

2 CORINTHIANS STUDY NOTES

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2 Corinthians 1

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

Much of this letter to the Corinthians is occupied with a defense of Paul's ministry. Some did not accept him as an apostle. Others viewed him as somewhat second rate in terms of apostleship. Still others viewed him as a self-appointed apostle. Some of this stemmed from the fact that he had accepted no financial support for his services. Paul's opening to this letter is very fitting since such issues were at stake. He is an apostle by the will of God. There is no other explanation, so dramatic was his call and the change in his life that resulted.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth, a town in the southern province of Greece called Achaia. He anticipated that his letter would go out to the neighboring towns of that province and would be read in all the churches.

Paul represents all of what he would say as coming from Timothy as well. Timothy was his companion, and one whom he had groomed to share in the responsibility of overseeing the work in the many churches that had sprung up in the wake of the rapid spread of the gospel.

Paul regarded the church at Corinth as "the Church of God." Though he was the human agent responsible for its existence, and though he regarded himself as being its "father," it was not his church. Paul always clarified this matter carefully and though he was very directive with the churches he always carefully defined the lines of authority and acknowledged Jesus as the head.

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

This is Paul standard greeting, and it is a great choice of words. It is likely rooted in the Hebrew idea of God's "shalom." There could be no greater blessing to bestow on someone then for them to be the recipients of God's peace and His great and boundless grace. If anyone has this, they have what matters. If they do not have it, then it does not matter what else they have.

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

All thanksgiving, together with all the praise for all things belongs eventually to God the Father. He is the one worshipped by Jesus and He is the one to whom Jesus our Lord defers, though they are equal in essence. Just as God initiated the life of the Son on the earth so He initiated and continues to show myriads of mercies toward creation. All those things that happen that we regard as "good fortune," and all those things that we recognize as "chance happenings of good," are intentionally generated by God the Father. This is true of what we have called general mercies, experienced by all, things like the steady and predictable orbit of the earth and what we call "natural law." It is also true of specific and personal mercies extended with respect to the specific events of individual's lives by God. We can be certain that where there is mercy it has been generated by God.

In addition, He is the God of all comfort, or encouragement. Where there is good fortune, we can be certain it was generated by God. Where there is bad and evil fortune, we can be certain God will be present with us, though He is not the cause of it. The word for encouragement is παρακλητος, the well-known and often used word that we picture by its etymological meaning, "to call alongside." When we find ourselves in need of someone to run alongside us and speak to us words that strengthen, we find God. This He does through people, through events, through His own words. There are many methods He uses. Where there is a need for comfort, God can be found eager and willing to work, and so we find that many find relationship with Him through trouble. When mercy and comfort are needed, there is fertile ground for God to reveal Himself, because He is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. These things are just who He is.

1:4 who comforts us in all our affliction 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.

Because of His character we enter a very predictable experience with God. We are comforted in all afflictions by him. He gives us perspective, hope, and companionship. Whichever of these responses He knows fits the best He gives, all in His time so that we are comforted. There is no affliction that lies beyond His specialty. His goal is not just to meet our need, it is to equip us to join this great work of His, that of bringing comfort to others. And so, we can be sure that His comfort will often come to us through others and it will then flow through us to others. In this way His people reflect the fact that the God they worship is the God of all comfort.

1:5 for just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

Paul knew the sufferings of Christ. Their distinctive mark is that they are endured for the welfare of others. Paul had experienced the disfavor of the Jewish religious leaders. He endured the beatings and imprisonments. He endured the hardship and difficulty induced by Satan. He had experienced the routine stress of the ministry. These are all part of the sufferings Christ endured for others, and Paul said, "they are ours in abundance."

Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians in the wake of an intense run of sufferings. In many ways he could have felt "used up." But this is his testimony, that his comfort is abundant. Where the suffering is present so also is the comfort. This is because it is the essential nature of God to comfort. Though we could experience the agony that was Christ's in Gethsemane, we will experience the same comfort He experienced there and emerge as He did with resolute heart to face what lay ahead in the plan of God (see Luke 22:39-53). Paul wants us to understand that this comfort from God is a certainty, and it is an unfortunate Christian who, due to their instinct of self-preservation, experiences neither.

1:6 but if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer;

So certain is Paul of this great work of comfort being done by God, that he can go a step further and see his own sufferings as being "for" others, which is the distinct mark of Christ's suffering. Paul's own afflictions equip him to comfort others who endure the same things and in fighting through them he achieves certain ministry objectives. In both these senses his suffering is FOR others.

Paul's statement on the impact of his own comfort and encouragement on the Corinthians defines what he means by encourage. Is not that the trial is lifted and thus they are encouraged. It is that they are energized in enduring the same kinds of trials Paul is facing. Both Paul and the Corinthians did not set the race aside, they ran through the tape! The phrase "which is effective in the patient enduring" is an appositional one. It can be understood as a restatement or further definition of "encouragement." The phrase can be literally rendered "if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, that is, that your endurance might be energized in the same sufferings". So encouragement is seen by Paul as the energizing of someone to endure.

