ... at least we could track what was being planned

*Demon1:* Yeah, boss ... but what about that Saul guy .... He came out of the blue ... really surprised us ... and look at how effective he's been ... I thought he was going to be a big time player for us ... He had that persecution thing down real good ... the disciples were so shook up they had a hard time believing he had flipped!

*Satan:* That WAS a shocker ... but if he quit on us maybe we can make him quit on Jesus, too ... maybe he just doesn't have the perseverance to hang in there when things get tough ... We have to figure out how to discourage him and make him back off his ministry .. We could just let him burn out on his own ... a lot of people start off a ball of fire and just fizzle out after awhile .. but he's too strategic a leader for us to leave alone ... we need to go after him aggressively

*Demon2:* I don't know if that's going to work ... we've already shot a lot of our best ammunition at him ... Remember what we've tried already??

- The **prison deal** is usually a good tactic for educated folks like Paul ... they don't usually like being locked up with the riff raff of society ... but he keeps turning it into another episode of "Unshackled" ... preaching the gospel and sending out missionaries like prison is their home church .. plus all that singing and worship time ... we were losing some of our best people ... That Prison Fellowship Ministries has been a real pain in our side

*Demon3:* That's why we decided to **get physical** with him

- The Jews didn't need much encouragement to haul him into the synagogue and administer their Friday night special = 39 lashes .. but it didn't seem to phase him ... I thought we finally had him with that stoning incident ... but somehow he lived through

it

*Satan:* What are his weak points ... What scares him the most ... We need to do some more research and discover **his Achilles heel**

*Demon4:* We had a source that told us he was deathly **afraid of the water** ... so we had him shipwrecked three times ... but it turns out he was an undercover lifeguard ... no problems there ... we ditched that source ...

*Demon5:* We found somebody else who had heard that he was **terrified of snakes** ... but that didn't seem to bother him either. . . he just shook it off . . . the natives ended up thinking he was a god ... I don't know what to try??

*Satan:* We've been going about this all wrong ... He just gets stronger when he faces obvious evil ... We need a more **subtle approach** ... one that will sneak up on him and hurt him from the inside ... Let's plant some false disciples and attack him from inside the church... We will use some real leader types ... guys with a lot of charisma and speaking ability ... guys that are very persuasive ... maybe some lawyers that we have sitting around just trying to get those Christians to sue one another and divorce one another

*Demon1:* But how can they say anything against Paul that the church would believe?? He's beyond reproach ... his character is well known ...

*Satan:* Let's **infiltrate that Corinthian group** ... they have a lot of immature believers ... it seems they argue among themselves about everything ... For a lot of them, Paul's not even their favorite speaker ...

Here's our plan

1) First, We will attack Paul's character by saying that he is trying to profit by building up a kingdom for himself – at least the city government workers should understand what we're saying

2) Secondly, we will attack his message – you know he keeps talking about that grace stuff like you don't have to follow Moses and the law and you can live however you please .... We can really go after him there – We'll call our legalistic message the gospel as well and use a lot of the same terminology ... that should confuse them

3) Thirdly, we will accuse him of not being very productive or effective – I know some specific examples where he preached for an hour and no converts at all ... that doesn't look good for him

4) Finally, let's question his fitness to be an apostle – we'll have our guys claim to be apostles as well and muddy the waters – how can you tell the true from the false .. it will be just as easy as our campaign last year to pass off counterfeit denarii .. we made a mint off that scheme

That should finally discourage him ... imagine all that sacrifice he's made and now he has his own people turning against him and questioning his authority ... Why wouldn't he just throw in the towel and give up the fight???

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Easy for ministers of the gospel to get discouraged and lose heart. Look at all that Paul was facing:

- attacks against his character
- attacks against the legitimacy of his apostleship
- attacks against the effectiveness of his ministry

In some sense all believers are ministers (small “m”) of the gospel – not just isolating some special paid clergy class; so these instructions apply to all of us

## **I. (:1-2) MINISTRY INTEGRITY PROTECTS AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT**

### A. (:1) Giving Up is Not an Option in the Ministry

#### a. Stewardship of Precious Ministry

*“Therefore, since we have this ministry”*

Look back at chapter 3 to see the nature of this New Covenant Ministry – one of life, one of the Spirit, one of hope, one of confidence, one of boldness, one of glory

Concept of being a stakeholder – having some ministry niche that you own and are passionate about; not being pressured by others to meet needs in areas where you have not been called to minister

#### b. Safeguarded by Divine Mercy (against opposition to our ministry)

*“as we received mercy”* – Mercy both for salvation and service

Paul served in deep humility; not with a big ego

#### c. Staying the Course (when faced with discouragement)

*“we do not lose heart”*

**Willmouth:** Tenacity of Ministry -- The way we view our ministries will often help determine how we will fulfill it. If it becomes a burden instead of a privilege, then it becomes easy to quit when things don't go our way. Paul was overwhelmed by God's grace and mercy, which gave him the tenacity to keep on serving Christ regardless of his circumstances, regardless of what others said about him, regardless if anyone responded the way he wanted them to.

### B. (:2) Standing Up with Transparent Integrity is the Ultimate Safeguard Or Personal Purity as well?? Which is in view??

You've heard the expression: “He's a stand-up type of guy” = willing to shoulder responsibility; not trying to sluff the blame off on someone else

#### a. Aggressive Opposition to Deceit and Marketing Manipulation

*“but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame”*

Integrity is the best safeguard against discouragement.

Paul's ministry and his life were an open book

b. Authentic Consistency with the Truth of God's Word

1. Negatively

a. *"not walking in craftiness"*

- Gospel Charlatans – deceivers = pretending to be other than what they are
- Gospel Politicians = men-pleasers; hidden agendas  
No convictions
- Gospel Manipulators = playing on emotions

b. *"or adulterating the word of God"* – handling deceitfully ...

- Using same terminology but changing the meaning
- Twisting the meaning; taking it out of context
- Adding to the Scriptures
- Subtracting from the Scriptures – this does not apply today; caving to cultural pressure (divorce, role of men and women, etc.)

2. Positively

*"but by the manifestation of the truth"* (John 3:19-21)

c. Accountable Conduct before the Supreme Authority

*"commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*

**Ritchie:** Men intuitively recognize the truth. They do not need to be convinced of it. God has so constituted our consciences that we know truth when we hear it. When it is declared a sympathetic vibration is set up in side us. Truth does not really need to be proved to us. The reason people reject the truth is not that they do not sense it is true but because they choose to disbelieve. They would rather go their own way than respond to the truth.

**Barclay:** His enemies had leveled three charges against him. They had said that he used underhand methods, that he exercised an unscrupulous cleverness to get his own way, and that he adulterated the message of the gospel.

**II. (:3-4) LACK OF RESULTS DO NOT DETRACT FROM THE PRECIOUSNESS OR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL**

A. (:3) The Light of the Gospel Will Never Penetrate the Non Elect

*"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."*

No human way to reach this target group successfully; takes the pressure off us;  
No reason to get discouraged by a lack of response to the gospel;  
Still we are responsible to make the offer available to all men

B. (:4) Spiritual Blindness Is a Powerful Reality

*"in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see"*

Reality of the spiritual warfare behind the scenes

C. (:4b) No Fault Lies With The Gospel Itself -- Which Remains Precious and Glorious

*“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

**Stedman:** So what hope is there that anybody who has been blinded by the devil will ever believe the good news? It looks hopeless, doesn't it? If a veil lies over their minds, and if, as we have already seen in the previous passage, only when someone turns to the Lord is the veil removed -- yet, in order to turn, men must see the glory of Christ that the veil obscures -- what hope is there? It is very evident from this that men cannot remove the veil themselves. Only Christ can take it away. How then can men be saved? That is the question Paul is facing.

### **III. (:5) IT IS NOT ABOUT US -- THE FOCUS OF GOSPEL MINISTRY IS THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST**

A. (:5a) The Focus Should Never Be On Ourselves

*“For we do not preach ourselves”*

We are not capable of saving anyone; we are not looking for praise and attention

B. (:5b) The Focus Must Always Be On the Lordship of Christ

*“but Christ Jesus as Lord”*

What type of false gospel is it that presents Christ as less than Lord?

We are all accountable to our Creator

C. (:5c) But We Do Play a Critical Supporting Role

*“and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake.”*

**Gromacki:** Paul served others; he did not expect others to serve him. He used his apostolic prerogatives as greater opportunities for ministry, not for selfish gratification.

**Tasker:** All the service Paul (and every true Christian missionary and pastor) renders to his converts is not done primarily for their sakes. He has a more compelling love and a more overriding loyalty. He is their servant, because first and foremost he is the servant of Jesus Christ, by whose love he is constrained, and the promotion of whose glory is his passionate desire.

**Stedman:** If you want to know where we fit in, here it is: we are your servants for Jesus' sake. We are not your masters; we do not own you; we are not your bosses; we do not come to tell you everything to do and give you orders and be a little pope in every church we come into. No, we are your servants. We have come to help you. We have come to minister to you, to labor among you, to teach and instruct you, but we are not here to boss you." The apostle is careful to make that plain.

**IV. (:6) GOD CAN MAKE THINGS HAPPEN IN A BIG WAY ANY TIME HE WANTS -- THE PRECIOUS STEWARDSHIP OF THE GOSPEL DEPENDS ON SOVEREIGN ENLIGHTENMENT**

- Our testimony of conversion is one of Sovereign Enlightenment
- Our confidence in presenting the gospel to others is that God can also perform such a Sovereign work of Enlightenment in others

A. (:6a) Example of God's Sovereignty in Creation

*"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,'"*

Some Christians argue that it is no big deal whether you believe in evolution or creationism; well it is a big deal to God. He has based many important doctrines on the foundation of His role in creation.

B. (:6b) Testimony of God's Sovereign Enlightenment in Conversion

*"is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."*

**Jeffries:** Consider for just one moment how differently you might approach every single "people" occasion -- even the most hum-drum routine occasions -- if you remained constantly aware that God desires that *"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God"* should shine through you so that it can be observed by whomever He has brought into your life at that moment.

**CONCLUSION:**

**(:7) THE DANGER SHOULD NEVER BE DISCOURAGEMENT ... IT SHOULD BE AVOIDING CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH – leads into rest of chapter 4**

- Jars of Clay – good name for a Christian vocal group

What are our expectations of God?? Here Paul makes reference not just to His power ... but to the surpassing greatness of His power ...

This glorious ministry performed through vessels of weakness .... Great Paradox!

Outer man decaying ... inner man being renewed

**Read vv. 16-18** – same theme of Not losing heart!

Never forget that just as God has a plan for your life ... so does Satan ... We made fun of things in our little play ... but make no mistake ... Satan is the god of this world and is actively at work scheming how he might discourage each of us from fulfilling the personal mission that our Lord has laid before each of us

But remember today's message:

**THE GOSPEL MINISTRY (PROCLAIMING THE GLORY OF CHRIST) IS TOO PRECIOUS TO GIVE IN TO DISCOURAGEMENT**

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### PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) The message of the gospel focuses on the *glory of Christ*.
- 2) Christ supremely reveals God as *the image of God*.
- 3) Any gospel that does not preach *Christ Jesus as Lord* is a false gospel.
- 4) We need to be gazing intently into *the face of Christ*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of ministry have you received from the Lord?
- 2) When are you tempted to get discouraged in your ministry; to question whether it is worth it to keep making sacrifices and putting forth the effort? How do you deal with this temptation to despair or to withdraw?
- 3) Do you truly believe that God is Sovereign when it comes to who responds to the truth of the gospel? How does this impact your desire to witness?
- 4) How glorious and precious do you find God's revelation about Himself in the person of Christ to be to you?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Barclay:** He says that he never loses heart in the great task that has been given to him, and by implication he tells us why. There are two things which keep him going. (a) There is the consciousness of a great task. A man who is conscious of a great task can do amazing things. One of the great works of musical genius is Handel's Messiah. It is on record that the whole work was composed and written down in twenty-two days, and that during the whole time Handel would scarcely consent to eat or to sleep. The strange thing about a great task is that it brings its own strength with it. (b) There is the memory of mercy received. It was Paul's aim to spend all his life and all his effort seeking to do something for the love which had redeemed him.

**Stedman:** I am always amazed at how up-to-date the Scriptures seem. You would think that Paul had just been listening to some Christian radio broadcasts, or television programs, when he wrote this. Evidently there were people in his day, preaching in churches and evangelizing, who were practicing disgraceful, underhanded ways. They

were relying on cunning approaches and even tampering with the Word of God. Paul

says, "I have given all that up," (if he ever did it). "Seeing other people do this, I want nothing to do with it." . . .

Notice particularly what this consists of, because this speaks to our own time. First, he says, "I have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways," that is, the practice of deliberate deceit. . .

Paul says he refuses to practice cunning. Now what does that mean? Well, it means to rely on some psychological trick played on people to get them to respond, some intense pressure tactic in a meeting, perhaps beautiful seductive music to get them to give way, telling stories that bring tears to people's eyes, playing upon their emotions, this kind of thing. Paul says, "We don't need any of this any longer. We don't rely upon that."

In our day it is largely a matter of going in for Christian showmanship, seeing who can put on the biggest spectacle to attract people to come in by hiring a special band or getting trapeze artists to come and put on a show, etc., Paul says we do not rely on those kinds of things anymore.

**Deffinbaugh:** The God who has been gracious to me by saving me, an unworthy, undeserving sinner, is the God who continues to show mercy to me by using my words to enrich others and to bring praise and glory to Himself.

This assurance frees me from succumbing to my sense of inadequacy and enables me to reject all of those means and methods which are unworthy of the gospel. The gospel is not some broken down, used car, which requires much deception and deceit to sell to someone. The gospel is glorious, and the Holy Spirit is mighty to save. The gospel brings glory to God always and saves some when it is proclaimed in simplicity and truth, empowered by the Holy Spirit. My job is never to convince or to convert; it is only to convey the truth as simply and accurately as I can. I do not have to water down the message of the gospel, adulterating it so that it will be more palatable. The gospel is not palatable. People believe the good news and trust in Jesus as the Savior because they have been supernaturally quickened by the Holy Spirit. When they are divinely quickened, they can do nothing but believe. We see this in Paul's conversion (see Acts 9:1-19). We must realize that Paul's experience is not the exception but the rule. This is the way every unbeliever is saved—supernaturally. And thus, we only need to preach the truth, with no gimmicks or modifications, trusting in God to save the lost (to bring the spiritually dead to life, to give sight to the spiritually blind), by His grace and by His power.

If men do not receive and believe our message, there is a good reason. Not only are they naturally predisposed to reject the truth of the gospel, they are supernaturally blinded to keep them from seeing the truth. This is what Paul tells us in 4:3-4. Satan, the god of this world, blinds the minds of unbelieving men, so that they cannot and will not believe the gospel and be saved. Only God can overcome Satan's blinding and override

men's blindness. But when men fail to believe, we should not assume automatically that it is because of a deficiency in our message or methods so that we are tempted to imitate the peddlers of the word. If it is true that men are saved in spite of their sin and our weakness, it is just as true that those who reject the truth are not lost due to our weaknesses, but due to their blindness to the truth.

Paul reminds us that when we preach the gospel as we ought, we are not preaching ourselves but Christ. Those who are converted through our ministry and message are not grounds for pride and boasting on our part. And those who are not saved through our preaching should not be a blow to our pride. We are but servants, preaching the gospel for Christ's sake, for the glory of God and not for personal gain. Yes, there is a personal blessing when the lost are saved, but we must never preach out of selfish ambition (see Philippians 1:15-17).

God is sovereign in the salvation of men. At his best, Elijah could not convert the nation Israel. At his worst, Jonah could not prevent the conversion of the entire population of Nineveh. The God who gave us the Great Commission is the same God who called forth light in the midst of the darkness. He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He is the One who has declared that the "light will shine out of darkness." We are lights shining in a dark place, and God will use our light to bring others out of the darkness into the kingdom of light. He who causes others to see the light is He who has shone in our hearts and revealed His glory to us in the face of Christ. . .

Our text serves as a word of caution to those waving the "seeker-friendly church" banners. Certainly there is no need or merit in being offensive in some non-critical area. Paul tells us he happily surrenders his rights when this enhances the gospel (1 Corinthians 9). But he is never willing to compromise the gospel to make it more appealing to the lost. Some disturbing tendencies exist in the "seeker-friendly" approach. The first is the assumption that there are "seekers" who might be won if only we remove some of the barriers to their belief. The Bible tells us that there are no seekers after God (Romans 3:10-11). Those who come to God are drawn to God by the Father, through the Spirit, to faith in the Son (John 6:37, 44; 8:43-47). None whom the Father chooses will fail to trust in Him. None whom the Father has rejected will come to Him. The seeker-friendly church places far too much emphasis on man's role in salvation and far too little on the sovereignty of God in salvation. Second, the "seeker-friendly" approach places too much emphasis on pleasing the unbeliever, as a kind of potential customer, rather than on pleasing God. I am not saying that this movement has nothing to commend it, but there is much we should question and challenge.

**Guzik**: The god of this age: The title god of this age is not used of Satan anywhere else in Scripture, but the thought is expressed in passages like John 12:31, 14:30, and in Ephesians 2:2; 6:12 and 1 John 5:19.

i. There is a significant, and real sense in which Satan "rules" this world. Not in an ultimate sense, because, The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. (Psalm 24:1). Yet, Jesus did not contest Satan's claim to rule over

this present age (Luke 4:5-8), because there is a sense in which Satan is the “popularly elected” ruler of this age.

ii. “The satanic world sovereignty is in fact apparent rather than real; for God alone is the ‘King of the ages’ (1 Timothy 1:17, Greek), that is, of every age, past, present, and future” (Hughes). “It is the devil who is here called the god of this world, because he ruleth over the greatest part of the world, and they are his servants and slaves . . . though we no where else find him called the god of this world, yet our Saviour twice calls him the prince of this world.” (Poole)

iii. The Biblical truth that Satan is the god of this age can be understood in a wrong way. Some later Christians (like the Manichaeans) promoted a dualistic understanding of God and Satan, and emphasized this phrase the god of this age. Their idea was that God and Satan were “equal opponents,” instead of understanding that in no way is Satan the opposite of God. In reaction to these false doctrines, many early Christian commentators (like Augustine, Origen, Chrysostom and others) interpreted this verse strangely to “remove ammunition” from the heretics. But this is wrong. Just because some one twists a truth one way, it doesn’t mean we can twist it the other way to “compensate.” Calvin well remarks of this approach, “being hard pressed by their opponents they were more anxious to refute them than to expound Paul.”

iv. Instead, Calvin gives a good sense of what we should understand by the phrase the god of this age: “The devil is called the god of this age in no other way than Baal was called the god of those who worshipped him or the dog the god of Egypt.”