1:7 and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers in our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

It is an important thing to have hope. No human being can be healthy for long apart from hope. It is critical to our psyche. It is a wonderful thing to have a hope that is firmly grounded, rather than having false, or misplaced hope, or hope in a scenario that may not develop. Christianity provides for that need, giving us hope regarding the pain and difficulty of the past, hope for the day-to-day challenges of the present, and hope in the face of an uncertain future. The hope we have is in being joined in covenant relationship to an all-powerful God who is perfect and unchanging in His love and impeccable in His character. So though we share the sufferings that go with living the life Yahweh has called us to lead in the fallen world, we can be certain that we will share in His comfort. Both things have been abundantly true of His people throughout time.

Of this Paul could be certain about the Corinthians because both things were true of anyone who chooses the way of God over the way of the world. The comfort and care of God in the face of an evil hostile world is a firmly grounded hope. This is because it is rooted in the character of God. It is His unchanging nature to so care for His own.

1:8 for we do not want you to be unaware brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we are burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.

We believe the specific trouble in Asia Paul speaks of here came in Ephesus at the hands of Demetrius, the silversmith. Demetrius, an idol maker by trade, saw opportunity for profit eroding because of the impact of the gospel. This event is recorded in Acts 19, though a high level of detail regarding Paul's personal agony is not given. Since in his impassioned plea for opposition to the gospel Demetrius refers to "all over Asia," it is likely that Paul and his companions felt that the danger to them was present in all of Asia, not just Ephesus.

Indeed, Paul had previously been mistreated in several cities in Asia. A group of Jews had doggedly followed him and stirred up trouble for him everywhere he proclaimed the truth of Jesus. This came to a head in Lystra, where he was stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead.

And at a later time Paul crossed over into Greece and was “shamefully treated” at Philippi (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Wherever he went, Jews initiated trouble for him. It was a big part of his life as a minister of the gospel. It was beyond wearisome.

In this description by Paul of his past emotions to the Corinthians, we get insight into the feelings that even Spirit-controlled people experience. Though they have the power and presence of God with them, they can still feel excessively burdened and stretched beyond their breaking point. Paul says that they despaired even of life, a remarkable admission. It shows that Paul's faith is not simply the putting on of a game face. It was genuine and he was genuinely describing it.

Paul has described that the sufferings of Christ are ours. This he experienced in Asia. But he has also assured us that we share in the comfort of Christ that comes to us at such times. Now Paul's description of his feelings while going through the sufferings do not lead us to believe that he is experiencing much comfort during the moment of trial. In fact, we will not read about his comfort until 7:6, where he writes, “but God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus, not only by his coming, but also with the comfort with which he was comforted in you.” What we see is that the season came about of trial and then the season arrived for comfort, and God used Titus to deliver the comfort as well as the news he bore regarding the Corinthian church. The result was that Paul's words to the Corinthians about their having “fellowship” together in the trial and comfort of Christ had already been lived out and illustrated.

But returning to Paul's description of his emotion here, it is a very intense emotion. Paul creates an image in our mind of when he says he despaired even of life. There is that limit we reach in the present life that is not removed by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit though it is certainly increased. That limit persists and will persist that we must be comforted through. We are not made immune to it. We get through such powerful emotion by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through Him the comfort of God flows through His people to us. We also receive it by our own meditation and the increase of skill and endurance that previous events weathered through the Spirit have imparted to us.

1:9 indeed we had the sentence of death in ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

In such a time, when Paul had arrived at and exceeded his limit, Paul describes his perspective as having “the sentence of death in ourselves.” This could mean one of two things. It may mean that Paul is describing what he had already done, long before this trouble had arrived the act of laying down his own life to die if God so willed it, to carry out God's purposes. Paul may be describing what he felt like when this trouble broke out, that it was so dismal that they had concluded there was no possible escape, and they would die. They had lost hope of deliverance. Depression can have that effect on us.

Paul could also be describing the act of a more complete yieldedness the trial produced in him—a deeper trust in Yahweh. Trust is the word he uses in the second part of this verse. A greater more abandoned trust would steer Paul away from the normal human pursuits associated with surviving and getting ahead in this life. It would lead to the death of his own ego. Paul could have been describing here that he had sentenced all the trappings of self-love and self-preservation in him, so instinctive to our fallen nature, to death.

The verb rendered “had” in the NASB is the verb ἐξῆλθον. It is in the perfect tense, conveying action in the past that has a present result. We could capture the meaning this conveys by rendering the phrase in this way; “we have come to have in ourselves the sentence of death.” It seems from the grammar Paul uses that he is talking about a mindset either developed earlier or else developed through this time of trial in Asia. Whenever and however, it happened, it lingered to the present time.

If this latter idea is correct, and I believe it is the best way to understand it, this season of travail in Asia had been used by God to strengthen Paul’s own faith. It made him more able to endure, a skill his ministry would demand in the years ahead. It strengthened his ability to encourage others.

How must greater it is to trust in God than in ourselves. It is God who raises the dead, both those who die in the physical sense and those who die to self. The latter are raised to newness of life. The former is raised to eternal life. Both are a blessing and the prospect of both allows us to trust God fully, to the point of dying to ourselves while alive physically and buoyed by living this way to face physical death courageously.

When trouble came upon Paul in Asia and the depression that is part of this life settled over Paul, his perspective came to be in time that to this end he had lived and he was now prepared to give his life. Such people can rest in the wisdom and goodness of God in the matter of the outcome of events orchestrated against them.

This mentality did not lift the depression. That would not happen until the arrival of Titus and the accompanying comfort he would bring. It seems that Paul was called to “ride it out,” enduring the season of depression until the season of comfort arrived. There seems to have been no instant relief. Only strength found to survive.

This should be applied carefully, to the normal ups and downs of life, not to instances of clinical depression or unexplainable depression when solutions should be sought out. But there is a depression that is simply part of the seasons of this imperfect life. For this God gives grace, somewhat undetectable in the moment of trial, so that we survive and gain strength and wisdom in it.

1:10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And he will yet deliver us,

God is a God of deliverance. He is a Savior. It is His nature to rescue, to deliver and to set free. Three times the word deliverance is used in this verse. The first is an aorist tense, signifying completed action. Paul and his company had been delivered from the immediate trial in Asia. The next use of the word is in the future tense. It is an expression of hope that God could be counted on to repeat such an act of grace in future trials confronted in the normal course of ministry. The third uses a future tense as well, with the addition of the term “yet” or “still.” It is an adverb which in this case

likely contributes a further element of time to the future tense. The idea is that there is a deliverance awaiting in future time, beyond the deliverance already projected in the earlier future tense usage. In this final usage Paul is likely referring to our ultimate deliverance from all the vestiges of evil in this fallen world.

There is a great theology of hope expressed in this verse that should rule every believer's heart. As God has been faithful to deliver, He will continue to deliver and will ultimately deliver us completely from affliction and suffering.

1:11 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*.

Prayer is a means of joining and helping those in great need. Prayer is a great help, not simply a cosmetic sort of solution. To pray for someone is to help them far more than anything else we could do. Paul credited his deliverance to the prayers of many. It is a grievous error to think "all we can do is pray," and in that to think that prayer is not much. It is effectual and brings about results far greater than those we would from a human standpoint project. If we can pray, and if we will pray, we are accomplishing the thing of ultimate importance in the event, and we are extending to others through prayer the most strategic form of help we could possibly offer. "I'll pray for you" has become to many as empty as the phrase "how you are doing?" But if it is stated sincerely, it is the greatest promise that could be extended to another human being.

1:12 for our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

As in any area of achievement in this life, it is easy to develop a dangerous and destructive form of pride regarding what has been accomplished in ministry. Many false teachers were on the scene in Corinth boasting over their qualifications and achievements. Such boasting is still a common thing in ministry.

There is however a proper confidence, or what Paul describes here as a "boasting." It is a confidence, corroborated by witnesses including the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us, that our course of behavior has been directed by God and was indeed His will for the moment. It is critical to arrive at this point of confidence, that one has resisted the things that make sense from a worldly point of view but have no witness of the Spirit and chosen instead to carry out God's chosen course of action. This is all very proper and Paul is describing this strength of faith. It is belief and confidence that he has looked for and leaned on the grace of God His power and blessing brought to bear in each circumstance confronting him.

Paul is confident that he has moved in God's way, in harmony with the leading of the Holy Spirit in all his dealings with the Corinthians. This was apparently being called into question by some in Corinth who were suggesting that Paul was a "flake." And so, far from apologizing, Paul confidently asserts the divine origins of his decisions and actions not only regarding the Corinthians but about "the world," or what we would say "in all of life."

Paul makes three claims with respect to his conduct. First, he says that it has been “holy.” The term he uses is ἀθλο/τητι. It is a word that is formed by prefixing the α privative to the word πλεω, which means to braid or twist together. So by etymology the word meant unbraided. It is a word that in usage expresses singleness of motive, the fact that nothing is accompanying Paul’s actions except what he has expressed. There is no hidden agenda, and Paul himself has no secrets.

The second claim Paul makes is that his actions are “sincere.” The word he uses is ελικρινεια. It is a compound word form by joining the word for the sun’s rays to the word for judging or testing. It expresses the idea that something has been tested by the light or heat of the sun. It has been found through such scrutiny and testing to be without flaws. So this is a second expression that indicates purity of motive and Paul’s insistence on this in himself.

The third claim Paul makes of his conduct is found in the phrase, “not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God.” It is a claim that Paul has not simply behaved instinctively, but has availed himself to the grace or strength, wisdom and favor Yahweh holds for us in each moment to behave not as we wish, but as He wishes. He has behaved by this grace of Yahweh not simply by what his own thinking might direct.