**Kent:** One can imagine that certain criticisms of Paul may be alluded to here. Had Judaizing teachers accused him of omitting certain teachings regarding compliance with Mosaic rites? Were they accusing him of enticing Gentiles with a watered-down message of salvation at the outset, with the scheme in mind of adding the other essentials later? Paul’s clear answer was that the Word of God had been handled in such a way as to display its truth to every open-minded listener. It had been taught not only for intellectual stimulation, but its moral and spiritual implications also had been clearly aimed at the conscience of each hearer. This in turn should have commended the preachers themselves to the conscience of every Corinthian as being faithful messengers of God. These words reflect no self-seeking on Paul’s part, but rather were his solemn recognition that his ministry was carried on “in the sight of God,” who not only was guiding his labors but also was enlightening the consciences of those who were open to His truth. How refreshing it would be if it could be said of every preacher that his chief commendation is his fidelity to the truth of God’s Word and the impact which he makes on the consciences of his hearers.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

TITLE: *PHYSICAL CHALLENGES DON'T DISTRACT MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL FROM THEIR ETERNAL FOCUS*

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE PROSPECT OF THE MINISTRY -- FUTURE RESURRECTION AND REWARD ENABLE US TO ENDURE PRESENT PHYSICAL SUFFERING IN THE MINISTRY WITHOUT LOSING HEART**

**INTRODUCTION:**

In what ways are you physically challenged? Paul experienced such severe suffering that he could say that he was “*constantly being delivered over to death.*”

**I. (:7-12) SHOWCASING JESUS INSTEAD OF OURSELVES REQUIRES DYING SO OTHERS MAY LIVE**

A. (:7) God is Our Power Source (made obvious by our Human Frailty)

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves”*

**Gromacki:** Gideon learned this lesson when his army, reduced to three hundred, besieged the Midianites with weapons of trumpets and burning lamps within clay pots (Judg. 7:16). Just as the pots had to be broken to let the lamps shine, so believers must be broken to manifest the light of God through them.

B. (:8-10) Jesus is Our Resurrection Life

1. (:8-9) Four Contrasts Between Intense Suffering and Surprising Perseverance

a. *“we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed”*

b. *“perplexed, but not despairing”*

c. *“persecuted, but not forsaken”*

d. *“struck down, but not destroyed”*

Paul and the apostles suffered physically for the gospel in the extreme. In our circumstances these phrases might have a somewhat different application.

**Stedman:**

*Afflictions:* These are the normal trials which everybody faces, Christian and non-Christian alike. . .

*Perplexities*: This refers to all the pressing calls for decisions, when we don't know what to decide. We are at a loss, we can't see the end, we don't know how it is going to turn out. We are afflicted with fears, anxieties, worries, and uncertainties, all gathered up in this word "*perplexities*."

*Persecutions*: These are the misunderstandings we all run up against, the ostracisms, the cold shoulders which are shown to us at times, the malicious actions and attitudes, deliberate slights, attacks on our character and our reputation, and oftentimes, the bigoted, prejudiced, unfair practices of members of society against one another, all part of the Christian's life as well as the non-Christian's.

And finally,

*Catastrophes*: "Struck down!" Stunning, shattering blows which drop out of the blue into our lives -- accidents, fatal illnesses, war, earthquake, famine, riot, insanity -- these terrible episodes which shatter a family or an individual, and leave us frightened and baffled. All these things are part of normal Christian experience. There is no change in the problems, the pressures.

2. (:10) Sharing in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

a. Sharing in the Death of Jesus

*"always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus"*

b. Sharing in the Resurrection of Jesus

*"that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body"*

C. (:11-12) Death is Our Ministry Calling (So Others May Live)

*"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you."*

**II. (:13-15) SPREADING GRACE TO THE GLORY OF GOD REQUIRES PROCLAIMING THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION**

A. (:13) Testimony Springs From Faith

*"But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore also we speak."*

B. (:14) Testimony Springs From Confidence in the Resurrection

*"knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you."*

C. (:15) Testimony Springs From the Ultimate Desire to See God Glorified

*"For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."*

### III. (:16-18) SUFFERING AFFLICTION WITH PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES FOCUSING ON THE ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

#### A. (:16a) Main Application

*“Therefore we do not lose heart”*

#### B. (:16b) Battleground: Physical vs. Spiritual –

Maturing Spiritual Life More Than Compensates for Deteriorating Physical Life

*“but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”*

#### C. (:17) Eternal Reward -- When it Comes to Eternity – No Comparison

*“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison”*

#### D. (:18) Eternal Focus

*“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.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) We need to be intimately connected daily to the dying of Jesus. This is the aspect of taking up our cross daily and following after Christ as a genuine disciple.
- 2) We access spiritual power when we are intimately connected moment by moment to the indwelling life of Christ so that *“the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”*
- 3) Our resurrection will be patterned after that of Christ’s. Therefore, our resurrection is certain and glorious and yields an eternal result.
- 4) Christ is our connection to the realm of ultimate reality = the realm of the spiritual unseen and the realm of eternity.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you consider your body to be a *treasure* chest? Are you hoarding God’s riches or proclaiming His glory?



2) Where have you experienced God's power operating as "*surpassing greatness*" in the context of your human frailty?

3) In what ways have you found *death to be working* in you?

4) How does the prospect of eternal glory and reward truly motivate you to persevere?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** There is widespread confusion today in the matter of defining Christians and Christianity. There is a common stereotype of Christianity, accepted everywhere, which is completely and demonstrably false. This stereotype runs something like this: (This perhaps may come as a surprise to some who do not really understand how others see us.) In the eyes of the world,

"Christians are men and women who have, by dint of their own self-will, achieved a certain level of morality, i.e., they don't do certain secular things, while they do do certain religious things. They have come to regard themselves as members of a very exclusive club which is especially favored by God, so that they get (or should get, anyway) many special divine favors extended to them. They gather together weekly to perform certain rather meaningless religious rituals. They believe a number of unprovable claims, but take them by blind faith. The result of all this is the production of men and women who are essentially smug, bigoted, and narrow-minded, who, as the course of history has run on, have become responsible for terrible wars, bloodshed, cruelty, and prejudice; who are the ones largely responsible for creating and preserving the ghettos which are such a problem in our own day; and who, in self-righteous priggishness, think of themselves as especially holy people because they don't smoke, drink, gamble, play cards, or go to movies (some of them, at least), etc."

I have tried to be as realistic as possible in describing what I feel is a very commonplace image, which is, for the most part, regarded as genuine by a majority of people in the world today. Of course, we immediately recognize it as a phony, fake Christianity, produced by the attempt of religious people to imitate the genuine product. In Second Corinthians 4:7 we have set forth for us the essence of the true Christian position, a genuine Christianity. That is why I appreciate this seventh verse so much. "We have this treasure," says the apostle, "in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not of us."

There are two particularly important factors about this verse: One is its description of genuine humanity -- humanity as God intended it to be. You will notice that it consists of two elements.

First, mankind is described as "vessels." This is not the only place this figure occurs in the Scriptures, and it is a most significant figure. I do not know if you have ever thought



of yourself as a vessel, but it is a fundamental and essential concept of the Scriptures with regard to the human race.

What are vessels for? We would all agree that vessels are made to contain something. That is their sole purpose. They are made to hold something. They are designed and shaped to be filled with something. That is why this verse is so significant. It reminds us that we human beings were intended to contain something. We are made to be vessels, pots, if you like, made to contain something, to hold something.

The vessels in your own home (pots, cups, or bowls) are made to contain something and if they do not have that substance in them, they are, of course, empty. It is no accident that we describe lives without Jesus Christ as empty lives, because that is exactly what they are. It is no accident that the world today is suffering from what Dr. Carl Jung calls "a neurosis of emptiness." He says, "When goal goes, meaning goes; when meaning goes, purpose goes; when purpose goes, life goes dead on our hands." This is what is happening in many hearts and lives today, both young and old alike – a great wave of emptiness, of despair. The result is hollow men and women, who have a facade of interest, attention and activity, but within whom there is nothing but emptiness. That emptiness is what is creating the restlessness which is so characteristic of our age and which is breaking out on every side in rebellion and reaction. See how accurately the Scriptures indicate the significant element about humanity: We are made to be vessels, made to hold something, and if we do not have that something in there, our lives are inevitably empty and meaningless.

But, secondly, mankind is not only vessels, but "earthen vessels," i.e., made out of dirt, made from clay, from very common material which has nothing in itself of any value, nothing pretentious. Something is there, yes, but nothing of any real value in itself. Here, of course, is the concept with which so many struggle today and which the humanist vigorously rejects. He says that man is the substance of all things. But the Word of God takes a very humbling and realistic approach to mankind and says that we are nothing but insignificant bits of clay.

Of course, there are all kinds and grades of clay. Some of you are rather fine china -- you crack easily -- still you have a very fine texture, though it is nothing more than clay. Others of us are more like sun-dried mud, and we crumble at the first knock which comes along. But at any rate the matter is gathered up in this one phrase -- earthen vessels. We are all made of common clay and that is why we all have the same problems. As someone has well put it, "We're all made in the same mold -- only some are moldier than others!"

That is a wonderfully realistic view of human life. Pots we are, made to hold something, but of little value in and of ourselves. This corresponds so exactly with the words of Paul when he warns the Galatians not to think of themselves more highly than they ought, "For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself," {Gal 6:3 RSV}. This is the biblical picture of man.

But notice how the picture is completed here. In the Christian life, the apostle says, we have a treasure in those earthen vessels. And he describes it as "transcendent power." That is the glory of the Christian life, of humanity as God intended it to be. The vessel is not much in itself, but it holds an inestimable treasure, a treasure beyond price. Now, these are glowing words. They speak of a reality, of something genuine. It is indeed a treasure, a treasure so valuable that the world would give everything it has to get it. Throughout the rest of this week there will be money expended in large amounts to try to discover the secret of this treasure, what might be called "the lost secret of humanity." Billions are poured out every week in a vain effort to identify this treasure and to channel it into the normal affairs of human life.

It is a treasure because it is a power, a transcendent power. Do you know what transcendent means? "Something beyond the ordinary, something above ourselves, something wholly other, something different, unusual." It is not like the ordinary kind of power, which tears things apart, destroys, blasts, or breaks. This is a strange kind, a kind which unites, which harmonizes, gathers, breaks down barriers and middle walls of partition. In other words, here is the power to change a life or a society from within, not from without. It does not make superficial, external adjustments, changing the outward face of things, but a genuine transformation which arises from within, which completely and permanently changes an individual. As individuals become changed, the society of which they are a part likewise becomes changed. . .

This is real Christianity -- Christ in you, not merely to take you home to heaven when you die, but to manifest his life anew in you right now, to live again his life in you in terms of your situation and circumstances. This is the treasure. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, and designedly so. God put it in failing, faulty, weak, sinful men and women in order that it might be evident that the power does not originate in us. It is not a result of a strong personality, or an extroverted nature, or a highly honed and trained mind. No, it is not a result of any of these things. It is something which arises from the presence of God in the heart. That is why God so delights to call people like us -- the stupid, the weak, the faulty, the failing -- and to manifest his life and grace through us.

**Deffinbaugh:** Distinguishing the Contents from the Container --

The true treasure is the glory of God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as presented and proclaimed by the gospel. In contrast to this glorious treasure are the vessels which contain the treasure. Christians are merely "clay pots," while the gospel is the treasure. Earthen vessels (clay pots) are common and cheap, ones like those red flowerpots we can buy today for very little money. Earthen vessels are also fragile and easily broken. I have broken a significant number of clay pots. Earthen vessels are "earthy" and "earthly"; they are of this world. (Remember that we were made of the dust of the earth—see Genesis 2:7.) Earthen vessels are fashioned by the potter, who creates them for his own purposes (see Romans 9:20-21). Clay pots have nothing in which to boast; they have no basis for feeling superior. The treasure gains nothing from the pots; if anything, the pots gain from the glory of the treasure. . .

I believe Paul's argument in this passage may be summarized in this way: As Christians die daily, by living righteously and boldly speaking forth the truth of the gospel, we live out the death and life of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the consternation of those who reject the gospel, to the benefit and blessing of those who believe, and ultimately to the glory of God.

**Zeisler:** Christians are very ordinary clay pots. There is nothing intrinsically beautiful or powerful about us; there is nothing to commend us. We are fragile, temporary, functional, ordinary. But such pots were made to contain a great treasure—the life of God himself. He is beautiful beyond description, and powerful beyond measure. The surpassing greatness of the power is of God, and we find that our lives have a quality that is unexplained. We learn these lessons by suffering when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances; and we learn by the grace of God to accept them and not resist them. The surpassing greatness of the power of God does its work.

**Kent:** Paul and the other apostles were constantly under threat of physical death just as Jesus was. Now the hatred of men for the Son of God was being directed against Paul and others as they attempted to carry out their Christian ministry. The word “*dying*” (*nekrosin*) does not mean simply death but the process of dying. Paul chose this term to emphasize not just one act, but the repeated sufferings which were directed against his life in order to put him to death.

Nevertheless Paul could look beyond the trials to the grander purpose which was being served. God's suffering servants not only showed their identification with Christ by their willingness to suffer as He did, but they also displayed His life in their bodies. Christ living in them enabled them not to be crushed, be despairing, feel forsaken, or be destroyed. They ran the risk of death in order to proclaim the new life in Christ, and they did this by personal demonstration of Christ's life in their own lives.

**Barclay:** (:16-18) Here Paul sets out for us the secret of endurance.

(i) All through life it must happen that a man's bodily strength fades away, but all through life it ought to happen that a man's soul keeps growing. The very sufferings which may leave a man with a weakened body may be the very things which strengthen the sinews of his soul. It was the prayer of the poet, “Let me grow lovely growing old.” The years which take away physical beauty should add spiritual beauty. From the physical point of view life may be a slow but inevitable slipping down the slope that leads to death and ends in the grave. But from the spiritual point of view life is a climbing up the hill that leads to the peak of the presence of God. No man need fear the years, for they bring him nearer, not to death, but to God.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

TITLE: *EARTHLY TENT VS HEAVENLY HOME*

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE LONGING FOR THE RESURRECTION BODY MOTIVATES US TO FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL MINISTRY EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF PHYSICAL SUFFERING – FUTURE GLORY INSPIRES COURAGE AND COMMITMENT IN LIVING TO PLEASE OUR LORD**

**I. (5:1-5) PRESENT SUFFERING SHOULD INTENSIFY THE LONGING FOR FUTURE GLORY (THE RESURRECTION BODY)**

Context = extreme physical suffering in the ministry  
Understood from previous section in Chapter 4

A. (:1) The Superiority of the Resurrection Body

1. Prospect of Physical Death -- Limitations of Our Physical Body

*“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down”*

For all of you campers out there, what are some of the drawbacks of living in a tent?

*“torn down”* seems to suggest more than just death by old age

2. Promise of Permanent Dwelling

a. Superstructure

*“we have a building from God”*

not from Bob the Builder or Bob Vila

b. Spiritual

*“a house not made with hands”*

c. Eternal

*“eternal in the heavens”*

B. (:2-4) The Preference for the Resurrection Body

1. (:2a) The Groaning Associated with this Present Body

*“For indeed in this house we groan”*

**Ryrie**: in this earthly body we groan because of the burdens of life (cf. Rom. 8:23).

2. (:2b-3) The Longing for Permanent Glorious Clothing

*“longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;*

*inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked”*

3. (:4) Summary: Preference for Immortality (clothed in Resurrection Body)  
*“For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”*

C. (:5) The Assurance of the Resurrection Body

1. God's Purpose -- it cannot be defeated  
*“Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God”*
2. God's Pledge -- the indwelling Holy Spirit  
*“who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”*

## **II. (5:6-10) TWO RESULTS OF THIS LONGING FOR FUTURE GLORY**

A. (:6-8) Future Glory Inspires Courage

*“Therefore, being always of good courage”*

1. Because we recognize the limitations of this earthly life  
*“and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord”*

**Guzik:** As it is true that to be absent from the body means we will be present with the Lord, it proves two false doctrines to be false. It refutes the false doctrine of “soul sleep,” (saying that the believing dead are held in some sort of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs) and the false doctrine of “purgatory” (saying that the believing dead must be “cleaned up” through their own suffering before coming into the presence of God).

2. Because we walk by faith not by sight  
*“for we walk by faith, not by sight”*
3. Because we prefer our eternal home  
*“we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”*

**Stedman:** I love that phrasing. Notice how it is put here. The word is used both for our life in the body and our coming presence with the Lord. They are both said to be an experience of being *“at home.”* What does that mean? Well, you feel *“at home”* in your body, don't you, right now? You do not feel strange in it. You do not feel unnatural. You feel relaxed. You would feel very strained and unnatural if you did not have your body. You feel at home in it. That is what it means. Now, using the same language, the apostle says when you leave this earthly body and are given the body of glory that is awaiting you, you will be at home there too. It will be an experience not of strain or difference, but natural. In fact, later on in this letter, in Chapter 12, he speaks of being caught up into the third heaven into the very presence of God. He says, *“I didn't know*

*whether I was in the body or out of it. I couldn't tell. I felt so much at home it didn't make any difference," {cf., 2 Cor, 12:3}.*

That is an encouragement to us that what we are headed toward is not something dreadful or so terribly different that we need to be afraid. We will be at home with the Lord, in his very presence, seeing him no longer only with the Spirit within, but face to face. If it is true, as Peter puts it, that "*Without having seen him you love him*" {cf., 1 Pet 1:8}, how much more will that be true when we see him face to face? So we are nerved to go through the difficulty of these days and to be of good courage because we are heading into light instead of darkness.

B. (:9-10) Future Glory Inspires Commitment

1. (:9) Single-minded Ambition

*"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."*

2. (:10) Sobering Accountability

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) Our eternal home is with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We live as pilgrims in this world and in the tent of this temporary body. Our permanent dwelling is a building from God.

2) Presently we *walk by faith* in Jesus Christ, complete dependence upon His guidance and strength.

3) We measure everything we do up against the one motive of striving to *please Jesus*. That is the focus of all of our ambition. (cf. the movement: What Would Jesus Do?)

4) We live soberly in light of the absolute accountability we will face before the *judgment seat of Christ*.

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

1) What type of resurrection body and heavenly home are you anticipating?

- 2) What are some of your groanings associated with this present earthly body?
- 3) How does this passage argue against some type of permanent bodiless existence?
- 4) How does the concept of the judgment seat of Christ reconcile with the truth that Christ has delivered us from all condemnation and completely forgiven us of our sins?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Kent:** What about the intermediate state of the believer between death and resurrection? A third view sees here a possible reference to an intermediate body which the believer has until the resurrection. One should not be dogmatic about this because the biblical evidence is not certain; however, this passage could be interpreted in this manner. To see here a reference to an intermediate body would answer Paul's concern that the loss of his physical body by death would leave him naked. If the "*building from God*" is the resurrection body, then he would be naked until the resurrection. Furthermore, there is some biblical evidence for intermediate bodies between death and resurrection. Moses and Elijah were not disembodied spirits at the transfiguration, but did possess visible bodies (Matt. 17:3, et. al.). The martyrs of the tribulation wore white robes after their deaths but prior to their resurrection (Rev. 6:9-11). If anyone questions that an intermediate body would by definition not be "*eternal*" as this verse states, the answer could be found in the similar terminology used regarding the kingdom. It is described as lasting one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-5), and at other times as being eternal (Rev. 11:15). Apparently, it merges into the eternal state and yet its basic character is not significantly changed.