The term “fleshly wisdom” is a significant one for us to understand. At every moment we understand our challenge in living our faith boils down to a struggle against fleshly desires. Therefore, recognizing fleshly wisdom is imperative! Fleshly wisdom and the desires of the flesh can be understood as those thought patterns that give rise to the “deeds of the flesh” as revealed for us in Galatians 5:19-21. Paul tells us in those verse that the deeds of the flesh are “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these . . .” The “flesh” is natural or instinctive desires within us that lead to these types of behaviors. The “flesh” is not these sins. It is the self-centeredness in our hearts that leads to such behaviors as these. It is the desire to elevate oneself and glorify oneself, draw attention to oneself and obtain what our desires crave. It is the scheming that runs past all obstacles to lay hold of what is desired.

From this we can conclude that “fleshly wisdom” has to do with tactics, strategies, plans and the like that work, meaning they deliver the recognition, the reward, the pleasure, the experiences we set out to get. Therefore, when it comes to making plans and developing strategies and setting objectives and timetables we must make certain that the Spirit has the right to pass judgment on such things. We must hold all things loosely, because our own attachment to them can be mistaken for and passed off as the conviction and leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is apparent that plans, strategies, timetables, and the like are not evil in themselves. God Himself deals in them. Like many things, they are evil when they are established by us and pursued without regard for what God Himself is seeking to do. Fleshly wisdom is very difficult to hold in check. Simply doing what we want to is a most natural way to live. There is no limit to what we can and will compromise when what we want is at stake. Doing as God is directing us almost always involves sacrificing time. It may well mean sacrificing certain objectives entirely. That is what makes holding fleshly wisdom in check so difficult. It goes against all of our instincts. It is why we must have the Holy Spirit within us to even begin. It is why we must obey His leading unconditionally to succeed.

It is certainly possible for us to aim too low with our plans and strategies. Jesus Himself indicated this in His exhortations on faith (Mk. 11:22-23). He also warned that it is possible for us to aim in completely the wrong direction (Mk. 8:32-33). There are many points at which we can go wrong in determining the leading of the Holy Spirit. That should not inhibit our quest to do so. The option is living by fleshly wisdom. In doing so it is certain that we will go wrong and waste our lives. We must proceed in life with faith and continually submit our plans, timetables, strategies to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The reality is that if we live by the leading of the Holy Spirit, then our plans can change, and our timetables can be interrupted and our strategy can change. This in turn means we can be misunderstood and falsely accused of vacillation. That had happened to Paul. There were those who were apparently accusing him of being unstable and unreliable, one who talked out of both sides of his mouth. He will move on to deal with these false accusations.

1:13 for we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and hope you will understand until the end;

Paul wants the Corinthians to know that there is no "double talk" happening on his part. We can only surmise that some were accusing Paul of saying one thing and meaning another, or of having some form of hidden agenda. Paul assures the readers that he is being straight-forward in his communication with them. His words are trustworthy and understandable in the normal way in which communication is understood.

Paul's words are intended to be reliable and worthy of trust "until the end." His intention in writing to the Corinthians was this, to provide for them information and thought on which their faith could be grounded for all time. He had no idea of the degree to which this intention would be realized. Presently the writings of Paul have helped guide the church for two millennia. They will be understood and will guide understanding until the end. With the rest of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16), they are the final authority for the faith.

1:15 and in this confidence I intended first to come to you, that you might twice receive a blessing;

Firmly governing his every move by the leading of the Holy Spirit, with no other goal in mind, Paul made plans for a venture that would pass through Corinth twice. He had perhaps communicated to them that intention. For some reason this plan changed in that it was not possible and so Paul is here rehearsing with them what had been his intent.

It is a curious activity, planning, yet waiting to move each moment in harmony with the Spirit. We should not suppose that they are at odds, yet there are special challenges and tensions involved in the process. We plan by nature and think ahead because God does so, and we are like Him in this way. So there is nothing inherently evil in planning. We know that God has spoken out a plan that includes the details of our life.

Our task in planning becomes anticipating what He will be doing with us at moments in time in the future, and that is tricky. He demands faith and trust from us, so we can be certain we will never know the plan in the absolute sense for any moment of our

lives ahead of time. So our plan must be such, and our attitude toward it must be such that we can adapt at any moment with faith to what we learn of His will. This will not change in this life and so there will always be unexpected changes in plans.

This vacillation is not a sign of a lack of spirituality but proof of its presence. It would be unhealthy if it were not present. Yet viewed in an unspiritual way and with a lack of trust in God or in the character of a person, it can look like instability. Paul was being accused of this by some who were viewing him in a fleshly way. That is what he is attempting to refute in these verses.

1:16 that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.

Here Paul clarifies further what his initial plan had been. He intended to arrive at Corinth and travel from there north in the province of Macedonia. Then he would return south back to Corinth and receive from them "help". This help was likely both financial and emotional, for the upcoming trip to Judea.

That plan had been made with the best of intentions. It then changed and we are uncertain as to why. We can be certain that Paul was responding to the Holy Spirit when he formulated his plan and when he changed it. We do not by this concede that God is changeable. We know that His character does not change. We do see that in dealing with changeable humanity, God's methods change and the timing of specific ministries to men change, though never in a sense that such changes are unanticipated by Him. This lies beyond our complete understanding, but we observe enough of such phenomenon within the realm of human endeavor and authority to know that such adaptability can be present without any loss in control.