**Barclay:** He [Paul] is not looking for a Nirvana with the peace of extinction; he is not looking for absorption in the divine; he is not looking for the freedom of a disembodied spirit; he is waiting for the day when God will give him a new body, a spiritual body, in which he will still be able, even in the heavenly places, to serve and adore God. . . He saw eternity not as escape into nothingness, not as release into permanent inaction, but as the entry into life and into a body in which service could be complete.

**Deffinbaugh:** There is something wrong with the world in which we live. There is something temporary and incomplete about these bodies in which we dwell. Our earthly groaning reminds us that we live in a fallen world, and that these bodies and this earth are to be replaced by something far better. Do we groan? We should. This groaning will be replaced by constant rejoicing, as we inhabit our new bodies in the eternal presence of our God.

For this reason, destruction of the earthly body does not distress Paul. Our earthly body will be replaced by a vastly superior body. And we come to possess our new bodies by the death of our old ones. It is something like the old Opel Kadett I once owned. Since I had a replacement for it, literally the old one was headed for the metal rendering plant.



After removing all the parts I wanted to keep, I let the kids go out in the driveway with hammers and pound on it. They loved that, and I enjoyed watching them destroy it. Why should I care, when I had something better to take its place? And so Paul is not hesitant to boldly preach Christ, even though men will persecute him, and his lifestyle in ministry will take a heavy toll on his body. This only hastens the day when his better body will be given to him.

**Stedman:** How could those people who died receive a resurrection body when their bodies are still lying unresurrected in the grave?" Many explanations have been offered for this, but there are basically three of them: One says, "We really are disembodied. When we die we go to be with the Lord in spirit, but our bodies are buried in the grave so we have to wait incomplete until the body is raised. It may take centuries, but we are just waiting around in bodiless existence." In the light of this passage, that teaching cannot be accepted. Paul says he does not want to be disembodied, he does not expect to be, and he who has prepared him for the very opposite is God himself. Then there is another suggestion that what happens when we die is that both our soul and our spirit go to sleep within the body, and there is no sense of communication or experience. As often happens when we physically go to sleep, we wake up and we do not know how long we have been asleep. Time is eclipsed, and that this is what happens. We may sleep for centuries in the body and when we are wakened at the resurrection it is to us as though nothing has happened in the meantime. But the problem with that suggestion is that it does not do justice to the expressions in scripture that speak of being with the Lord immediately. "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," Paul says in the very next verse. But to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. In Philippians he speaks of departing and "being with Christ; which is far better," {Phil 1:23 KJV}. Every suggestion is one of an immediate access to that. There are some who propose still a third alternative. They say that God gives us in the meantime an intermediate, a temporary body to use in eternity until our real one gets there -- a kind of heavenly bathrobe which we wait around in while our real one is getting back from the cleaners. But once again there is not a vestige of Scripture to support that. There is no reference to an intermediate body.

What Paul means, of course, is that when we leave this body we also leave time. Our problem comes because we do not do that in our thinking. We project time into eternity and say it is the same thing going on forever, but it is not. Anyone who studies carefully in this area has to distinguish sharply between the conditions of eternity and those of time. The characteristic of time is that we are all locked into the same rigid sequence of events. We all experience 24-hour days because on this earth it takes that long for the earth to rotate on its axis and nobody can speed it up. Some of you cannot by choice live 12 hour days while the rest of us have to make out with 24.

But in eternity there is no past or future, there is simply one great present moment. Therefore, the events we experience in eternity are never anything we have to wait for, they are always what we are ready for, what we are spiritually prepared for. This passage says that God has been spiritually preparing us for something, and that event is the coming of the Lord for his own, the return of Christ for his church, for each individual believer. Therefore, the Scriptures clearly teach that when a believer dies,



what he experiences immediately is the coming of the Lord for his own. Paul describes that event in First Thessalonians 4, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God," {1 Th 4:16a KJV}. With him will come all those who have been dead in Christ so that it will appear to those left on earth as though they had already been raised first when in actuality we are all raised together, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord," {1 Th 4:17b KJV}. This is the experience that awaits us immediately.

**Guzik:** i. The Greek philosophers thought that to be a bodiless spirit was the highest level of existence. They thought of the body as a prison for the soul, and saw no advantage in being resurrected in another body.

ii. But to God, the body itself is not a negative. The problem isn't in the body itself, but in these sin corrupted, fallen bodies that we live in. Jesus approved the essential goodness of the body by becoming a man. If there was something inherently evil in the body, Jesus could never have added humanity to His deity.

**Harris:** Appearance before Christ's tribunal is the privilege of Christians. It is concerned with the assessment of works and, indirectly, of character, not with the determination of destiny; with reward, not status. Judgment on the basis of works is not opposed to justification on the basis of faith. Delivered from "the works of the law" (Rom 3:28), the Christian is presently committed to "the work of faith," "action stemming from faith" (1 Thess 1:3), that will be assessed and rewarded at the bema ("tribunal"). Yet not all verdicts will be comforting. The believer may "suffer loss" (1 Cor 3:15) by forfeiting Christ's praise or losing a reward that might have been his.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:2

TITLE: *THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION*

**BIG IDEA:**

**GOD'S WORK OF RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST MOTIVATES US TO PURSUE A MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Talking both about reconciliation of the unsaved (many of Paul's opponents who were putting themselves forwards as teachers were actually unsaved) as well as the Corinthian believers putting aside whatever sin was affecting their relationship with the Apostle Paul and hence with God.

**5 MOTIVATIONS TO PURSUE RECONCILIATION**

**I. (5:11-13) CONSTRAINED BY THE FEAR OF GOD – ACCOUNTABILITY DRIVES OUR MINISTRY URGENCY AND INTEGRITY**

(:10) Context: Judgment Seat of Christ

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

A. (:11a) Motivation Stated = Fear of God

*“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord”*

B. (:11b) Fear of God Makes Us Urgent Transparent Persuaders

*“we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”*

Nothing worse than persuasion that is crafty manipulation and exploitation.

C. (:12-13) Our Testimony of Integrity Not Self Serving

*“We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”*

- Paul could defend himself with a clear conscience because he was innocent of the charges leveled against him by his opponents in Corinth

- When we have done something wrong there is a need for repentance as the foundation for reconciliation

**Ryrie:** Lit., we went mad, probably referring to some specific occasion when Paul's critics charged him with madness.

## **II. (:14-15) CONSTRAINED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST -- CHRIST'S LOVE MAKES US MINISTER UNSELFISHLY**

A. (:14a) Motivation Stated = Love of Christ

*"For the love of Christ controls us"*

Translation here could be "holds us together"; we have a desperate need for unity in the truth; not a bunch of separate cliques within one fellowship

B. (:14b) United with Christ in His Death

*"having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died"*

We do not have to judge whether a specific Christian is worthy of our reconciliation; Christ died for him as well and he is worthy!

C. (:15) Living the New Life for Christ

*"and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."*

## **III. (:16-17) CONSTRAINED BY A RADICALLY NEW PERSPECTIVE -- WE EVALUATE MEN FROM A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE**

A. (:16a) Motivation Stated = Radically New Perspective

*"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh"*

B. (:16b) New Perspective Towards Christ Contrasted with the Old

*"even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer."*

Paul had made himself the standard and the judge; he was the one who decided what personality types he liked; etc. But now he (and we) must allow the Spirit to be the standard. We are to view others as a new creation in Christ.

**Ryrie:** Before his conversion, Paul regarded Christ as merely another man.

**Stedman:** What did he think of him? Why, he thought he was a lowdown, worthless rabble-rouser, a tub-thumping street preacher from a dirty little obscure town that nobody thought anything good could come out of. He thought because Jesus had no political standing, no family position, no training and no education that he was worthless. He tried his best to exterminate the religion that gathered about him because he regarded him as an imposter and a phony.

C. (:17) New Perspective Towards Believers (including self) Contrasted with the Old  
*“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*

- allows us to easily forgive one another and pursue reconciliation

#### **IV. (:18-21) CONSTRAINED BY A HEART FOR RECONCILIATION -- OUR CHANGED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THE BASIS FOR OUR RECONCILIATION WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS**

A. (:18) Motivation Stated = Changed Heart

*“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”*

B. (:19a) God’s Global Work of Reconciliation in Christ

*“namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them,”*

C. (:19b-20) Our Ministry of Reconciliation to Others

*“and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation; Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

**Stedman:** Why do we send ambassadors? Well, because countries do not always relate to each other very well. Things need to be explained, need to be approached with diplomacy and caution and carefulness. That is what an ambassador is to do. He is to be a representative of a government, handling himself with such care and confidence that the message that his government seeks to convey is given in the most painless and least offensive way possible. Now that is dangerous. You can get yourself killed or taken captive as an ambassador in this world today.

D. (:21) Substitutionary Atonement = Grounds for Reconciliation

*“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

**Zeisler:** This word, "righteousness," is a magnificent term. Every desire you have for beauty, wholeness, value, purity; every time your heart calls to you to be something worth being, you are longing for the righteousness of God. "Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Our bodies were made for physical sustenance and call out for it when deprived even for a short time. Our souls were made to know righteousness, and a sensitive conscience implores us to be made right with God. "Be all that you can be," says the Army recruiting slogan, referring, of course, to this life. In some ways (on a much more profound level) this is the message of the Bible: "Be all that you can be." Be the righteousness of God

himself in Christ. Jesus became sin so that we might become in him the righteousness of God. What a wonderful truth!

## **V. (:6:1-2) CONSTRAINED BY URGENCY -- PROFITABLE CHRISTIAN SERVICE DEPENDS UPON IMMEDIATE RECONCILIATION**

### A. (6:2b) Motivation Stated = Urgency

*“Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation”*

### B. (6:1) Profitable Christian Service at Risk

*“And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain”*

Paul was working together with God because he was striving for the same goal; Christians should not be working against one another – Deut. 22:10 *“You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together”* – sometimes God must marvel at what kind of animals we manifest ourselves to be  
Don’t act like a donkey!

Danger of losing one’s reward at judgment seat of Christ

### C. (6:2a) God Stands Ready to Do His Part

*“for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’”*

Must deal with the conflict immediately; it takes priority; no time to try to schedule something for weeks down the road

**Harris:** In its original context the quotation belongs to a section of Isaiah 49 (vv. 7-9) where Yahweh directly addresses his Servant who has been “deeply despised, abhorred by the nations” (Isa 49:7, RSV), promising him vindication before men in due time and calling on him to carry out the work of restoration after the return from exile.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) The *“fear of the Lord”* is not just an OT doctrine. Christ’s work as Judge of believers makes us sober-minded and circumspect in ordering our motivations and action to be pleasing to Him. The prospect of reward is very great.
- 2) The supreme love of Christ for us as shown in being made sin for us and dying for us should control all that we do and mortify our selfishness.
- 3) He rose again *“on our behalf”* so that we might live in right relationship with the Father and with one another with the power of a changed heart.

4) Christ is carrying out His present ministry through us ... so that the exhortations we make are actually coming from Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we taking the initiative to perform the difficult work of confrontation in exhorting and persuading our Christian brothers and sisters to be reconciled where necessary?
- 2) Do we look at other believers through eyes of prejudice (or from a worldly external frame of evaluation such as status) or do we see believers as new creatures whose heart has been changed by God and who have become "*the righteousness of God in Him*"? Do we ever write somebody off? We do not have that right!
- 3) Are we living for ourselves or "*for Him who died and rose again on our behalf*"?
- 4) How well are we representing Christ as His ambassadors?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Harris:** As the "*therefore*" shows, this verse must be interpreted in close connection with what has immediately preceded, namely, the teaching concerning the judgment-seat of Christ before which all believes will be made manifest. . . Accordingly, when Paul speaks of "*persuading men*" here he is not referring to the evangelical duty of warning the ungodly of the wrath to come and pleading with them . . . but rather to the necessity which has regrettably been laid upon him of persuading certain members of the Corinthian church of the integrity of his personal character (see 1:12ff., 4:1f, 6:3ff., 7:2ff.) and of the authenticity of his status as their apostle (see 3:1ff., 10:1ff.). There is, indeed, a sense in which this whole epistle may be described as a vindication of his genuineness in face of the false reports and calumnies that were being circulated about him.

**Gromacki:** To whom was the command given ("*be ye reconciled*")? It may have been stated to the unbelieving element within the church. But it seems more plausible that Paul was addressing genuine Christians. They had already experienced spiritual reconciliation to God at their conversion. Now Paul wants them to be reconciled to God as dissident believers by accepting him as God's representative. Thus, this is reconciliation within the family structure.

**Stedman:** The primary characteristic of the "judgment seat" is that it is a time of disclosure to us of what has been hidden in the silent, inner reaches of our own hearts. And not only a disclosure to us, but also to others. In fact, the word that is used here is a very interesting one. It says, "we shall all appear." Literally it is, "we shall all be manifested," "we shall all be unveiled," in a sense, at the judgment seat of Christ, in the eyes of everyone. That is the point. This is the moment Jesus spoke of when he said, "Whatever is spoken in the secret places shall be shouted from the housetops." And it is described for us in the First Corinthian letter, Chapter 4, where Paul says, "Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart," {1 Cor 4:5 RSV}. That is what he is talking about. . .

Now many people ask the question, "Well, what about the rewards here? I'm interested in those." Let me tell you something. I have had to review and revise some of my concepts along this line. I was taught when I was a growing young Christian that all of those crowns, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, etc., that are mentioned in Scripture are the rewards you get at the judgment seat, if you deserve any rewards at all.

But I have come to see that is not true. A crown is a symbol, basically, of the gift of God to us, which is eternal life. Life in its various capacities, its various emphases and aspects are symbolized by crowns and they are always gifts in Scripture. You never earn a crown of glory. You never earn the crown of life. You cannot earn the crown of righteousness. Righteousness is a gift which none of us can earn. These are symbols, therefore, of the gift of eternal life which God gives us freely in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Well, then, what is it that you can win or lose at the judgment seat of Christ? The answer is, the opportunity to display the nature of the life that has been given to you. The degree to which you can manifest that is what we are determining by our faithfulness here, the degree to which you can display the glory of God, the opportunity that will be given you to manifest it. That differs according to the individual.

**Zeisler:** We don't trick people into a false allegiance to Christ. We don't try to get them to change outwardly, ignoring any change in their hearts. This is just what the false teachers in Corinth were attempting to do as they sought to undermine Paul's ministry: they were trying to "take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart" (verse 12b). Certain religious leaders attempt to create a false agreement, either by browbeating their listeners or by watering down the message. We won't do that, says Paul. This may very well be why we are misunderstood. Nevertheless, our efforts are based on persuasion--"we try to persuade men." We long for people to see what God has done in Christ. We exalt the cross of Jesus, therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus so that it might be clearly seen for what it is. And then, having been seen, believed, and having been believed, men and women are never the same.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

TITLE: PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

**BIG IDEA:**

**TRANSPARENT INTEGRITY OF MINISTRY REMOVES ALL OBSTACLES TO PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL**

**I. (:1-2) SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL**

A. (:1a) Example of Paul Working in Fellowship with Christ

*“And working together with Him”*

B. (:1b) Exhortation to be a Profitable Servant

*“we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain”*

C. (:2) Urgency of Call to Reconciliation

*“for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you;’ behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’--”*

**II. (:3-10) COMMENDABLE CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY PAVES THE WAY FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL**

A. (:3-4a) Summary of Commendable Conduct

1. Stated Negatively – No Black Marks in the Ministry

*“giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited”*

2. Stated Positively – Sacrificial Servant Leadership

*“but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God”*  
Others might call this fanaticism ... but it is godly zeal at work

B. (:4b-10) Specific List of Ministry Experiences & Corresponding Godly Character

- What has Paul been through?

- What type of person has he proven himself to be?

1. (:4b-5) Enduring Hardship and Physical Suffering

a. Enduring Hardship

- *“in much endurance”*

- *“in afflictions”*

- *“in hardships”*

- *“in distresses”*

**Stedman:** Endurance is the key there. God, looking upon Paul's life, is pleased and glorified by the fact that no matter what happens to him he sticks with it. He endures;



that is the point. This word literally means to "stay under the pressure." We all feel pressure -- pressure to give in here, to give up there, pressure to go along with something. But the mark of a Christian who has learned how to walk with God is that he stays under the pressure; he does not quit. The modern term, "hang in there," expresses exactly what this verse means -- "Just hang in there and don't quit until you are triumphant."

b. Enduring Physical Suffering

- "*in beatings*"
- "*in imprisonments*"
- "*in tumults*"
- "*in labors*"
- "*in sleeplessness*"
- "*in hunger*"

2. (:6) Exhibiting the Fruit of the Holy Spirit

- "*in purity*"
- "*in knowledge*"
- "*in patience*"
- "*in kindness*"
- "*in the Holy Spirit*"
- "*in genuine love*"

3. (:7) Engaging the Weapons of Spiritual Warfare

- "*in the word of truth*"
- "*in the power of God*"
- "*by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left*"

**Kent:** Spiritual weapons are adequate for protection on all sides"

4. (:8-9) Eliciting (But Ignoring) the Contradictory Evaluations of Men

- "*by glory and dishonor*"
- "*by evil report and good report*"
- "*regarded as deceivers and yet true*"
- "*as unknown yet well-known*"
- "*as dying yet behold, we live*"
- "*as punished yet not put to death*"

5. (:10) Eying Eternity as the Ultimate Goal

- "*as sorrowful yet always rejoicing*"
- "*as poor yet making many rich*"
- "*as having nothing yet possessing all things*"

**III. (:11-13) AFFECTIONATE OPEN DIALOGUE EXPECTS RECIPROCATION**

- A. (:11) Initiating Affectionate Open Dialogue  
*“Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.”*
- B. (:12) Addressing Obstacles to Affectionate Open Dialogue  
*“you are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections.”*
- C. (:13) Expecting Reciprocation of Affectionate Open Dialogue  
*“Now in a like exchange – I speak as to children – open wide to us also.”*

**Stedman:** As I travel around the country, I find this is probably the number one problem in churches today. Christians actually think it is right for them to be closed in on themselves, to be private persons, unwilling to communicate who they are and how they feel and where they are in their lives. . . Here is the problem with many churches in this country. They are filled with Christians who will not open up, will not communicate their needs and struggles to one another. Their mouths are not open. . . This is what concerns Paul here. So he urges the Corinthians, "Open up, communicate, show acceptance. It is basic to all else." That is Problem #1. If you do not respond to love, then do not wonder if your life remains cold, barren, lonely, empty and meaningless. When you are loved, deliberately love back and life will begin to expand.