So Paul planned this ministry venture in submission to the Holy Spirit. That he should have such a plan and articulate it was God's will. But then it was God's will that the plan be scrapped and something else be done. We cannot be certain that God's plan changed. He may have been leading in a way that would allow them to discover His plan while learning lessons that would strengthen the faith and trust of all parties concerned and affected by what appears to be a change in plans.

We must factor into this dilemma as well that no human being, apart from the One, can say that they are absolutely controlled by the Spirit. Yet it is proper to say we are controlled by the Spirit. This unknown "X" factor comes into play whenever we plan. It is possible to say in the general sense that we have planned in submission to the Holy Spirit. Yet, in the absolute sense we must say we have not. And so there are bound to be imperfections in any human plans. If God's will is to result, then such imperfections call for changes in the plan as it is implemented in real time. So Paul can confidently assert that he had conducted himself in holiness and godly sincerity. Yet he would not assert that this was true in the absolute sense. His intention was of God in this same way, but so was his actual action. Both the intended plan and the actual plan were of God though different. This "vacillation" is characteristic of the life of faith we live as fallen people in a fallen world.

1:17 therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this was I? 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?

What we have called "vacillation" is not vacillation in the classic sense. Paul was not changing plans as result of changed appetites, better opportunities, laziness, or other "fleshly" causes. Paul's intended visit was not planned to meet some fleshly need in him. Neither was it changed to do so. Therefore, the change in plan should not be taken by the Corinthians as an indication that Paul was not a man of his word. It should be assumed by them simply that God chose to take Paul a different direction and the change accepted as His doing. This is a healthy flexibility that should exist in every Christian and every Christian organization. It is the mark of a strong faith in the sovereignty of God, in His faithfulness, and in His power and willingness to direct the flow of life's events.

1:18 but as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.

Paul's word followed that of the Lord. Paul is living in harmony with Christ so that if there is a change in what he says the Corinthians can be assured it is because God has directed it. They can rest in this because God is faithful, and that is the most important truth to hang onto in a changing world.

Our faith in people would not be shaken near as often if we would reflect often on God's faithfulness, His willingness and ability to both prevent and orchestrate events, and if we would grant people the benefit of the doubt, that they have been directed by Him to do what they are doing. This is a characteristic of mature faith, and it advances the agenda of God.

1:19 for the son of God, Christ Jesus who was preached among you by us—by me, Sylvanus and Timothy was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.

Faithfulness and reliability are characteristic of the faith. That God should be unreliable or anyone walking with him unreliable is a complete contradiction. Paul speaks of the message he and others had brought to the Corinthians, and specifically the person of that message Jesus Christ.

Christ demonstrated in a very dramatic and tangible way, God's faithfulness. He came and did what he said he would do. His words were found to be faithful and true. There is no need to read between the lines in Christ's words, to re-interpret them. They are what they are, faithful and reliable. His deeds and words reflect the faithfulness of His Father to the written covenant promises made from the beginning of time. Christianity is about Yahweh's faithfulness and His growing this faithfulness in us.

1:20 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.

God's promises to man are many, recorded in the Scriptures from the dawn of history. The advent of Christ, His life, and His sacrifice guarantee those promises. In Christ they are all affirmed and guaranteed. In Christ "they are yes", meaning in our colloquial expressions, they are signed, sealed, and delivered. The word of Paul and all who come in the Lord's name is simply an "Amen" to what God and Christ have done. Our faith

does not rest on such messengers nor does our hope. They have simply come on the scene and said "Amen," or affirmed the truth of what God has done.

Our experience with these "amens" may ebb and flow. There will be times of joy and other times of disappointment with them. It is okay because they simply add the Amen to what has been done by God. Now Amen is just a phrase of affirmation, meaning "so be it." It is added after something profound is said and added as an expression of faith and hope in what has been uttered. The Amen encourages the hearers, but it adds no power to the words. So the messengers of Christ might encourage us, but the words are reliable apart from them, simply because of the character of the One who is their source. Our faith and our spirit should never wane too much with the ebb and flow of human relationships. Paul's absence in Corinth, and specifically his change in plans, did not alter one iota what they had in Christ and the blessing of that truth. Paul's object in the beginning was to bring glory to God. Specifically, it was to join men to God not to himself.

1:21 now he who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,

God is to be credited with our growing faith. When Paul speaks of "establishing us", he uses the Greek word *βεβαιον*, which means to confirm, to verify, to prove to be true, to strengthen. He is referring to the process of sanctification, of becoming like Christ in our character. The source of our growth and strength is God, and we can be certain that what or who we need for that growth will be provided, because our sanctification is most certainly God's will. So having the right people pass through our lives at certain times is not something we need to fret over.

God has also anointed us. This is a great word. It implies choice and enablement. God has chosen and enabled us by his Spirit to do certain work. We will do it if we are faithful. Again, in this context Paul likely makes these statements to deflect an unhealthy dependence on human leaders that the Corinthians had developed. They had, each of them, the sovereign choosing and the strengthening by God himself that was going on. Why be so concerned about what humans God used to bring about that work? Why be over-concerned with the change in Paul's plans to visit?

1:23 but I call God as a witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

The visit of Paul had fallen through. The plans had changed. The Corinthians, at least some of them, were suggesting it was because Paul was not a man of his word. He was by their account unstable and impulsive, given to change. In these verses we catch a little more insight into why the plans changed.

The trouble in Corinth was so severe and the emotion that it evoked in Paul so strong, that he felt part of the solution was for him to stay away. A personal visit might create both for himself and them unwarranted pain. And so after addressing the primary issues in writing, either in first Corinthians or in a lost letter, the Lord leads Paul to change his plan and allow some time to pass before he is with them again. His desire and God's in this choice is to spare them undue pain. Enough pain has been inflicted to solve the problem if their response is right. Now time must be allowed to see how they respond.

1:24 not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

Having used the words "in order to spare you," there is a possibility Paul could be misunderstood. His words could be construed to be those of someone who desired to be dictatorial and heavy-handed. And so, he states that he does not wish to "lord it over their faith." To "Lord over" means to be controlling in the unhealthy sense, to seek to dominate and thus manipulate for one's own advantage.

Paul assures them that any modification of the behavior he seeks to bring about, he does for their joy. This is the mark of a loving leader. He is firm and says hard words only because he longs for the followers to find the joy of life he has found. He views himself not as one who stands above them "pulling strings," but one who is their peer, one alongside them to contribute to the effort they are expending to achieve the life of joy in the Lord.

We see that Paul is not approaching them as inferior in faith so that they need to be propped up all the time. Paul is not saying in a condescending tone, "if it wasn't for us, you Corinthians would collapse in a heap." He is saying to them, "you're standing firm, here's how to do even better." Or perhaps, "here's how to find an even higher road to walk."

It is instructive to observe this tone, inspired and thus confirmed as legitimate by the Holy Spirit. From the human perspective, from what we can surmise of Corinth it would' have been legitimated to say they were not doing well in the faith. But from a divine perspective this instead is the appropriate statement. It is not manipulative and not contrived. It is of the Spirit and therefore true. Spiritual leaders lift up a high and holy expectation. But they must have a merciful and empathetic way of evaluating, and this is because this is our Lord's way, founded in His character as the God of loving kindness.

2 Corinthians 2

2:1 but I determine this for my own sake, but I would not come to you in sorrow again.

Paul had come to the Corinthians in sorrow. By this he means that he had been the one who had to confront their behavior, which made him sorrowful, and by that confrontation he had caused them sorrow. Confrontation is always a sorrowful thing, both for the one who must do it and for the recipient. Is never pleasant, though it can yield a pleasant fruit.

Confrontation takes a lot out of the confronter. It is agonizing and very difficult to do in the Spirit. To remain tough enough to speak the truth, yet tender enough to show love requires tremendous emotional control, and when emotions are controlled, there is great opportunity for the flesh, as much so as when they are left uncontrolled.

It is likely that Paul simply could not bear the stress of such a visit, and he was permitted by the Spirit, for his own well-being not to make the visit at that time. There are times when we reach the limit of what we can legitimately bear. Not everything that needs to be done needs to be done by us, nor does it need to be done immediately. In all things we must always allow the Spirit to orchestrate the who, what, and when of the mission. Paul was behaving spiritually when he made the decision not to go to Corinth and the Spirit was orchestrating that which was good for Paul. It could have appeared to be self – serving and cowardly. But it was both wise and Spirit – directed. With this Paul is allowing us to see at least a portion of the reason his plans changed, and the reason is somewhat surprising.

2:2 for if I caused you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?

The Corinthians had been a source of joy to Paul, people who made him glad. In the routine rigor of ministry there must be that which makes us glad. It is not altogether in the Lord alone that we find our strength. We find it through His people. Such joy is essential to our continuing on. We cannot hold out for long if everyone takes from us and no one puts anything back.

In Paul's intense troubles, spoken of in chapter 1, he needed good ministry experiences or at least good ministry news, to maintain his equilibrium. The Corinthians had been among those who lifted his spirits. But some of the factions they were allowing gave the overall church a very questionable spirit. They were for a time adding to Paul's troubles rather than making his load lighter.

2:3 and this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I come, 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.

There is considerable difference in opinion as to what letter Paul is referring to that he had written to the Corinthians. Some, of course, believe it was first Corinthians, some a "lost" epistle. Whatever it was, Paul reminds them that he is not expressing here new thoughts and that based on what he had previously expressed they should know exactly why he had changed his plans and decided not to visit. He wanted to

give them additional time so that they could process the matters he addressed and gain perspective that would allow their relationship to Paul to have its normal warmth.

In all discipline situations there is the need for time to pass so that the awkwardness of the situation can also pass. Paul had confidence that the Corinthians perspective on matters would be healthy in time and that their fondness of him would eventually carry the day. He wants to allow time for truth to do its work and emotion to settle down. It is a wise and instructive tactic that Paul employs.

2:4 from 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.