**Zeisler:** The Corinthians' love was restricted and reserved--and that is also a stumbling block. They withheld affection from Paul as they grew enamored of his opponents. A competition for status between Paul's apostleship and the one claimed by those who came later to Corinth had left him devalued and loved less as a result. The apostle's point here is that a love that must meet certain standards, that imposes rules and regulations, that must be earned before it expresses itself, is a stumbling block. "Open wide your hearts," says Paul. The love that ought to be apparent in the Christian community is one that takes no regard for its own advantage, that no longer views anybody "according to the flesh," as he pointed out in chapter 5.

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) How does the ministry of Christ provide the best model of transparent integrity in the ministry and affectionate open dialogue as He shared His compassionate heart with His disciples?
- 2) As we minister as ambassadors for Christ, we are only the channel for the exhortations and instruction that Christ actively provides.
- 3) Our suffering and hardship is not worthy to be compared to what Christ endured in a compressed time period during His earthly ministry.
- 4) Christ is the ultimate Suffering Servant. As we meditate on Paul’s list of ministry

experiences and spiritual character we always need to come back to the person of Christ as the ultimate role model in each area.

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### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have we written off any fellow believers as not worth our time in terms of seeking reconciliation for the purpose of ministry partnership and fellowship in the gospel?
  
- 2) Do we have any black marks that would give occasion for the enemy to discredit our ministry? How can we pursue transparent integrity and mature in this regard?
  
- 3) Are we availing ourselves of the *spiritual weapons* essential to the warfare? Is the Holy Spirit producing His fruit in our lives?
  
- 4) Are we *restrained in our affections* towards any of our Christian brothers and sisters?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** I want to close with these words from A. W. Tozer, that rugged old prophet from Chicago. He says:

A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for one whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest; and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge. The man who has met God is not looking for anything; he has found it. He is not searching for light, for upon him the light has already shined. His certainty may seem bigoted, but his assurance is that of one who knows by experience his religion is not hearsay. He is not a copy, not a facsimile. He is an original from the hand of the Holy Spirit.

That is the life that wins, the "ministry of reconciliation" in action.

**Deffinbaugh:** False prophets have minimized sin and its consequences throughout biblical history, and they have promised peace and prosperity to the wicked (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:3-7). When Jesus spoke to those who would follow Him, He made the cost of discipleship very clear (see Luke 9:57-62), and so did the apostles

(Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12). The apostles know what it means to “take up their cross” in following Jesus. But the false apostles are not interested in paying a price for following Christ, because they do not know Him (see Jeremiah 23; John 10:10-13). They are motivated by greed and self-indulgence. Thus, one of the ways of discerning an authentic apostle is to see how much he has suffered for His Lord. . .

How do many professing Christians judge the authenticity of God’s servants, of the men (and women), of their message, and their methods? All too often, we judge on external standards, the very same standards employed by the world. Let us adopt the same standards Paul sets down, not only for those whom we will follow as our leaders, but as the standard for our own lives as well. Here in this text we learn not only what distinguishes an authentic apostle, but also that which distinguishes an authentic Christian. Let us live according to the standard of authenticity God Himself sets down for us through His apostle, Paul.

**Geoff Thomas:** No preacher can read these words without a terrible sense of failure. A minister can hardly speak on a passage like this without blushing, feeling an utter hypocrite. His congregation sees the luxury and ease of his life. He has grown fat in the ministry. There seems little contact between what Paul describes here as a credible ministry and the ministry of their own pastor. How could a man justify spending a half an hour sermon on this text simply explaining to a congregation that things were utterly different in the first century compared to the twenty-first, or in extolling the extraordinary grace of the apostle in such a way that the spotlight of these verses is never focused on we preachers ourselves? It seems to me that there are few other passages in the Bible more important for ministers of the gospel and contemporary Christians to be studying than these words, even if it should bring many of us to the point of resignation from our calling. Unless this passage makes a minister cry out, "I have been an unprofitable servant," then he has not understood it. . .

In these words of our text the apostle Paul has bared his heart, and told us what he has experienced because of the genuineness of his ministry. Who could have gone through all this and endured it, rejoicing at the grace of God, unless the hand of God was always upon him? He stayed on his course in spite of all he went through. He never became depressed, and so this list offers us tremendous hope. We study it together and we say, "If Paul could endure so much by the grace of God that same grace is available to me. I can cope too in my far less taxing afflictions."

**Gromacki:** Throughout his life, Paul fought innuendo and false charges. In this section, he admitted that he appeared to be one thing, but in reality, he was just the opposite. He recognized that some reported false data about him completely contrary to the real facts. Others were constantly offending him, but he resolved not to offend them in turn. He isolated seven such false reports. They seem to fall into three major areas.

- 1) The first group of two contrasts deals with his reputation . . .
- 2) The second group of three contrasts deals with his health . . .
- 3) The third group of two contrasts deals with his finances . . .

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1

TITLE: *BLESSED BE THE TIES THAT BIND (CHRISTIAN TO CHRISTIAN) --  
AVOID CONTAMINATION AND YOU WON'T BE SPOILED*

**BIG IDEA:**

**AVOID INTIMATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH UNBELIEVERS THAT WOULD  
HINDER YOU FROM GROWING CLOSER TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER  
AND MANIFESTING YOUR CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS**

**CALL TO CHRISTIAN SEPARATION AND HOLINESS**

**I. (:14-16a) SEPARATION IS A NO-BRAINER**

Separation = Avoiding Intimate Partnerships with Unbelievers

Psalm 1 – “*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked ...*”

A. (:14a) One Clear Command – “*Do not be bound together with unbelievers*”

Key = When does it apply

Marriage / Business / Church / Degree of Friendship

B. (:14b-16a) Five Clearcut Distinctions (5 different Greek words used in rhetorical questions)

1. Orientation towards Obedience: *Partnership* / Righteousness vs Lawlessness

**Gromacki:** These patterns of behavior are mutually incompatible.

2. Orientation towards Character: *Fellowship* / Light vs Darkness

**Gromacki:** These cannot coexist.

3. Orientation towards the Savior Himself: *Harmony* / Christ vs Belial

4. Orientation towards Faith: *In common* / Believer vs Unbeliever

5. Orientation towards Worship: *Agreement* / Temple of God vs Idols

**II. (:16b-18) CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS**

Separation = Essential for Intimate Fellowship with our Heavenly Father

Psalm 15 – “*O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent?*”

A. (:16b) Remember Our Sacred Identity and Privileged Calling

“*For we are the temple of the living God*”

- B. (:16c, 17b-18) Remember God's Precious Promises to His People  
*"just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"*

*"'And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty."*

- C. (:17a) Obey God's Clear Command  
*"Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean;*

### **III. (7:1) HOLINESS IS NOT OUTDATED**

Purpose of Separation = Maturing in Holiness in the Fear of the Lord  
Psalm 93:5 – *"Thy testimonies are fully confirmed; Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, forevermore."*

- A. Standing on the Promises  
*"Therefore, having these promises, beloved"*
- B. Separating from All Defilement  
*"let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit"*
- C. Sanctifying Ourselves for Intimacy with God  
*"perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) Remember how Christ fulfilled all righteousness and avoided lawlessness while still being willing to rub shoulders with sinners.
- 2) Proclaim Christ as the Light of the world – shining in the darkness of this world.
- 3) Proclaim how God became incarnate in the person of Christ in order to walk among men and be their mediator so He could truly be their God.
- 4) Proclaim the privilege of being brought into God's family as a son or daughter.

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## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we debate doubtful areas from the perspective of “How close can we come to the fire without being burned” rather than eliminating all controversy by a zeal that pursues as hard after holiness as we can?
- 2) What types of applications have we found in our own life in the realm of Marriage / Business / Church / Degree of Friendship?
- 3) What does separation involve for us on a practical level? What are some things we have found we can't do and must avoid?
- 4) Are we sufficiently motivated by the precious promises of God?

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## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** Well, then, what constitutes a yoke that we are to avoid? Now, not all associations are yokes, but yokes have two characteristics by which we can always identify them:

The first one is that a yoke is not easily broken. It is a kind of permanent relationship. When you yoke two animals together they are bound together; they do not have any choice. Uncomfortable as it may be, they must do things together. . .

Now the second mark of a yoke is that it constrains someone; it does not permit independent action. There is something that forces you to comply with what the other one wants to do, whether you like it or not. Any kind of relationship that does not permit a believer to follow his Lord in all things is a yoke. Even a friendship can be a yoke. If it is the kind of possessive friendship in which you feel you cannot do what God wants you to do because you will offend your friend, then that is a yoke and it must be broken.

**Zeisler:** Paul uses two images drawn from the Old Testament. First, in verse 14 he makes the clear statement, do not be yoked together with unbelievers. Then as he outlines a series of contrasts, the final one has to do with the temple of God and the temple of idols, so he picks up the imagery of the temple and expands on that. The one image is that of a yoke on two animals, and the other is that of the temple of God and what it means for God to dwell in a place and be at home in righteousness where he belongs.

The law of the Jews forbade that Jews should take two different sorts of animals and yoke them together with a hard, inflexible, wooden yoke. We're told in Deuteronomy that it is not permissible to take an ox and a donkey and yoke them together. It was given originally to forbid cruelty to animals. If a heavy-footed, slow-moving ox is

locked together closely and unbreakably with a donkey, which is at a different height and moves at a different gait, the yoke will chafe and make both animals miserable.

**Gromacki:** 2 blessings of obedience to this command:

First, God will “receive” the obedient, separated child of God. This is not a reception to salvation, but to full enjoyment of the privileges of sonship. . .

Second, there would be an awareness of the Father-Son relationship (6:18). It was difficult for the prodigal son to sense his sonship when he was living far away from his father, indulging in riotous living and, later, working in the pig fields (Luke 15:11-24). When he repented and returned home, the Father kissed, forgave, clothed, and fed him. So it will be for any Christian who will separate himself from sin and sinful alliances.

**Kent:** (Re connection to previous paragraph)

The exhortation that the Corinthians open their hearts to Paul (6:13) must not be misunderstood as though he were asking for an undiscerning love that had no standards and no convictions. To return to Paul in a meaningful way would require a disavowal of all that was contradictory. . . He was warning his readers against forming the sort of binding relationships with unbelievers which would weaken their Christian standards or compromise their ability to maintain a consistent witness.

**Harris:** Paul is probably implying that the Corinthians had become defiled, perhaps by occasionally sharing meals at idol-shrines or by continuing to attend festivals or ceremonies in pagan temples (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22); or even by maintaining their membership in some local pagan cult. If they made a clean break . . . with pagan life in any and every form, they would be bringing their holiness nearer completion by this proof of their reverence for God. The Christian life involves separation (6:17), familial fellowship (6:18), and sanctification (7:1).



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

TITLE: *GODLY SORROW PRODUCES GENUINE REPENTANCE*

**BIG IDEA:**

**SPIRITUAL LEADERS REJOICE WITH COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE  
OVER GENUINE REPENTANCE**

**PERSPECTIVE:**

We need some perspective on the overall process of Reconciliation before beginning this study. There was a serious problem between Paul and some of the believers in Corinth. Remember some of the specific charges that had been leveled against him by his opponents:

- You are Ambiguous (1:13) – you are difficult to understand; Paul’s opponents would twist his words and misrepresent his teachings
- You are Fickle (1:15-20) – You can’t be depended upon; you change your travel plans and back out of previous commitments; we can not depend on your commitment to us
- You Brag about Yourself (3:1-3) – You are always commending yourself; exalting yourself; boasting in your accomplishments
- You are an Imposter (6:8) – Your apostolic call is questionable; Christ does not really speak through you (13:3)
- You have no real Authority (10:1-2) – In fact you are timid in person and only bold when you are writing from a safe distance away
- You are Crafty and Deceitful (12:16) – You take advantage of others

These are all very serious charges that have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry. Divine grace was needed not to lash back defensively and vindictively. What type of interaction would Paul choose:

- Loving Communication (with goal of restoration)      or  
  Angry Confrontation (with goal of revenge)

The Apostle Paul took the initiative by writing a severe letter and then waiting for Titus to report back with the response of the Corinthians.

Loving Communication produces Godly Sorrow which leads to Genuine Repentance and Reconciliation

Angry Confrontation produces Worldly Sorrow which leads to Superficial Regret and further Separation

**(:2-4) INTRODUCTION: THE ANTICIPATION OF GENUINE REPENTANCE (LEADING TO FULL RECONCILIATION) EVOKES DEEP EMOTIONS OF CONFIDENCE, COMFORT AND JOY**

- A. (:2) Ministry Integrity Removes Any Barriers to Full Reconciliation
  - 1. Plea for Full Reconciliation
    - “Make room for us in your hearts”*
  - 2. Personal Testimony of Ministry Integrity – A Clear Conscience
    - a. *“we wronged no one”*
    - b. *“we corrupted no one”*
    - c. *“we took advantage of no one”*
- B. (:3) Tone of Loving Acceptance – Not Judgmental Spirit
  - 1. Not out to Condemn
    - “I do not speak to condemn you”*
  - 2. Embracing Them in Loving Acceptance
    - “for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.”*
- C. (:4) Outpouring of Deep Emotions
  - 1. Confidence
    - a. *“Great is my confidence in you”*
    - b. *“great is my boasting on your behalf”*
  - 2. Comfort
    - “I am filled with comfort.”*
  - 3. Joy
    - “I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.”*

**I. (:5-7) DIVINE COMFORT RELIEVES INTENSE MINISTRY PRESSURE**

- A. (:5) Inescapable Battleground Pressure – Squeezed on all fronts
  - “For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.”*
- B. (:6) Divine Strategic Reinforcement – Divine Comfort in the person of Titus
  - “But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus”*

- C. (:7) Encouraging Scouting Report – First Fruits of Genuine Repentance  
*“and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.”*

## **II. (:8-10) GODLY SORROW PRODUCES GENUINE REPENTANCE**

- A. (:8-9) Godly Sorrow is a Means to an End, not an End in Itself  
*“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it – for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while – I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.”*

- B. (:10) Godly Sorrow is Different than Worldly Sorrow  
*“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

1. It is directed by God – *“according to the will of God”*
2. It is the believer's insurance policy: the premium hurts, but the benefits pay off in the long run – *“without regret”*  
If you had to do it all over again, you would pay the insurance premiums just like you did the first time.
3. It results in *salvation* (or reconciliation)  
(worldly sorrow results in death, separation)
4. Examples of worldly sorrow
  - a. King Herod Matt. 14:9
  - b. Rich young man Matt. 19:22
  - c. Judas Matt. 27:3-5

## **III. (:11-12) GENUINE REPENTANCE CAN BE RECOGNIZED BY OTHERS**

- A. Recognized according to its nature, its orientation

Def. of Repentance: "a change of mind leading to a change of action" --  
It results in a complete reorientation of thoughts, attitudes, and actions. It involves a turning from sin and a turning towards God. It is either used in a broad sense as synonymous with conversion or in a more narrow sense as one of the two conditions for salvation: Repentance and Faith – these two always go hand in hand – like the two sides of the same coin. Just as Repentance is essential for initial conversion, it is also

essential for continued spiritual growth (this is not emphasized enough). Cf. Co. 2:6 – “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

B. (:11) Recognized according to its fruit – The 7 Fruits of Genuine Repentance

1. Speedy Resolution (diligence, earnestness, eagerness)

*“For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you”*

(our English word “speed”) – same word used in Rom. 12:11 – “*not slothful in business*” – I am afraid we are more diligent in doing a good job solving problems at work than we are in addressing reconciliation problems. A genuinely repentant person will quickly seek out reconciliation on his own initiative. He will not treat the situation with careless indifference or ignore the problem (hoping it will go away). There is a need to get busy and be in earnest.

2. Reasonable Dialogue (controlled by reason, not by emotion)

*“what vindication of yourselves”*

(controlled by reason, not emotion – cf. English word “apology”) – Not compounding the sin or seeking to justify your participation in that sin, but explaining your repentance so that now you stand in a state of innocence – not participating in any of these false charges; not giving them any more of a hearing.

3. Indignation (shame and distress) – *“what indignation”*

Not calm and unruffled evidencing no sorrow for sin; not arrogant and stubborn; but recognizing the shame associated with such failure and being distressed by the whole situation and yet not despairing because of the forgiveness for sins provided by the blood of Christ.

4. Fear – *“what fear”*

The Corinthians recognized they had sinned against a holy God and against His apostolic representative. They realized how serious such an offense was and what judgment could have been theirs; no complacency or false security.

5. Longing (to see the offended party) – *“what longing”*

They wanted to meet personally to set things right and to make sure that the problem is behind them; not avoiding or despising the offended party.

6. Zeal (upholding the honor and reputation of the offended party)

*“what zeal”*

Encouraging others to express their loyalty towards this person; upholding his honor; not undermining loyalty to such a person and attacking him at every turn

7. Avenging of wrong – *“what avenging of wrong”*

The church is the proper forum for judging one another and exercising any necessary discipline. We should hold to a high standard of justice. We should not take matters into our own hands or seek revenge.

Summary: *“In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.”*

C. (:12) Recognized For What it Is

*“So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.”*

Essential for their ongoing spiritual growth and fruitfulness in ministry

**Stedman:** they begin to recover a sense of their own identity

**(:13-16) CONCLUSION: GENUINE REPENTANCE EVOKES DEEP EMOTIONS OF CONFIDENCE, COMFORT AND JOY**

Paul finishes this section just as he began it in verses 2-4

A. (:13) Genuine Repentance Brings Great Comfort and Refreshing Joy

1. Personal Comfort – experienced by the Apostle Paul

*“For this reason we have been comforted”*

2. Vicarious Comfort Evoking Even Greater Joy – based on encouragement to Titus

*“And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.”*

B. (:14) Genuine Repentance Brings Vindication of Boasting (Renewed Confidence)

*“For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.”*

C. (:15) Genuine Repentance Brings An Outpouring of Affection

*“And his affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.”*

D. (:16) Genuine Repentance Brings Joy in the Confident Expectation of Future Obedience

*“I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.”*

Quite the blanket statement!

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) Note the compassionate heart of Christ who is able to comfort the distressed and depressed in every circumstance.

2) Note how Christ responded to those who attacked Him and His ministry? “*Father, forgive them*” was His prayer as He actively pleaded with them to be reconciled to God before impending wrath would strike. Note his example in 1 Peter of suffering unjustly for the sake of doing good according to the will of God.

3) Reconciliation is only possible because Christ has paid the price for our sins and become our Mediator.

4) Christ offers life and union with God the Father rather than death and separation. He alone can bring wholeness to any broken relationship.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we take the initiative to seek reconciliation – whether we judge ourselves to be the offending party or the offender?

2) Do we have a condemning, judgmental spirit that seeks to place blame or to exact revenge or do we deeply long for the spiritual growth of the other party and for restored relationships?

3) Do we teach our children the difference between just mouthing the words “I’m sorry” (= worldly sorrow) and actually following through with attitudes and actions that demonstrate a changed heart of repentance (= godly sorrow)?

4) Do we make our boast in the spiritual maturity and proper responses of those whom we are training in discipleship?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Kent:** Re vs. 12 – Our knowledge of the details prompting this letter is admittedly meager, and thus we can only suggest possibilities. The view espoused in this commentary sees the offender as the ringleader of opposition against Paul (and perhaps Titus). The one offended was probably Paul, or perhaps Titus, but this is less likely. With this understanding, Paul is regarded as saying that his primary concern was not to secure punishment for the offender or vindication for himself. What he really wanted was for the Corinthians to prove to themselves that their response to spiritual truth and to God’s messengers was right. To accede to the directives of the apostle would rectify the situation, true repentance and an altered course of action would bring God’s approval, and this in turn would remind the Corinthians of the importance of heeding the instruction of Christ’s duly chosen apostles.

**Zeisler:** Characteristics of a Corrector

Paul makes two important points. First, his motives are right. When he had to say hard things to them, it was not for his own sake. He didn't have an axe to grind, and he didn't come to get riches, prominence, or ego satisfaction from them. I used to play football, and I recall good and bad coaches. One demanded a lot of the team, insisting we go beyond what we thought we could physically do. We ran until we dropped, practiced till it hurt, and call on reserves we didn't know we had. Sometimes the coach's demands on us succeeded in producing efforts that went beyond our expectations. But he wasn't centered on his own ego. He was demanding, but he wanted to serve his team, to see those in his charge succeed. But other coaches I've known are exactly the opposite. They treat their players like cattle, and if an individual is injured or needs extra help, he is "thrown away" and someone else put in his place because the program exists to promote the coach.

Paul is making that distinction here. He has had to demand hard things of the Corinthians. He has pointed out areas of their lives that they needed to hear about even though they didn't want to, but he didn't do it for his own sake. His motives were pure. That's a very important place to start if we are ever to be Micaiahs ourselves. Remember what Jesus said about logs and splinters in one's eye. Jesus said, first the log needs to be removed from your own eye before you can remove the splinter from another's eye. If we don't deal with our own motives and shortcomings, we shouldn't be in the ministry of shaping up someone else.

Paul alludes to another qualification in saying that the Corinthians are in his heart; he would live or die with them. Whatever happens in this correction process, he is not going to hold himself at a distance. Whatever pain or hardship they have to go through, his shoulder will be under the burden with them. Christian ministry of this sort cannot possibly take place at great distance. When the apostle must come to his church, or when a brother must come to his brother or sister, then he needs to be willing to say, "I know it's going to cost me something if you suffer because you matter so much to me."

...

To conclude, last week we talked about being yoked to non-Christians and why that's such a bad idea-having an unbreakable, inflexible oneness that dilutes our influence, that makes us live in a way that is less and less of the Lord. The exact opposite point is being made here, isn't it? We're not yoked enough to each other! We're not involved enough with those who are our family- we don't get close enough, speak forcefully enough; we're unwilling to do the courageous thing or we're too hardened to receive godly sorrow. We've taken communion today, and the Bible forbids us to take communion in an unworthy manner. It may very well be that we need someone to help us see our unworthiness. I need someone to come to me and tell me when I'm being arrogant, or when greed has infiltrated me, or I've stopped caring for other people. You need people like that to come to you. So it's good to avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers. But let's be more yoked to each other! Let's be more willing to say the hard thing when it's required, and expect godly sorrow to have its result, that life should abound.

**Piper:** I would suggest two ways to distinguish them.

1) Worldly regret is when you feel sorry for something you did because it starts to backfire on you and leads to humiliation or punishment. It's the reflex of a proud or fearful ego. Pride will always regret making a fool of itself. And fear will always regret acts that jeopardize comfort and safety. So feeling sorry for something we have done is in itself no sign of virtue. But godly regret is the reflex of a conscience that has wounded God's ego, not its own. Godly regret grieves that God's name has come into disrepute. The focus of godly regret is God.

2) A second way to distinguish worldly regret from godly regret is that godly regret is owing to God's word putting its finger on sin in our lives. Worldly regret is owing not to God's word but to the attitudes of men whose praise we don't want to lose. We can feel extremely sorry for something we have done if we detect that the people around us think it is stupid or silly or reprehensible. The word of man not God becomes the criterion of guilt.

So in summary, godly grief, or godly regret, is the uncomfortable feeling of guilt when the word of God shows you that what you've done is sin and thus has brought reproach on God's name. (Of course, if other people have been hurt by your sin, godly regret will want to redress the wrong and so remove the reproach upon God's honor.) Godly regret is the regret of a God-saturated heart, not a world-saturated heart.

**Gromacki:** Genuine repentance is permanent as well as observable. A temporary reformation is a sign of human change rather than divine. Peter warned against those professed believers who "*are again entangled therein, and overcome*" with the pollutions of the world (II Peter 2:20). Paul was concerned whether their repentance was genuine or false. The report of Titus proved that it was genuine.

**Tasker:** quoting **Menzie:** Re vs. 12

The painful letter was written to make the Corinthians clearly conscious of the sentiment with which they did all the time regard him. That was to be done before God, in a marked and solemn manner, so that there could be no going back on it afterwards.

**Barclay:** The last thing that Paul wished was to rebuke. He did it only under compulsion and because there was nothing else to do. He took no pleasure whatever in inflicting pain. There are those who take a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince beneath the lash of their tongue. Who pride themselves on being candid when they are only being rude, and on being blunt when they are only being boorish. It is the simple fact that the rebuke which is given with a certain relish will never prove as effective as the rebuke which is obviously unwillingly dragged out of a man and which he only gives because he can do no other. . .

Paul's sole object in giving rebuke was to enable people to be what they ought to be. By his rebuke he wished the Corinthians to see the real earnestness they possessed for him in the depths of their hearts in spite of their disobedience and their trouble-making.



Such a course might for the moment cause pain, but its ultimate object was not the pain; it was not to knock them down, it was to lift them up; it was not to discourage them, it was to encourage them; it was not simply to eradicate the evil, it was to make the good grow.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

TITLE: THE GRACIOUS WORK OF GIVING – ITS PRIORITY AND PRIVILEGE

**III. (8:1 – 9:15) POVERTY OF FELLOW BELIEVERS PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD’S GRACE AND SUFFICIENCY TO BE DISPLAYED IN GENEROUS CHRISTIAN GIVING (OFFERED FREELY FROM THE HEART AND ADMINISTERED WITH INTEGRITY) (PAUL’S PLEA FOR PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF FELLOWSHIP IN GOD’S GRACIOUS WORK OF GENEROUS GIVING)**

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”  
(9:8)*

**BIG IDEA:  
GOOD INTENTIONS IN GIVING MUST BE CONSUMMATED ACCORDING TO YOUR ABILITY – OR IDEALLY BEYOND YOUR ABILITY**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Principle: you can never out give the Grace of God

**I. (:1-5) IT IS COMMENDABLE TO GIVE BEYOND YOUR ABILITY – EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIANS – THEIR STRONG DESIRE TO GIVE**

**A. (:1) The Grace of God is the Key to Giving**

*“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia”*

We do God a disservice whenever we add any elements of legalism into Christian giving.

**Pounds:** The Macedonians make it absolutely clear that our stewardship does not depend upon our circumstances. It depends upon the quality of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We give because He first gave to us His amazing grace. . . The only true motive for giving is the grace of God. We give because of God's goodness to us. If God has not done anything good for you please do not give a dime. However, if you are the recipient of His abundant amazing grace then pour it out according to the measure you have received. It is a privilege and opportunity to be involved in the stewardship of grace. It is not our duty; it is our privilege. God invites us to come and join Him in what He is doing. That includes our giving.

**B. (:2) Poverty Does Not Have to be a Limitation to Generous Giving**

*“that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”*

Everyone can participate in the privilege of giving since it is not conditioned on having an abundance of wealth.

C. (3-4) Viewing Giving as a Privilege Motivates Sacrificial Giving Beyond One's Ability

*"For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,"*

Voluntary giving without any compulsion must be the rule; here the compulsion is turned around so that the givers are begging for the privilege of participating

D. (:5) Giving Must be Preceded by Consecration

*"and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."*

**II. (:6-11a) IT IS COMMENDABLE TO EXCEL IN THIS GRACIOUS WORK OF GIVING – CALL TO THE CORINTHIANS – THEIR DUTY TO CONSUMMATE THEIR GOOD INTENTIONS**

A. (:7) Excelling in Giving Should be High on Your List of Priorities

*"But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also."*

B. (:8) Excelling in Giving Proves the Sincerity of Your Love

*"I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also."*

C. (:9) Excelling in Giving Follows the Pattern of the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."*

D. (:10) Excelling in Giving Works to Your Advantage

*"And I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it."*

E. (:11a) Just Do It! – Good Intentions are not Enough – You Must Consummate Your Giving

*"But now finish doing it also; that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it"*

**III. (:11b-15) THE RATIONALE FOR GIVING ACCORDING TO ONE'S ABILITY IS THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY (NOT SHIFTING THE BURDEN TO YOURSELF) – FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN GIVING**

A. (:11b) Willingness to Give Must be Consummated According to Your Ability

*“that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.”*

B. (:12) Giving Evaluated Based on One’s Resources

*“For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have.”*

C. (:13-15) Principle of Equality Applies to Mutual Giving – Not Shifting the Burden to Yourself

*“For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality – at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”*

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**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) As the Lord of our life, Jesus Christ deserves our total consecration as the starting point for whatever steps of obedience we take in individual areas like giving.
- 2) What high price did Christ pay for the privilege of giving His riches to us? Is it really Christian giving if we do not feel any cost? Do we consider ourselves rich because of what Christ has provided for us?
- 3) How did Christ exemplify giving beyond His ability rather than just giving in accordance with His ability?
- 4) What is the current extent of Christ’s riches?

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**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) Why does Paul not appeal to the practice of tithing in this important section on Giving?
- 2) What is the significance of viewing giving as a gracious work of God?

3) How do you evaluate your own resources to determine what constitutes your ability to give? Would Paul support the practice of pledges as it relates to giving?

4) How is this principle of equality different from an economic system of socialism?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** To illustrate this, Paul quotes from the Old Testament the story of the manna that fell in the wilderness. He pictures the man who went forth with greed in his heart to gather this wonderful substance up and to fill his tubs, his crocks, his pots and his pans with this delicious stuff called manna. Manna means "what is it?" They did not know what it was so they called it "What is it?" Paul quotes, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack." Here was a man who went out and gathered all he could get, hoping to have an abundance of this wonderful food. But those who gathered like that, in greed, found that what they could not use in one day turned to a foul mass of corruption, while for those who gathered little, God met their need by the sharing of others and there was an abundance. Those who gathered little had no lack. Paul is simply saying that if we fail to give in prosperity, God will curse what we have and make it become a curse to us. It will become a foul mass. If we attempt to accumulate more than we actually need and do not give that which is in abundance with us, it shall turn, in the providence of God, to cursing in our hands. On the other hand, if we fail to receive in adversity, God will judge us for our carnal, stubborn pride. . .

When Joe Blinco was with us a number of years ago, he told us a story of a Christian leader, a prominent Christian man, who was speaking, on one occasion, to a group of ladies. He was giving his Christian testimony. He told how he came to Christ as a boy in his teens, how the Lord met him, delivered him, and saved him. Shortly after his conversion he went to a large city to seek for work. It was in the middle of the Depression and work was very scarce. In the joy of his new-found faith the first place he looked up was a church. The first Sunday night he went to church they were having a missionary meeting, and he told of the powerful appeal that was made from the pulpit for contributions to send out a missionary into a needy field. They took up an offering to accomplish this need. He said that he sat there in the audience and he had in his pocket, he knew, one silver dollar, all the money he had in the world. He knew that he would have to live on that dollar (it went a lot further in those days than now) for the next few days while he was looking for work. He said he could, at the same time, feel a tremendous pull of the Spirit in his life and heart to contribute to this need, but all he had was the dollar. The plate was passed up and down the rows and gradually it draw closer to him. He struggled with his desire to give and his feeling that he simply could not give when all he had was a dollar. But, he said, as the plate drew close to him he felt that the Spirit of God was urging him to venture his all. He said to these ladies,

"I reached in my pocket and I took out that silver dollar, all I had in the world, and I laid it on the plate and gave my all to Jesus Christ, expecting God to meet my need."

He went on to tell how God did meet his need. how someone met his physical need that night and the next morning a job came along, and he said that he then promised God that he would give faithfully and regularly of his income. God had greatly blessed him and now he was standing before them in testimony to the faithfulness of a God who gave in response to a giving heart. He had now come to a place of prominence, of power, influence, and wealth. And, as he was standing there before these ladies, a woman in the audience looked up at this wealthy Christian man, affluent, powerful, well dressed, and she said to him, "I dare you to do it again!"

Now, why not? Why not? This is the venture of faith that God calls us to. It is to step out on the promise that he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply our resources and increase the harvest of our righteousness, so that we will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. . . .

Have you ever noticed that there is no tithe in the New Testament?

Never once in the epistles do you ever read of Christians being asked to tithe. A lot of Christians today are taught to tithe, but I am always sorry to hear that, because that is not New Testament teaching.

The tithe was a tax levied upon people for the purpose of supporting a priesthood, a separate body of people who did religious things. When you come into the New Testament you find the priesthood has, in a sense, been eliminated. Now every Christian is a priest. We are a royal kingdom of priests, the epistles tell us, and there is no special collection or tax to support it.

It is laid upon us to give voluntarily, as our hearts are stirred and moved by the grace of God. That is what these Macedonians did. They understood that once you have given yourself it is easy to give anything else. That is the key.

**Piper:** Re vs. 9 -- This is the grace of God that turns selfish people into joyful givers. The reason verse 9 should take away our selfishness and make us joyful and generous is that it takes away the only basis for selfishness. The basis for selfishness is the notion that giving less away and keeping more for ourselves will provide more happiness and fulfillment to our lives. But verse 9 shows that God's purpose in sending His Son was to create joyful, loving, generous givers. Now if God values joyful, loving generosity so much as to give His beloved Son to create it in His people, then we can be absolutely assured that when we are more generous we will be more happy and more fulfilled because God is bound to work mightily for those whose behaviour he values so highly.

**Zeisler:** One of the saddest things about contemporary "pop Christianity" is the fund-raising approach that many organizations have adopted. So often, highly sophisticated

computer programs generate mailing lists or appeals that are intended to short-circuit the minds of people, grabbing at their emotions. There is an effort to spread the net as widely as possible so that even a small percentage of return will generate large sums. There's a horrible mentality behind all that. Instead of viewing the people who are giving as valuable in their own right, encouraging them to give their lives, to see the Lord at work, and to receive the blessing that comes from that, this mentality views them as sources of supply and little else. It's the farthest thing from what we read about in the scriptures. Paul saw something beautiful happen amongst the Macedonians, and their example was held up to others. They gave themselves first to the Lord; to his servants; and then they gave their money. . . .

Summing up, the Corinthians were embarrassed because they weren't going to have as much as they had indicated, so Paul is trying to relieve their embarrassment. And they were grumbling because they wondered if the system was going to be one-way and never work to their advantage, so he declares, "there will be equality." And Paul wants the sterling example of the Macedonians, who didn't think as much about the process or the details, who didn't calculate as much, but who were caught up in gratitude, to stand before the Corinthian Christians. Part of what he is trying to do is challenge them to consider whether their standards are what they ought to be. Their sense of what hardship is may need some adjusting.

**Hughes:** The example of the Macedonians is a practical proof that true generosity is not the prerogative of those who enjoy an adequacy of means. The most genuine liberality is frequently displayed by those who have least to give. Christian giving is estimated in terms not of quantity but of sacrifice.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:16 - 9:5

TITLE: PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

**BIG IDEA:**

**CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE ADMINISTERED WITH FINANCIAL INTEGRITY AND OFFERED FROM PREPARED HEARTS**

**I. (8:16-24) CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE ADMINISTERED WITH FINANCIAL INTEGRITY**

Commending the Collectors

A. (:16-17) Commending Titus (for His Earnestness)

1. (:16) Divine Giftedness

*“But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.”*

2. (:17) Personal Initiative

*“For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.”*

B. (:18-19a) Commending Famous Brother

1. (:18) Commissioned by Paul

*“And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches”*

2. (:19a) Commissioned by the Churches

*“and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work”*

C. (:19b-21) Concern for Financial Integrity (Heart of the passage)

1. (:19b) Proper Stewardship

*“which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness.”*

2. (:20) Fiscal Accountability

*“taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift”*

3. (:21) Good Reputation

*“for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”*

D. (:22) Commending Unnamed Brother (for His Diligence)

*“And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent, because of his great*



*confidence in you.”*

E. (:23) Summary of Commendation

1. Titus

*“As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you”*

2. Other Brothers

*“as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ”*

F. (:24) Appeal for Loving Acceptance

*“Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.”*

**II. (9:1-5) CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE OFFERED FROM PREPARED HEARTS**

Collecting the Pledges

A. (:1-2) Confidence in Their Heart Preparation

*“For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”*

B. (3-4) Precaution of Checking on Their Heart Preparation

*“But I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence.”*

C. (:5) Summary

*“So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) In our efforts to live lives pleasing to our Lord, we seek to glorify Him in everything and we are careful to always do what is honorable in the Lord’s sight, knowing that He is watching all that we do.

2) Christ always did what was honorable in the sight of all men. Look at His wisdom in answering trick questions from the religious leaders ... such as about paying taxes or

who is married to whom in heaven.

3) Christ allowed the purse strings of His earthly ministry to be managed at least in part by Judas ... why would he do this if integrity of financial affairs was so important?

4) Look at how Christ proved His great love for us by the nature and extend of His sacrificial giving.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How careful are we in the giving of our money to Christian organizations? Have we checked them out to make sure that they are practicing policies of financial accountability and integrity?

2) Do we think that are responsibility stops with just giving a certain amount of money away to the Lord's work or do we view it as an investment where we want to make sure we get the best return for our \$\$?

3) Would we characterize our approach to giving as one marked by *zeal*?

4) What type of preparation do we make for our giving . . . or is it largely a very automatic thing without much compassion for the needs or without much concern for the glory of the Lord?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** Personally, I would never give to a Christian organization that is headed by a single individual, no matter how responsible he may seem to be. It is just not wise to trust an individual with the administration of sums of money. . . Furthermore, I would never give to an organization headed by a board on which there were several members of the same family. . . Furthermore, in this regard, it is an excellent practice to require two signatures on every check disbursed from Christian funds . . . Do not give to organizations or groups or people who habitually rely on emotional appeals to get you to give. . .