Here Paul describes his own agony in writing the letter he had written. Confrontation is never easy for the spiritual leader. In fact, it could likely be said that if confrontation is easy, it is not spiritual, that some fleshly motive is driving it.

Paul uses three terms to clearly communicate the depth of his own pain in the matter; "much affliction, anguish of heart, and many tears." To the follower the pain of the leader is minimal. It is very deep. It would be easier to let things slide in the short view of things. It is a long view, and in particular a leader's responsibility to God that gives them the resolve to wade into such thorny issues.

Paul's letter was not intended to cause pain but to convey a message of his love for the Corinthians. In his firmness they would feel sorrow, but that was just an intermediate consequence. His intent in crafting his words was to convey negative emotion only so that they would read love into his words. His was a special love at that, which he makes clear in his word choice here. He feels a love for the Corinthians that is over and above others.

So Paul conveys his pain, knowing that in the end this will be perceived as love. We will see it was. Again, it is an instructive tactic in conducting the confrontation. Show your pain, and they will perceive your love.

2:5 but if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but to some degree in order not to say too much to all of you.

The issue being processed in the minds of the Corinthians, was the sorrow they had caused Paul. Now the danger Paul was concerned about was that in their embarrassment, they might become punitive toward the offender. They might do so because of their own feelings or by misreading Paul's feelings. Here he begins to move toward clarifying how they should now treat the offending brother who had repented.

There is a tone of caution in this verse. The little phrase "to some degree—in order not to say too much" reflects this. Paul is saying "don't over – react." Or "don't get carried away in the emotion of all this." Paul does not want them to compensate for the pain caused him. He encourages them here to leave it at the pain caused them, and not to allow their embarrassment to over blow that. The pain this person has caused the Corinthians is "to some degree." This phrase is intentionally used by Paul so the damage is not over-stated, and the discipline overly harsh.

2:6 sufficient for such a one is the punishment which was inflicted by the majority.

What they had collectively done to the offender was enough for Paul. He would not require additional payment. There would be no "you will get more once Paul arrives!" Paul for his part was letting go of any hurt and anger he might have had. This is the mark of the Spiritual person, one who doesn't have to have their "pound of flesh." Where there is repentance, a change is called for on the part of those correcting behavior. Now was the time for all to move on, and Paul turns to that idea next.

2:7 but on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Excessive sorrow must be guarded against. Paul does not describe what it is. He only speaks of what it does. It overwhelms. The word used is καταπιθη, from καταπινω meaning "to drink down, or swallow." Sorrow that is excessive swallows up by disturbing one's view of things. It leads them to think wrongly. Ultimately it makes them feel that they have moved beyond grace. Things like "penance," making up for their sin or paying back for their sin, begin to govern their thoughts rather than repentance and God's grace. There is, of course, a fine line. Sin must be faced, restitution where appropriate made, a period of "probation" passed through in some cases, but all of it must be done for restoration not for punishment or forgiveness. That is a key point.

The word for forgive is χαρισασθα from χαρίζομαι. It comes from the word "grace and means to bestow in kindness or grace, freely. The sinner is to be "en-graced" by us as they respond to our discipline. Now, such grace will not be felt if they do not repent. In that case neither the offender nor the offended are led into a feeling of God's grace. The process has been stopped short and cannot yield its sweet fruit, only a bitter fruit. Once repentance is entered, grace is to carry the day so that the person can get back on their feet again and be returned to a place of usefulness. So discipline must be carried out, it must be responded to with brokenness and repentance, and then grace and encouragement is to rule a relationship.

We are to do more than simply forgive. We reach out, pick up, lift up, and equip the one who left the way. Human nature being what it is, we do not move in the direction of grace, but move naturally to revenge and punishment once we start dealing with sin. We must moderate our natural response with our knowledge of God's grace and extend that grace to those who have offended us and repented. Let it never be said about those who have been forgiven so very much that they demand more of their debtors than was demanded of them.

2:8 wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

There comes a time when reaffirming love becomes the calling of the moment. Group opinion and influence is powerful. It has the capability of bringing enormous pressure to bear on a life, and it can be overwhelming so that all hope is lost. Once behavior is condemned by the group, and the proper spirit demonstrated, love must be affirmed and one's worth to the body of Christ reinforced. It is in grace that there is great power for change and God's grace is comprehended when it is seen demonstrated by God's people. The Corinthians reaffirming their love for the guilty party would help ensure his recovery and restoration to usefulness.

2:9 for to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

Truth declared always puts the hearers to the test. The question becomes will they rise to the occasion and take the action they need to take in the love of this truth. This is especially the case when the truth is accurately applied to a specific situation. It becomes an important test to that person or group and the response determines what they move on to.

If those who hear the truth so applied and who implement the truth, more truth will be given. If they do not implement the truth, they have been given they will stagnate and then move backwards. Jesus explained this reality in this way; "To those who have more will be given, but to those who do not have, even what they have shall be taken away." (Luke 8:11 – 18). It is not that Paul is manipulating the Corinthians or seeking to gain control of them. He is clarifying the opportunity for them, a critical moment when they have opportunity to rise to a new level spiritually. A test can be viewed either negatively or positively. It is always a positive result when we pass it, and this is the case in the Christian life with the countless tests that come our way as our knowledge of truth increases.