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that if you give according to the law of harvest, God will give back. And this is the form it will take:  
First, it will awaken gratitude in those to whom you give . . .  
second, it stimulates them to pray for you . . .  
And third, it glorifies God with the thanksgivings of many. . .

Giving is godlike, and we are everywhere in Scripture reminded that we are to give

because we have been given to. Therefore, we are encouraged by a passage like this to sow with a prodigal hand, to give generously, to realize we have affluence, we have additional money beyond our own needs for the very reason that we might have something to give to those who have less. Take advantage of it. Jesus put it as beautifully and as simply as it could ever be put: "*Freely you have received, freely give,*" {cf., Matt 10:8 KJV}. That is God's basis and motive for encouraging our Christian giving

**Zeisler:** About a year previously, the Corinthians had heard about the opportunity to give to the poor in Jerusalem, and they had been effusive in their insistence that they would give a great deal of money; they wanted to be known as a generous church. So Paul took them at their word. They had not been required to say this or manipulated into offering a generous gift. In their characteristic way they had leaped at the challenge before them. So when Paul traveled to other places, he would speak of the generous response of the Corinthians, their commitment to sacrificial giving, and so on. Now word has come back to him that they are feeling embarrassed about all this, and that is one of the sources of tension between Paul and them. There isn't a big sum of money waiting in Corinth. Their response had waned quickly after they had first spoken. What Paul is doing now is bringing the issues out into the open. He is saying in effect that their reputation will be based on what they actually do, not on what they say. He is not willing to cover their embarrassment by pretending the facts are not as they are.

**Tasker:** Chapter divisions are not always found in the best places in our English versions, and the assignment of these words to the opening verse of a new chapter (9:1) is somewhat misleading, for Paul, in fact, is continuing to speak about the delegates who are soon to visit Corinth.

**Barclay:** It is Paul's great desire here that the gift of the Corinthians should be ready and should not have to be collected and prepared at the last moment. There is an old Latin proverb which says, "He gives twice who gives quickly." That is always true. The finest gifts are given, not when they are demanded, but before they are asked for. The finest gifts are given, not after waiting until need has to ask, but by the man whose eye sees and whose heart feels and whose hand is stretched out even before any request is made. It was while we were yet enemies that Christ died for us. God hears our prayers even before we speak them. And we should be to our fellow men even as God has been to us.

**Kent:** The apostle expected the collection to be a generous one. At the same time, he recognized that any considerable amount of funds given for charitable purposes opens the collectors to suspicion if safeguards are not provided. Anyone in the limelight as Paul was quickly learns that his prominence makes him an obvious target of critics, especially in financial matters. Once suspicions are aroused, they will color every future action. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that suitable precautions be taken. Paul was doing exactly that. By using a delegation of trustworthy men, and getting authorization from a spectrum of churches, he was avoiding any possibility of serious suspicion.

**Gromacki:** He wanted them to “be ready” in performance as they had been ready in plans. The apostle had gone out on the proverbial limb for them (“as I said”). They could either vindicate his confidence in them or bring suspicion upon the integrity of his words. If the Corinthians had failed, then the other churches could have thought that the apostle manipulated them with a challenging example that was not true.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

TITLE: *MONEY IN THE BANK -- GENEROUS GIVING YIELDS AN ABUNDANT HARVEST*

**BIG IDEA:**

**GOD GUARANTEES A RETURN ON SPIRITUAL INVESTMENTS –  
THE PROMISES OF GOD PROMOTE GENEROUS GIVING WHICH BINDS  
BELIEVERS TOGETHER IN GLORIFYING GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Have you ever made a really bad investment?? Discouraging to throw your money away. How generous are you when it comes to investing in the Lord's work?

**I. (:6-11a) 5 PROMISES OF GOD THAT PROMOTE GENEROUS GIVING**

A. (:6) Promise of Proportional Reaping

1. Sow sparingly . . . Reap sparingly

*“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly”*

2. Sow bountifully . . . Reap bountifully

*“and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.”*

Implies a careful effort; not just a scattering of the seed by careful Planting; Laws of nature apply to laws of giving

B. (:7) Promise of Blessing of Free Will Offerings

1. OT Background of Free Will Offerings

2. Positively: Purposeful Giving

*“Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart”*

3. Negatively:

- a. *Not grudgingly*
- b. *Or under compulsion*

4. Blessing: *“for God loves a cheerful giver”*

*“hilarious”*

C. (:8-9) Promise of Abundant Grace

1. Key Principle: *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you”*

2. Meeting All Your Needs

*“that always having all sufficiency in everything”*

3. Providing Extra Resources to Help Others

*“you may have an abundance for every good deed”*

4. (:9) Supporting OT Quote – Result = Abiding Righteousness

*“as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever.’”* Psalm 112:9

**Tasker:** Paul now produces Scripture proof for the truth that the giver shall be provided with the means of giving. In Ps. cxii, after stating in verse 3 that the man who fears God will never lack riches, the psalmist goes on to say in verse 9 that the righteous man, who desires to express his righteousness in beneficence, will never lack the means of doing it. *Righteousness* is used here for *“almsgiving”* (cf. Mt. vi. 1).

D. (:10) Promise of Supplying Both Abundant Seed and Abundant Harvest

*“Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness”*  
God provides the capital for all spiritual investments

E. (:11a) Promise of Overall Enrichment

*“you will be enriched in everything for all liberality”*

**II. (11b-14) THERE ARE IMMEDIATE RETURNS ON SPIRITUAL INVESTMENTS – GENEROUS GIVING BINDS BELIEVERS TOGETHER IN GLORIFYING GOD**

A. (:11b-12) Produces Abundant Thanksgiving to God

(in addition to meeting the needs of the saints)

*“which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.”*

B. (13) Causes the Recipients to Glorify God

1. Because of Obedience to the Confession of the Gospel

*“Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ”*

2. Because of the Generosity of the Gift

*“and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all”*

D. (:14) Binds Believers Together -- receiver prays for giver

*“while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.”*

Relates to spiritual growth and ministry

**(:15) BENEDICTION**

*“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”*

Some think this refers to God’s grace in the life of the Corinthians to spur them to giving ... but it must refer to God’s incredible gift of His Son (John 3:16)

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**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) Christ is the supreme example of sowing abundantly; of giving purposefully (setting His face to go to the cross); of giving freely and cheerfully.
- 2) Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ had all of his physical needs met by His heavenly Father and was prospered in righteousness.
- 3) The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about giving and should produce in us a spirit of generous giving if we are obedient to our confession.
- 4) Words are not adequate to describe the incredible gift of Jesus Christ (and the associated grace) which has been given to us by the Father.

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**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) Are we hoarding riches for our future security or investing generously and wisely for a promised abundant harvest?
- 2) How do emotional types of fund raising and arm twisting tactics violate the spirit of how we have been instructed to give?
- 3) Have we appreciated the fact that God supplies the capital for all of our investments or do we consider the money He has enabled us to earn to belong to us?
- 4) In what sense does God promise to enrich us as we give with liberality?

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**QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:**

**Gromacki:** Through the practice of biblical principles of giving, the Corinthians would constantly be “enriched in everything to all bountifulness.” Instead of becoming impoverished through giving, as they might have expected, they would actually become

spiritual plutocrats . . . The word “bountifulness” . . . refers to their liberality, comparable to that of the Macedonians (8:2). They would be rich in giving, wealthy in liberality. Those are genuine riches.

**Kent:** The Corinthians’ bountiful giving would cause the Jerusalem saints to reciprocate, not by a return gift of money at this time – a situation clearly impossible – but by heartfelt prayers on their behalf. As the Jerusalem Christians prayed for their Corinthian benefactors, their hearts would be knit together with them, and they would yearn for a closer association because the lavish gift (*“the surpassing grace of God”*) which God had enabled them to give showed that they were one in spirit.

**Barclay:** Paul insists that no man was ever the loser because he was generous. Giving is like sowing seed. The man who sows with a sparing hand cannot hope for anything but a meagre harvest, but the man who sows with a generous hand will in due time reap a generous return. The New Testament is an extremely practical book and one of its great features is that it is never afraid of the reward motive. It never says that goodness is all to no purpose, that life is exactly the same for the man who obeys God and the man who does not. It never forgets that something new and precious and wonderful does enter into the life of the man who accepts God’s commands as his law. But the rewards that the New Testament envisages are never material rewards. It does not promise the wealth of things; but it does promise the wealth of the heart and of the spirit.

**Piper:** The great truth of this text is that God wants to be known and trusted and loved as the Giver not the Taker in this whole affair of giving. Otherwise all our giving is draining, burdensome, oppressive, legalistic, and sparing. And who needs it!

**Deffinbaugh:** Finally, our text has some remarkable parallels to the second coming of our Lord. Paul has been to Corinth, where he has proclaimed the gospel and many have come to faith. In his absence, he has written several letters and sent others to minister to them. He has promised to return to them, and his return appears to have been delayed. Now, he is soon to come, and he does not want the Corinthians caught by surprise, not really ready for his return, and thus embarrassed by his coming. This is the reason Paul writes to them and sends this delegation to prepare the way for his return. He wants his return to be a joyful reunion.

Our Lord has come to this earth and proclaimed the gospel. He has departed by His resurrection and ascension, but He assures us that He is coming again. He does not want us to be caught unaware and unprepared. He wants us to be ready for His return so that our reunion will be a joyful one, rather than an occasion for embarrassment. And so He has left us with His Word and with other gifted saints, all of whom are to encourage and equip us to live godly lives, so that when He returns we will be found ready. What a joyful time that will be if we are ready and waiting. Are there things which need to be done beforehand? Then let us tend to them now, quickly, before He returns, so that our reunion may be a joyful one.



**Geoff Thomas:** The true Christian, made rich in every way by God, shows it by a life of generosity. It is so much better to have your gold in your hand than in your heart, said a Puritan. I am told that there are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, 'I have to.' Duty giving says, 'I ought to.' Thanksgiving says, 'I want to,' and says it on every occasion

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

TITLE: *DON'T TRIFLE WITH SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY*

**IV. (10:1 – 13:10) PAINFUL ATTACKS AGAINST SPIRITUAL LEADERS  
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY TO EASILY BE  
DISTINGUISHED FROM COUNTERFEIT AUTHORITY  
(PAUL'S AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF HIS LEGITIMATE APOSTOLIC  
AUTHORITY)**

*“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.”  
(13:10)*

**BIG IDEA:  
THE REALITY OF PAUL'S AUTHORITY –  
WHEN NECESSARY, SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST DEFEND THEIR  
LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY AGAINST MISREPRESENTATIONS BY FALSE  
LEADERS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Beginning of a new section:

**VINDICATION OF PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (10:1 - 13:10)**

**CONTEXT:**

**Ryrie:** In spite of Paul's general satisfaction with the Corinthian church, there were still some there who challenged his apostolic authority and followed certain leaders whom Paul calls *“false apostles”* (11:13). These leaders were apparently Jewish Christians (11:22) who claimed higher authority than Paul's (10:7) and who lorded over the church.

**I. (:1-6) HIS READINESS (AND RELUCTANCE) TO EXERCISE HIS  
AUTHORITY – SPIRITUAL LEADERS CARRY A BIG STICK  
REPLY TO CHARGE OF WEAKNESS**

**A. (:1) Don't Confuse Meekness for Weakness**

*“Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!”*

Paul speaking sarcastically here, answering the charge that he was only bold on paper but was nobody to be reckoned with in person.

**Tasker:** The meekness of Jesus was preeminently shown in His submission to the wrongs inflicted upon Him in the discharge of His ministry as God's suffering Servant.

- B. (:2) Don't Make Me Use the Big Stick --  
Spiritual Leaders Only Use the Big Stick as a Last Resort  
*"I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh."*
- C. (:3-4) Spiritual Leaders Don't Fight Fairly – i.e. they use weapons that are divinely Powerful

*"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."*

- Cf. the weapons of David vs. Goliath – sling shot and some stones  
Cf. the weapons of Gideon  
Cf. the weapons of Joshua – literally knocking down fortresses

- D. (:5) Spiritual Leaders Attack the Root of the Problem – Aggressively and Successfully  
*"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."*
- E. (:6) Spiritual Leaders Will Use the Big Stick When Necessary  
*"and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."*

**II. (:7-11) HIS POWERFUL PERSONAL PRESENCE – CONSISTENT WITH HIS STRONG LETTERS – SPIRITUAL LEADERS SHOULD NEVER BE UNDERESTIMATED  
REPLY TO CHARGE OF INSINCERITY**

- A. (:7a) Outward Appearances Can Be Deceiving  
*"You are looking at things as they are outwardly."*
- B. (:7b) No Place for Christian Elitism  
*"If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we."*

**Barclay:** It seems clear that at least some of Paul's opponents asserted that Paul did not belong to Christ in the same way as they did. Perhaps they were still casting up at Paul the fact that once he had been the arch-persecutor of the Church. Perhaps they claimed special knowledge and special revelations. Perhaps they claimed a special holiness and

a special spirituality. In any event they looked down on Paul and they glorified themselves and their own relationship to Christ.

C. (:8-9) Goal is Edification Not Lording it Over

*“For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.”*

D. (:10-11) Legitimate Spiritual Authority is the Real Thing –  
whether by letter or in person

1. (:10) Accusation:

*“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible.’”*

2. (:11) Response

*“Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”*

**III. (:12-18) HIS LEGITIMATE SPHERE OF AUTHORITY –  
REPLY TO CHARGE OF PRIDE**

A. (:12) Futility of Self Commendation

*“For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.”*

B. (:13-16) Sphere of Authority Corresponds to Sphere of Ministry

1. (:13) Principle Stated = We exercise our authority within the proper sphere

*“But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.”*

Not overstepping the bounds of his authority in this matter

2. (:14) Historical Testimony = We brought you the Gospel

*“For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ.”*

**Tasker:** The false apostles had no authority for ministering at Corinth other than that which they had arrogated to themselves. It was they who were stretching themselves beyond measure, not Paul. Priority of service gave Paul a prior claim to the loyalty of the Corinthians.

3. (:15-16) Vision for Broader Outreach (vs. Sheep Stealing)

*“not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere,*

*enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.”*

C. (:17) Focus of Boasting

*“But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.”*

D. (:18) Validity of God Commendation

*“For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.”*

**ASIDE: PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATING THAT SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY MUST BE JUDGED BY SPIRITUAL STANDARDS**

1. Spiritual authority is given by God (:8,13)
2. Spiritual authority cannot be recognized through physical appearance or attributes (:7,12), rather we learn to judge as God judges and commend whom God commends (:18)
3. Spiritual authority is exercised in meekness (:1)  
meekness is not timidity (:2,10,11)  
spiritual leader must be strong to fight spiritual wars with spiritual weapons (:3-5)
4. Spiritual authority is given for edification (:8)
5. Spiritual authority will not be ashamed (or refuted) (:8)
6. Paul's Spiritual Authority within the field (probably geographical) God has assigned (:13)
7. Effectiveness of Spiritual Leader in a church is limited by the submission and faith of the church (:6,15)

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**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) Christ is presented here as the epitome of meekness and gentleness without detracting at all from his strength and power.
- 2) Belonging to Christ is the great privilege and security of every believer.
- 3) Spiritual leaders in the church have been granted authority by Christ for the purpose of edification.
- 4) The Lord should be the subject of our boasting

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## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we have a tendency to evaluate Christian leaders on the basis of what is outwardly impressive?
- 2) Do we view the spiritual weapons at our disposal as powerful enough to tear down the strongholds of sin and bondage in our lives?
- 3) Do we have the commendation of the Lord upon our ministry? Are we overly concerned with how others evaluate us?
- 4) Do we have a heart that longs to see the Lord increase the sphere of our ministry to extend to areas that are unreached by the gospel?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Tasker:** There is a definite break in the Epistle at the end of chapter ix as the apostle turns to deal with the recalcitrant minority at Corinth who, in contrast to the great majority of the Corinthian Christians, have not been loyal to him but are listening all too eagerly to the specious claims of certain false shepherds who have intruded into the fold of the Corinthian church.

**Barclay:** He speaks of the gentleness and the sweet reasonableness of Christ. The word *prautes*, *gentleness*, is an interesting word. Aristotle defined it as the correct mean between being too angry and being never angry at all. It is the quality of the man whose anger is so mastered and so controlled that he is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. It describes the man who is never angry at any personal wrong or insult or injury he may receive, but who is capable of righteous anger when he sees others hurt and injured and insulted. By using that word Paul is saying at the very beginning of his stern letter that he is not carried away by personal anger and rage, that he is speaking with the strong gentleness of Jesus Himself. The other word is even more illuminating. *Sweet reasonableness* is the Greek word *epieikeia*. The Greeks themselves defined *epieikeia* as "that which is just and even better than just." They described it as that quality which must enter in when justice, just because of its generality, is in danger of becoming unjust. There are cases when strictly to apply the laws and rules and regulations is actually unjust. There are times when strict and impartial justice can actually result in injustice. Sometimes there arise circumstances in which the real justice is not to insist on the rules or on the letter of the law, but to let a higher quality enter into our decisions. The man who has *epieikeia* is the man who knows that, in the last analysis, the Christian standard is not justice; it is love. And by using this word at the very beginning Paul is in effect saying that he is not out for his rights, he is not out to insist in the letter of the law and to impose all the rules and regulations. He is going to deal with this situation with that Christlike love which

transcends even the purest of human justice. He is going to try to deal with the situation as Christ himself would have dealt with it.

**Kent:** In this spiritual warfare which the true apostles of Christ waged, the particular objects of attack were the fortresses of human reasoning. These are now explained as those human philosophies regarding God and His works which are contrary to what God Himself has revealed.

**Gromacki:** The Judaizing critic, however, delighted in making such comparisons. *First*, he compared himself with his own self-appointed standard of excellence (“make ourselves of the number,” *egkrinai*). This was introspection. *Second*, he compared himself with others (“with some that commend themselves,” *sugkrinai*). This was competition. If a person adopts low standards for himself, he can usually meet them. If a person selects someone inferior with whom he can compare himself, he is bound to see himself as better.

**Zeisler:** Our first and deepest goal is to tear down strongholds, destroying places where evil is entrenched. Paul makes the point that evil is entrenched in the thinking of people. It is pretensions, the ideas that oppose knowledge of God, that are the ultimate strongholds. People behave the way they do because they have strongholds in their belief systems. What makes them willing to give in to the attraction to pornography is misguided beliefs about sexuality, righteousness, and who they are. It's the stronghold of misunderstanding a righteous God, his claim upon people's lives, and the idea that our sexuality should be joyful and honorable. The strongholds inside make people vulnerable to the external behavior. Our business as the Christian church is to attack the strongholds, not just the periphery. It's to march past the distant border and go all the way to the capital city, to take on the ideas on the inside and tear them down by application of spiritual weapons.

**Stedman:** So how do we spot the phonies who are all around us?

- They commend themselves, for the most part.
- They are always boasting of their accomplishment, printing it and spreading it around so you can see.
- They do not let others speak for them, but they talk about it themselves.
- And they are not concerned about reaching the unreached. They are concerned only with having a little group of their own supporters, building that to the highest number, and paying no attention to the lost around.
- They manipulate and try to get meetings and try to set up various open doors instead of following those which God opens for them.
- Most of all, when they boast they make it clear that God is mighty lucky to have them on his side.

That is the mark of a counterfeit. He may not be a counterfeit Christian, but he has a counterfeit ministry.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

TITLE: MARKS OF APOSTLESHIP #1: HUMILITY IN MINISTRY

**BIG IDEA:**

**(BASIS FOR HIS BOASTING IN HIS AUTHORITY = THE MARKS OF HIS APOSTLESHIP)**

**HUMILITY IN MINISTRY (DEMONSTRATED HERE BY PREACHING THE TRUTH WITHOUT CHARGE) DIFFERENTIATES THE TRUE FROM THE FALSE APOSTLE**

**I. (:1-4) REALITY CHECK –**

**DISCERNMENT SHOULD ANCHOR BELIEVERS IN THEIR DEVOTION TO CHRIST**

A. (:1-2) Paul's Appeal Springs From Godly Jealousy Not Personal Pride

1. (:1) He Deserves a Fair Hearing

*"I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me."*

2. (:2) His Passion is for Their Faithfulness to Christ

*"For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."*

**Gromacki:** A person should be jealous when he sees a loved one being turned away from obedient faith by false attractions.

B. (:3) Paul's Concern is that the Corinthians Have Proven Susceptible to Deception

*"But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."*

**Stedman:** You can lose it in the pressures of daily living. You can get so busy and so worried and so anxious about yourself and the things that are happening to you that you lose the sense that Christ is with you and he is adequate. This is the beautiful, "simplicity that is in Jesus." Here in Corinth they were assaulted with these teachers who were exposing them to things that caught their attention, but they were drifting from that central point. They were involved with fascinating philosophies based on the Word of God, but which went off on side tracks and rabbit paths of thought. They were being challenged with certain ego-appealing experiences which if they could just grasp would make them feel so great, so wonderful, so God-possessed -- just like people today who are invited to explore strange and wonderful mysteries all involved with Christian faith -- but which tend to move them away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

C. (:4) Paul's Sarcasm Highlights Their Lack of Discernment –

3 Christian Fundamentals:

*"For if one comes and . . . you bear this beautifully"*



1. Truth about Jesus –

*“preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached”*

*Allon* – another of the same kind – Why does he use this word here?

2. Truth about the Holy Spirit –

*“or you receive a different Spirit which you have not received”*

*Heteron* -- Another of a different kind

3. Truth about the Gospel –

*“or a different gospel which you have not accepted”*

*Heteron* – Another of a different kind

**II. (:5-12) COUNTERFEIT TEST –  
HUMILITY IN MINISTRY (DEMONSTRATED HERE BY PREACHING THE  
TRUTH WITHOUT CHARGE) CAN NOT BE COUNTERFEITED**

A. (:5-6) Make Substance the Benchmark – Not Style

1. (:5) No Inferiority Complex ... No False Humility

*“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.”*

2. (:6) Excelling in Knowledge (and Christian graces) vs. Oratory

*“But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”*

B. (:7-9) Appreciate the Extent of His Humility in Ministry

1. (:7) Thesis expressed with Sarcasm

*“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?”*

2. (:8-9) Humility Demonstrated in Allowing Other Churches to Support Work in Corinth

*“I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.”*

**Kent:** The figure of robbing other churches is, of course, hyperbole. It was robbery only in the sense that the churches who gave to Paul's support were not presently receiving the benefits and hence had no direct obligation to give.

- C. (:10-12) Understand the Motivation for His Humility in Ministry
1. (:10) Humility is Grounds for Boasting!  
*“As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.”*
  2. (:11) Humility Motivated by Love  
*“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”*
  3. (:12) Humility = Distinguishing Mark of Genuine Apostleship  
*“But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”*

**III. (:13-15) DECEITFUL DISGUISE – FALSE APOSTLES MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO LOOK LIKE THE REAL THING**

- A. (:13) Exposing the Counterfeits  
*“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”*
- B. (:14-15a) Explaining Their Craftiness  
*“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”*
- C. (:15b) Emphasizing Their Condemnation  
*“whose end shall be according to their deeds.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) In what specific ways did Christ humble Himself and prove a model for genuine spiritual ministry?
- 2) How deserving is Christ of our total faithfulness in our marriage relationship with Him as His bride?
- 3) Examine the ministry of Christ to highlight His emphasis on truth, light and righteousness – areas where the false apostles fall short when examined on the basis of their deeds.
- 4) How is the Jesus preached by Paul and the genuine apostles different from the Jesus preached by the counterfeit apostles?

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of philosophies and speculations are enticing believers today away from “*the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ?*”
- 2) Do we respond with godly jealousy and righteous indignation to any adulteration of the fundamentals of our Christian faith?
- 3) Do we know anyone who is preaching the genuine gospel without cost? What do you think is their motivation today in not lobbying for rightful wages? What was Paul’s personal policy regarding being paid for Christian ministry?
- 4) What types of disguises are Satan’s workers wearing today?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Barclay:** All through this section Paul has to adopt methods which are completely distasteful to him. He has to stress his own authority, he has to present his own credentials, he has to boast about himself, he has to keep comparing himself with those who are seeking to seduce the Corinthian Church, and he does not like it. His whole instinct is against it, and he apologizes every time he has to speak in such a way. Paul was not a man to stand on his dignity. It was said of a great man, “He never remembered his dignity until others forgot it.” But Paul knew that it was not really his dignity and honour that were at stake, but the dignity and the honour of Jesus Christ.

**Stedman:** Now if jealousy is so bad, why is God jealous? Here Paul says that he feels “divine jealousy,” a godly jealousy, literally, for these people. Surely that indicates that jealousy can be both good and bad. So when you feel jealous of someone you have to ask yourself, “Is my jealousy a rightful one, or is it false?” The difference is right here: False jealousy is always selfish; it is concerned about my feelings. It is possessive; it wants to control another person. It is therefore often dominating, even cruel and tyrannical. It usurps the rights of others and insists on its own way. It is imposed upon someone else whether he likes it or not. Because it is so vicious in its cruelty and its tyranny, jealousy perhaps is the most destructive force in the world today.

A true jealousy, a godly jealousy, on the other hand, as Paul felt for the Corinthians, is one that arises from a deep passion for the welfare of another. It becomes careless of self, and it is always manifested in a tenderness and a thoughtfulness about someone else. It may never cease, because it is a powerful motive, just as this one is here in the heart of Paul, as it is in the heart of God.

**Zeisler:** A great theologian, who lived many years, wrote scores of profound theological books. At the end of his life he was asked to summarize what he had learned over his lifetime, thinking back on all of his scholarship. He said quietly, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The summary of all he had learned was simply that. Jesus loved him and he loved Jesus, and it was a relationship he was sure of because he found it in the Scriptures.

The apostle is warning the Corinthian church, and he is warning our Palo Alto church: We are always in danger of being led astray. We can lose the simple truths; we can become greater and the Lord less; seducers can win our hearts away. We must resist them and cling to the simple truth:

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

**Gromacki:** The phrase, "*the simplicity that is in Christ*," refers to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone apart from circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law. The Judaizers taught that faith in Christ alone could not save, but that circumcision was also necessary (Acts 15:1). When Eve began to reason with Satan, she at that moment failed to submit her thoughts to God (cf. 10:5). The concept of "simplicity" is achieved when one is totally obedient to Christ through the revealed Word of God."

**Gromacki:** The Judaizers and the dissident minority viewed his refusal to take an honorarium as an "offence" (literally "sin," *hamartian*). In the first century, professional speakers charged fees for their services. The greater the reputation, the higher the fee. The false teachers used Paul's free speaking as an attack against his ability and his estimation of himself."

**Kent:** Satan carries on his works through his servants (KJV, "*ministers*") who derive their motivation and their methods from him. They assume the guise of promoters of righteousness, but such righteousness is a masquerade, not their true nature. The "*righteousness*" they promote is a self-righteousness, a righteousness of works, and this is the opposite of the message Christ brought and the true apostles proclaimed.

Paul had no hesitancy in charging these opponents with the spiritual crimes they were committing. They were proclaiming a righteousness which was not God's righteousness. They were false apostles masquerading as Christ's appointees. They were exhibiting the character and practice of Satan, the supreme deceiver. And they faced the prospect of certain judgment. When God would ultimately deal with them, it would be in absolute justice and in accordance with the true nature of their deeds, not with what they pretended to be.

**Deffinbaugh:** Should Paul's practice be interpreted to mean he does not care for the Corinthians? Not at all! He loves them greatly, and his sacrificial lifestyle is evidence of his love for them. What Paul is doing—and fully intends to keep doing—is to distinguish himself from those who are frauds, those who are simply into ministry for

the money. Paul will do everything he can to set himself apart from those who want to be considered his equals, but who are really false apostles. One thing he knows for sure—they are not going to minister free of charge. This is one area in which they will not attempt to look like Paul. By his selfless, sacrificial lifestyle, Paul sets himself apart from the greedy hucksters who take advantage of others by pretending to be servants of God. Do Paul's opponents boast? Let them boast in ministering free of charge, or let them realize they are nothing like Paul.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:13

TITLE: MARKS OF APOSTLESHIP: WEAKNESS FORTIFIED BY GRACE

**BIG IDEA:**

**BASIS FOR HIS BOASTING IN HIS AUTHORITY -- THE MARKS OF HIS APOSTLESHIP**

**SEVERE PRESSURES IN THE MINISTRY MAKE WEAKNESS THE PLATFORM FOR EXALTING CHRIST'S GRACE AND POWER**

**(11:16-21a) INTRODUCTION: BOASTING IN THE LORD'S GRACE AND POWER CAN LOOK LIKE WEAKNESS AND FOOLISHNESS TO OTHERS**

A. (:16-18) Foolish or Not . . . Listen to My Boasting

*“Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little. That which I am speaking, I am not speaking as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.”*

B. (:19-20) You Have Listened to the Boasting of the Truly Foolish

1. (:19) Sarcastic Rebuke

*“For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly.”*

2. (:20) Specific Failures in Discernment

*“For you bear with anyone”*

a. Bondage -- *“if he enslaves you”*

b. Destruction -- *“if he devours you”*

c. Exploitation -- *“if he takes advantage of you”*

d. Pride -- *“if he exalts himself”*

e. Shame -- *“if he hits you in the face”*

C. (:21a) Weak or Not . . . Listen to My Boasting

*“To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.”*

**I. (11:21b-33) PERSERVERANCE THROUGH SEVERE PRESSURES IN THE MINISTRY CANNOT BE EXPLAINED APART FROM THE GRACE AND POWER OF CHRIST**

A. (11:21b) Introduction of Personal Testimony

*“But in whatever respect anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself.”*

B. (11:22) Impeccable Jewish Roots

*“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”*

C. (11:23-27) Itemization of Severe Physical and Emotional Pressures as a Servant of Christ

1. (:23a) Offered as Proof of Authentic Christian Ministry

*“Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so”*

2. (:23b-27) Manifold External Pressures – every kind imaginable

*“in far more labors”*

*“in far more imprisonments”*

*“beaten times without number”*

*“often in danger of death”*

*“Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.”*

*“Three times I was beaten with rods”*

*“once I was stoned”*

*“three times I was shipwrecked”*

*“a night and a day I have spent in the deep”*

*“I have been on frequent journeys”*

*“in dangers from rivers”*

*“dangers from robbers”*

*“dangers from my countrymen”*

*“dangers from the Gentiles”*

*“dangers in the city”*

*“dangers in the wilderness”*

*“dangers on the sea”*

*“dangers among false brethren”*

*“I have been in labor and hardship”*

*“through many sleepless nights”*

*“in hunger and thirst”*

*“often without food”*

*“in cold and exposure”*

D. (:28-29) Incessant Pastoring Pressures in Christian Ministry

1. (:28) Heavier in Weight than Pressure of External Circumstances

*“Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.”*

2. (:29) Empathy With Struggles of Others

a. Their Physical and Emotional Struggles

*“Who is weak without my being weak?”*

b. Their Spiritual Struggles

*“Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”*

E. (:30-33) Big Idea: Weakness Magnifies Divine Deliverances

1. (:30) Boasting in Weakness

*“If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.”*

2. (:31) Divine Witness to Veracity

*“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”*

3. (:32-33) Example of Divine Deliverance from Hopeless Situation

*“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.”*

**II. (12:1-10) PHYSICAL WEAKNESS KEEPS ONE DEPENDENT ON CHRIST’S GRACE AND POWER DESPITE THE MOUNTAINTOP PRIVILEGE OF VISIONS AND REVELATIONS**

A. (12:1-6) Spiritual Privilege Can Go to Your Head

In Paul’s case, Spiritual Privilege = Direct Access to Divine Visions and Revelations

1. (:1) Visions and Revelations = New Theme for Necessary Boasting

*“Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.”*

2. (:2-4) Recounting the Incredible Experience

*“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.”*

3. (:5-6) Continued Apologies for Necessity of Boasting

*“On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.”*

B. (12:7-10) Physical Handicaps Can Bring You to Your Knees

1. (:7) God Can Get Our Attention -- Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh

a. Privilege of the Revelations

*“And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations”*



b. Protection Against Pride

*“for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself . . .”*

*“– to keep me from exalting myself.”*

c. Pain in the Neck

*“there was given me a thorn in the flesh,  
a messenger of Satan to buffet me”*

2. (:8) We Can't Always Get Our Way -- Prayer for Deliverance

*“Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”*

3. (:9) We Need to Learn the Big Lesson of Life = Embracing the Sufficiency of God's Grace and Power

*“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”*

4. (:10) We Need to Practice Contentment in All Circumstances

*“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

**III. (12:11-13) THE MARKS OF GENUINE APOSTLESHIP SHOULD HAVE MADE SUCH BOASTING UNNECESSARY**

A. (:11) Commendation Should Have Come From Others

*“I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.”*

B. (:12) Authentication Should Have Been Obvious

*“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”*

C. (:13) Sarcasm Has Become Necessary

*“For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong.”*

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**PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) In what ways would Christ's detractors have accused Him of being foolish and weak?

- 2) What must it have been like to experience such “*direct revelations of the Lord*”? What subjects would have been covered?
- 3) How have we found Christ’s grace and power sufficient in our areas of weakness? What is God’s special program for humbling you?
- 4) How does a nobody like Paul become an eminent somebody in the service of Christ?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Talk about toughing it out! Just read through that daunting list of trials and tribulations. What would it take to rob us of our joy? It makes us ashamed to see how easily we become discontented.
- 2) Have we ever been confronted with a situation where it was necessary for us to defend our leadership or our ministry as Paul had to? How did we do so without coming across as prideful and arrogant?
- 3) How intense is our pastoral concern for others compared to the concern we place on our own comfort and protection?
- 4) How focused were Paul’s entreaties that he could recount three specific occasions where he labored at length with the Lord regarding this thorn in the flesh (as opposed to less specific constant droning on and on about the matter)? How could this hardship be both a messenger from Satan and part of God’s grand design to show His grace and power?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** But what remarkable boasts he makes, with not a word of what we might expect, not a word of what many preachers boast about today. He does not display an impressive list of scholastic degrees. He does not mention any of the famous converts he has worked with. He does not make any claims about the great crowds he has preached to or the remarkable miracles that accompanied his ministry. He does not say anything about being an internationally known apostle. All of these things were true, but Paul did not say one word about them, in sharp contrast with many who are preaching today. Rather, he begins to boast about an incredible list of hardships -- beatings, fastings, imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, dangers from every side. Then he includes the almost embarrassing story about the night he has to be let down over a

wall in a basket in order to escape a plot to take his life. That does not sound like much to boast about because it represented a collapse of all his dreams and plans. . .

Paul, of course, was not one of the original twelve, but he had seen Christ on the Damascus road. Now he tells us here that there were many occasions when he had visions of the Lord. That does not mean a fantasy or something he saw in his mind. He actually saw the Lord; the Lord appeared to him and taught him. This is the basis of his claim to be an apostle. Paul said that Jesus himself had taught him what he had learned, the truths of the gospel that he preached. That, incidentally, is an important fact to bear in mind when people are challenging the apostle's authority in these days. We must remember that he himself said that it was the Lord who taught him these things. After many years of ministering around the world, Paul had a chance one day to compare notes with the original apostles, Peter, James, John and others, and he tells us in Galatians that they could add nothing to what he had learned from the Lord himself. So here is the basis of this great apostle's teaching: It came directly from the Lord in personal appearances.

**Ritchie:** Weakness? Yes. Why? so that Jesus might be seen. Do you feel in your heart that somehow you got gypped, that God sent Satan's messenger to the wrong person, that he should have gone two blocks down and one over? Do you get angry and bitter at God over the "stakes" which are in your life? Don't do that. Thank God for them. "Because of that stake, and because of that buffeting," Jesus is saying "they'll see me, and that is what it's all about. Let them see me, and don't complain. I'm weaving a tapestry, and when it is all finished I'm going to let you see it. And I'll show you the very spot where you pulled it all together for me, along with the rest of your brothers and sisters."

When you see that tapestry spread out throughout eternity, you are going to stand there in your redeemed body and say, "You're too much, God; you're just too much! Thank you so much for the stake, thank you for Satan's messenger. Thank you that I learned the lesson that your grace is sufficient for me, in whatever state I find myself." And you can say right now, "I shall be content, Lord, wherever I find myself, with the insults, the difficulties, the persecutions, the weaknesses. I shall be content because I know you're in charge of the whole program."

**Zeisler:** Paul said he worked harder and was constantly on the move, and he experienced deprivation; his reward was usually more hardship! The evidence of God's approval is not higher standing or the goods of this earth—none of the things the Corinthian opposition would have pointed to as evidence of the favor of God. For Paul, very often doing the best meant raising the hatred of those who were dug in against Christ and his truth.

**Piper:** Weaknesses here are not imperfect behaviors. They are circumstances and situations and experiences and wounds that make us look weak; things we would probably get rid of if we had the human strength.

I If we were "strong" we might return the insult with such an effective put down that the opponent would wither and everyone would admire our wit and cleverness.

I If we were "strong" we might take charge of our own fortune and turn back the emerging hardship and change circumstances so that they go the way we want them to and not force us into discomfort.

I If we were "strong" we might turn back the persecution so quickly and so decisively that no one would mess with us again.

I If we were "strong" we might use our resources to get out of the calamity or distress as fast as possible, or take charge of the situation and marshal our own resources so masterfully as to minimize its pressure.

But in reality we don't usually have that kind of human strength, and even when we may have it, Christians don't use it the way the world does. Jesus tells us not to return evil for evil (Matt. 5:38-42). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:12-13. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate." And then he added, "We have become like the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things." In other words, this kind of lifestyle, this kind of response to abuse, looks weak and beggarly and feeble and anemic and inept--at least it looks that way to thrive on pride and equate power with the best come back.

So the answer to our first question is that weaknesses are not sins but experiences and situations and circumstances and wounds that are hard to bear and that we can't remove either because they are beyond our control or because love dictates that we not return evil for evil. . .

What is the purpose of such weaknesses? Is there a goal or an aim for why the weaknesses come? Why insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities, troubles? Why can't I find a job? Why am I trapped in this awful marriage? Why does my dad have cancer? Why can't I have children? Why do I have no friends? Why is nothing working in my life?

Paul gives three brief answers about his own experience and I think they are tremendously important for us to live by.

First, he says that Satan has the purpose to buffet you or harass you (v. 7). And so it is OK to pray for relief. That's what Paul did until he got word from the Lord. Pain is not a good thing in itself. God does not delight in your suffering. Satan does and he must be resisted.

Second, God's purpose over and through Satan's harassment is our humility. Paul was in danger of pride and self-exaltation and God took steps to keep him humble. This is an utterly strange thing in our self-saturated age. God thinks humility is more important than comfort. Humility is more important than freedom from pain. He will give us a mountain top experience in Paradise, and then bring us through anguish of soul lest we think that we have risen above the need for total reliance on his grace. So his purpose is our humility and lowliness and reliance on him (cf. 1:9; 4:7).

Finally, God's purpose in our weaknesses is to glorify the grace and power of his Son. This is the main point of verses 9-10. Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." God's design is to make you a showcase for Jesus' power. But not necessarily the way the market demands: not by getting rid of all our weaknesses; but by giving strength to endure and even rejoice in tribulation.

Let God be God here. If he wills to show the perfection of his Son's power in our weakness instead of by our escape from weakness then he knows best, trust him. Hebrews 11 is a good guide here. It says that by faith some escaped the edge of the sword (v. 34) and by faith some were killed by the sword (v. 37). By faith some stopped the mouths of lions, and by faith others were sawn asunder. By faith some were mighty in war, and by faith others suffered chains and imprisonment (see also Phil. 4:11-13).

The ultimate purpose of God in our weakness is to glorify the kind of power that moved Christ to the cross and kept him there until the work of love was done. Paul said that Christ crucified was foolishness to the Greeks, a stumbling block to the Jews, but to those who are called it is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23f.).

The deepest need that you and I have in weakness and adversity is not quick relief, but the well-grounded confidence that what is happening to us is part of the greatest purpose of God in the universe--the glorification of the grace and power of his Son--the grace and power that bore him to the cross and kept him there until the work of love was done. That's what God is building into our lives. That is the meaning of weakness, insults, hardships, persecution, calamity.

**Deffinbaugh:** Paul is very concerned that others not judge his spirituality and standing before God on the basis of his glorious experience in receiving this vision. Here is another example of how different Paul and his fellow-apostles are from the false apostles—the intruders, as D. A. Carson likes to call them. They cannot wait to make their public proclamations of glorious spiritual experiences. Paul can hardly be forced to speak or write about them. Why? Why does Paul not wish to tell the Corinthians about his wonderful vision? I think the reasons are clear and simple. First and foremost, telling of his experience would draw attention to himself, rather than to Christ. Paul preaches Christ crucified. He refuses to change his message or his methods so that the messenger becomes more prominent than the message, and especially the Messiah. Second, telling of his experience is impossible, since the words (and the visible images he saw) are inexpressible. Third, telling of his experience detracts attention from the gospel. Paul is concerned that people hear the gospel and be saved, not that they hear his experience and try to replicate it. Fourth, making much of his experience emphasizes the sensational aspects of the Christian experience, rather than the normal Christian life. It might lead some to conclude that spirituality and significance are linked to such spectacular experiences, when the more accurate test is suffering unjustly for the sake of the gospel, and our Lord, of whom the gospel speaks. The Corinthians are already caught up with the sensational and disinterested in the painful aspects of the Christian life. Triumphalism is all about the sensational, and maturity is all about steadfast perseverance in the midst of adversity and suffering, and stability in the face of false teaching (see Ephesians 4:10-16). Fifth, Paul's experiences are personal and

impossible to verify or test. Visions cannot be verified; only the teaching or message they are said to convey can be tested by Scripture.

**Pounds:** The more weak and contemptible Paul was in the eyes of the Corinthians the more they must be compelled to glorify Christ by whom he was strengthened in his spirit and made successful. If Christ might receive more glory by means of these thorns, he was not only willing to endure them, but ready to glory in them even unto death. Paul remained as weak as ever; but, being persuaded that Christ's power should be the more magnified through his weakness, he was satisfied. If we are conscious that we are wholly without strength, and can do nothing of ourselves, we shall be more simple and uniform in our dependence on Christ. In our weakness we find His strength and He alone is glorified.

Paul says I use my thorns for God's glory and my personal growth. What do you do with your circumstances? Let God speak to you through them. Let Him use them to conform you to the image and likeness of Christ.

**Gromacki:** The church willingly submitted itself to those with whom it was impressed (11:20). They were awed by strong, authoritative personalities, not by humble servants. In appearance, the Judaizers were like the former and the apostle like the latter.

With sarcasm, Paul pointed out five ways in which they were impressed with religious braggarts and tyrants.

First, the Judaizers had enslaved them . . .

Second, they exploited the church . . .

Third, they took from the church, but never gave anything in return . . .

Fourth, they exalted themselves over the church. . .

Fifth, they insulted the church . . . they humiliated it.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 12:14 – 13:14

TITLE: *YOU'RE MESSING WITH THE WRONG DUDE*

**BIG IDEA:**

**SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FOR THE PURPOSE OF LOVING EDIFICATION (INCLUDING DISCIPLINE WHEN NECESSARY)**

(Preparations for Paul's Third Visit to the Corinthian Believers)

**INTRODUCTION:**

Deffinbaugh: "Paul's closing argument"

**I. (12:14-18) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FROM PURE MOTIVES  
MOTIVE OF LOVE VS. EXPLOITATION**

A. (:14-15) Demonstrated Commitment of Love

1. Commitment to Visit Them Personally and Repeatedly  
*"Here for this third time I am ready to come to you"*
2. Commitment to Not Sponge off Them  
*"and I will not be a burden to you"*
3. Commitment to Seek Intimacy with Them  
*"for I do not seek what is yours, but you"*
4. Commitment to Provide for Them  
*"for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls."*
5. Continued Sarcasm to Press Home His Commitment of Love  
*"If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?"*

B. (:16-17) No Possible Charge of Exploitation

*"But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?"*

C. (:18) Consistency of Motive and Conduct Among Paul's Fellow Workers

*"I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk I the same steps?"*

**II. (12:19-21) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FOR PASTORAL PURPOSES  
PURPOSE OF EDIFICATION AND CORRECTION NOT PROMOTING SELF**

A. (:19) Purpose of Edification Not Promoting Self

*“All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.”*

B. (:20-21) Anticipation of Need for Further Correction / Repentance

*“For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;*

*I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”*

**III. (13:1-10) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY THROUGH SEVERE DISCIPLINE WHEN NECESSARY**

A. (:1) Context = Anticipation of Third Visit

*“This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”* Reference to Deut. 19:15

B. (:2-4) Loaded for Bear

1. (:2) Last Chance to Repent

*“I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone.”*

2. (:3-4) Power of God on Tap Through Union with Christ

*“since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.”*

C. (:5-6) Self Examination

*“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?”*

**Deffinbaugh:** It is assumed that some members who profess to be born again believers are not. It is apparent that some in the Corinthian church are actually regarded as having apostolic authority, and yet Paul’s words describe them in such a way that we must



wonder if they are even saved (2 Corinthians 11:12-15). Elsewhere, the apostles make it even clearer that there are those in the church who profess salvation but do not possess it (see 2 Timothy 3:1-9; James 1:19–2:26; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 6-11; Jude 17-19). As far as outward appearances are concerned, the difference between a disobedient Christian and a professing unbeliever may be very slight.

D. (:7-9) Concern for Their Spiritual Maturity

*“Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.”*

**Gromacki:** In the long run, truth will win. Paul spoke the truth. He lived “for the truth.” He wanted the church to recognize truth and to stand for it regardless of the opinions of others. He knew that God would vindicate the spiritually minded believers and himself.

D. (:10) Summary

*“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.”*

**(13:11-14) FINAL CHARGE / GREETING / BENEDICTION**

A. (:11) Final Charge

1. Finality of the Charge

*“Finally, brethren”*

2. Five Imperatives for Spiritual Maturity

a. *“rejoice”*

b. *“be made complete”*

c. *“be comforted”*

d. *“be like-minded”*

e. *“live in peace”*

3. Faithful Blessing

*“and the God of love and peace shall be with you”*

B. (:12-13) Final Greeting

1. Directed to the Corinthians

*“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”*

2. Delivered to the Corinthians  
“All the saints greet you.”

C. (:14) Final Benediction

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

\* \* \* \* \*

**PREACHING CHRIST:**

- 1) Do ministers of the gospel today have Christ speaking through them in the same sense that Paul refers to Christ speaking through him?
- 2) What does it mean that “*Jesus Christ is in*” all genuine believers? What type of test is there to see if we are in the faith?
- 3) How does Christ make Himself mighty and powerful in your life?
- 4) Do we seek the ultimate blessing of “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*” upon all our brothers and sisters in Christ?

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) What spiritual leaders have you known that modeled for you this type of servant spirit where they constantly sought to enrich you without being a burden in any way? How should the parent-child relationship model this commitment to provide for needs, etc.?
- 2) Why did Paul resort to so much sarcasm at the end of this letter? What was he trying to achieve? When is sarcasm appropriate?
- 3) Are all of our efforts directed towards building up the body of Christ rather than tearing it down? What types of things have we witnessed that are destructive?
- 4) What does Paul mean by the desire to see these believers “*be made complete*”?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** Re 13:5-6 -- The thing that really marks it is if Jesus Christ is living in you. A true Christian is someone in whom Christ dwells. And the person in whom Christ dwells will have certain inescapable evidence of that fact given to him or her.

That is what Paul is suggesting we ask ourselves. Do we have the evidence that Jesus Christ lives in us? Has a fundamental change occurred at the very depths of our being? It is actually the question, of course, "Are you really born again?" That is a term that has fallen into wrong use these days. Many people who merely change their actions for a little while are said to be "born again." People are using that term about everything today. But this is the question that Paul is asking, "Are you truly and permanently different because Jesus Christ has come to live within you?" . . .

Re 13:6-9 --

Paul explains that he is not looking for an opportunity to come and demonstrate his authority as an apostle by judging them; he takes no delight in flexing his apostolic muscle. He would be quite happy if they would judge themselves and stop their evil behavior, leaving nothing for him to do when he comes but to rejoice with them. In fact, he says, "I would be quite willing to let you go on thinking that we are kind of weak as an apostle, that we do not really amount to very much, that we are only a paper tiger, as long as your behavior changes in line with who you really are." What he wants is their moral improvement, not an opportunity to personally exhibit what a true apostle he is.

**Zeisler:** Paul is coming to Corinth, and he is afraid there may be difficulty. He wants them to understand the basis on which he is coming, which is as a loving parent who is ready to expend himself for them. He wants only their best. He has not been defending himself throughout this letter in order to promote himself. Instead, he wants to do everything to offer the best possible hope that they will receive his words as he intends, which is to strengthen and correct them, that they will respond rightly and their lives will become what they ought to be. But he realizes that when he comes as a parent it may not go well. There's still uncertainty as to how the Corinthians are going to accept being made accountable. . .

What can we draw from this section that will help us understand how to accomplish spiritual accountability well? I see four ingredients. The first one I would call competence. Not just anybody ought to be bustling around looking into other people's lives, giving advice, attempting to change their behavior, etc. Paul says, in verses 11 and following, "I ought to have been commended by you." He shouldn't have to defend himself or compare himself to the super-apostles. The Corinthians should have voluntarily and gladly received him. He is the proper person to have this responsibility. In particular, the things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders, and miracles---were done among them with great perseverance. He is saying that everything they would expect in an apostle they saw in him. The Lord had authenticated his ministry by healings, signs, and miracles, and they didn't miss out on any of that. (Now, authenticating signs always diminish in their importance; they are a beginning point that testifies as to the individual

speaking. Having done that, they become less important as the character, witness, and reality of the speaker gain more importance.) He was competent to do these miracles and signs, and he was a man of great perseverance; he was willing to take all the time necessary with them. On the other hand, Paul doesn't have an ego problem of his own, and he's not a neophyte or someone without wisdom. He is not without the blessing of God. On every count he is an appropriate person to delve into the lives of the Corinthians.

The question of competence is the right question to ask. If there is going to be an examination of the life of either a church or an individual, those who take on the role of the examiner ought to be competent to do it. Not just anybody is. Brand-new Christians, for example, probably aren't in a position to give good advice or helpful counsel as those calling for accountability.

A second ingredient is that love needs to be at the heart of the relationship. When an apostle comes to his church as a father to his children and wants to know how they're doing, he needs to be an individual who loves those he is seeking to correct. It's very clear here that Paul loves these people. In verse 14 he reminds them that his unwillingness to take their money was not because he was proud or because he wanted to put them down, but because he didn't want them to be confused as to the role of money in their relationship. He didn't want them to think that their money was too important, that it could somehow sway his thinking, or that they could gain standing by the amount of money they gave. He deliberately refused to accept their money on account of their immaturity. He says, "What I want is not your possessions but you." As long as money is allowed to get in the way, they will never understand how much he loves them, how much he is willing to expend himself for them. They were so used to having spiritual leaders take from them! He says he is not defending himself; rather, he wants to strengthen and build them up. It's clear again that Paul is the right person to hold this church accountable because he loves them very much.

The third ingredient for successful accountability is honesty. The father coming to visit his children should be an honest man. In sarcasm Paul expresses his accusers' contention that his honesty is a ploy something like the quip we hear, "Be sincere whether you mean it or not." They say he is tricking them to get their money, that although he says he doesn't want it, he's sending Titus and others to come and somehow take it from them. Paul says that's not true; he really doesn't want their money. The love is genuine, and what they have seen in him is the real Paul; he has no hidden motives beneath the surface. So if we would be in a relationship of examination, of bringing into the light difficult things, it's important to be competent, motivated by love, and honest to the core.

Lastly, he says there must be follow-through. He isn't just making noise when he raises these issues. He is going to come; this isn't an idle threat. It might be difficult. He might end up looking like a fool again because they fight against everything he has said. It might be that there will be tension as there was before. But he isn't going to fail to

come for those reasons. He has a commitment to godliness, and that means he is going to come and they are going to deal with it.

**Deffinbaugh:** Re 13:1-4 -- Here Paul changes from a defensive posture (which is really for the Corinthians' sake) to an offensive posture. Paul is not on trial; the Corinthians are the ones on trial. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ, and as such, he sets down truths the Corinthians should accept and abide by. Those who are doing wrong are not Paul and his associates, but a number of the Corinthians who use their opposition to Paul's apostleship as a smoke screen to cover their own sins. Paul now brushes the smoke screen aside and presses his own attack. It is the Corinthians who must prove themselves, not Paul.

Paul does not fear that the Corinthians will fail to approve of him, but that they will not respond adequately to his rebuke and thus be found continuing in sin (verse 20). Paul fears that when he does arrive at Corinth—for the third time—he will find them other than he wishes. Consequently, if Paul is not happy with what he sees when he arrives, they will not be happy to see him. Paul knows the kinds of things he is likely to find of which he will not approve: “*strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances.*” In addition to these, Paul has every reason to expect that he will find “*impurity, immorality, and sensuality.*” He has good reason to expect these things, for they are the very things he found it necessary to rebuke in his first epistle, specifically or more generally. These are the sins he exposed and rebuked in the past, and he fears some may not have repented of them. Even more distressing, these are also manifestations of the flesh as opposed to the fruit of the spirit:

**Geoff Thomas:** "you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me," he said to them. So he gives them proof. Whether they were any happier by his answer we are not sure, but his reply is the only one. His approach is the following.

#### 1. THE DIVINE MODEL IS STRENGTH ATTAINED BY WEAKNESS.

How does Paul answer them? He doesn't deny the evident weaknesses of a sinner saved by grace, of a mortal man growing old and frail, of a much persecuted victim. He makes no attempt to exalt himself. He admits anything they may have to say about his deficiency in natural dignity and elocution. So what proofs that Christ was actually speaking through him does Paul offer his critics? The apostle takes them back to Jesus, and he directs their attention to the life of the Son of God on this earth. What he is doing is to ask them this kind of question, "Where has that power of God (that has transformed your lives) been seen most clearly?" He tells them the answer: "In the life of the Lord Jesus." We can all be "sure" of that; Paul says, "for to be sure, he was crucified in weakness" (v.4). There can be no argument about that historical reality. The Corinthian church believed it. The 'super-apostles' believed it. Paul believed it. We all believe it today. The divine Messiah himself, incarnate Jehovah, the Creator of Genesis 1, was crucified in weakness. . .

#### 2. OUR OWN MODEL IS THE POWER OF SERVICE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH WEAKNESS.

Two things again:

i] The Christian serves in weakness.

Paul was weak in Christ. He says that clearly, "Likewise, we are weak in him" (v.4). Paul's body was covered in scars. He had frequently faced death, he had been beaten by rods, flogged and stoned. He had been often hungry and cold, thrown into prison, shipwrecked, surviving by clinging to driftwood a night and a day. What weakness in service. Neither was Paul a superman psychologically. There was a time when he was immeasurably pressed down with a huge weight of concern so that he was in despair. He bore the cares of all the churches. There were times when he was fighting on many fronts while at the same time inwardly afraid. Paul was weak, and that consciousness kept him going to the Lord and saying, "I can only cope by your help." . . .

ii] By God's power we live with God to serve the church. (v.4).

So, here is a man living by the power of God. There is blatant sin tolerated in the Corinthian church. Paul will not ignore it. . .

This truth of our felt weakness being the grounds of receiving strength from Christ will accomplish all things. Supported by its power, "he that is feeble shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God." They "shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea," and it shall be done. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." We are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

**Barclay:** He finishes with a warning. He is coming again to Corinth and this time there will be no more loose talk and reckless statements. Whatever is said will be witnessed and proved once and for all. To put it in our modern idiom, Paul insists that there must be a show down. The ill situation must drag on no longer. Paul knew that there comes a time when trouble must be faced. If all the healing medicines fail there is nothing for it but the surgeon's knife. No one ever cured trouble by running away from it.

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