2:10 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,

Paul stands with the Corinthians in their response to this brother that has fallen into sin. If they have extended forgiveness, he wants to be understood as having done so with them. Not knowing if they had extended such forgiveness already to the individual, Paul makes clear that if they had done so, he also had done so through them. The church stands together in the mind of Christ. When individuals in it are extended forgiveness, that speaks for the entire body, there is no need for further deliberation or ceremony. Paul had extended forgiveness already, or else would extend it through those in Christ at Corinth when they forgave the man. There was no call for a separate act from him.

This provides interesting insight into Paul's view of his own authority as it should be understood in the church. In Christ such an act need not be initiated by Paul. Now it is certain that it could have been, but Paul seems very comfortable deferring to their actions in this matter, content to being understood as standing with them. So the idea of his authority is certainly present in the context, and directing them in this matter. But it is also evident that they are seen to some degree as peers. There is a reason the standing together in Christ is critical. Paul goes on to explain this.

2:11 in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

It is important for the church to stand together in Christ due to the ability of Satan to manipulate and scheme to gain an advantage against us. This is especially true in the matter of extending forgiveness, for in that practice the truth of the power of the cross, the doctrine of Christ, and the entire idea of grace are all at stake. To think wrong about forgiving repentant brothers is to set aside the truth and when this is done you always hand Satan an immense opportunity. The cross is where the victory lies. To in any way minimize forgiveness, or not allow it to do its work is to take a stand with "the accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:10), against the redeemed.

There is grave spiritual danger in not forgiving, that goes way beyond the obvious relational damage. We are to guard ourselves well against this danger (Ephesians 4:26-27).

2:12 Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when the door was open for me in the Lord,

Paul begins to turn to another subject, wanting to narrate to the Corinthians an account of his earlier journey into Greece. The transition to that subject however at this time is very short lived, and he will only touch on it briefly here.

We see that Paul's travels were "for the gospel." His ambition was always to preach the gospel, particularly in areas where it had not been heard. If one is looking for that which gave Paul, his drive and motivation they need look no further than this. At Troas a door opened for him in the Lord, that is, an opportunity developed in the Yahweh's business to advance it. Troas was a town in Asia minor—modern day Turkey. It was from Troas that one could cross the northern Aegean Sea into Greece.

2:13 I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them I went to Macedonia.

Titus had been sent by Paul to Corinth. Many believe that the purpose of his visit was to take the letter mentioned in this letter to them, a letter which has not been preserved. It was they say, a very stern letter and Paul was quite anxious about their response to it. He was very anxious therefore to meet up with Titus to hear about the situation in Corinth.

Paul expected to find Titus in Troas. But Titus was not there when Paul arrived. So though there was opportunity for Paul to advance the Lord's business there in Troas, Paul himself did not linger to do it, but left the company whom he was traveling with to address the opportunity while he himself traveled on to northern Greece, into the province of Macedonia in search of Titus and news from Corinth.

It is possible to encounter a great open door and yet be moved by the Spirit to another work. This was the case with Paul who was preoccupied with the welfare of the Corinthian church. And so he leaves the work in Troas and crosses the Aegean Sea where he hopes to find Titus and hear from him word on the welfare of the Corinthians.

(Below in this commentary is writing that began at second Corinthians 2:14 and runs through chapter 7 verse five. This is where I began my exercise and discipline in journaling my way through Scripture in 1997. From this passage in the Corinthian epistles the habit spread to all the other epistles and beyond.)

2:14 but thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ

This phrase marks an abrupt change in tone. It is introduced in most English versions by the conjunction "but". This is the English rendering of the Greek conjunction δε, which is an adversative connector that shows that a contrast is coming. Here there is a dramatic contrast, a complete change in perspective from what has preceded. There has been a heaviness in Paul's words. The word "but" marks a change. The next word reveals what that contrast will be, the word "thanks."

Thanksgiving is unexpected in view of the things that Paul has been reporting. A string of very emotional statements precedes this verse. In 1:8, Paul said "we despaired even of life." In 1:9, He stated "we had the sentence of death within ourselves." In 2:1-2, Paul spoke of his unwillingness to tackle the potential emotional pain of another visit with them in Corinth. He mentioned the depth of that pain in 2:4, "out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote". Meanwhile in his continued ministry something was amiss. In the verse which precedes this one, he speaks of having "no rest in his spirit."

Now suddenly, during all that heaviness Paul found that which caused a shift, a great one in terms of how he felt. This shift of emotion launches him into this statement of thanksgiving. It develops into a lengthy explanation that reveals his perspective on ministry and on life while in ministry. The heaviness leaves. In its place is a collection of thoughts and ideas, learned over time, brought home to Paul in perhaps a new and emphatic way by the trials of his ministry of late. These comprise a perspective on life and ministry that enables one to endure the greatest of hardships.

A particular event which we will not find out about until 7:5, has caused this sudden shift in Paul's mood. That event was the long-awaited arrival of Titus, and the news Titus brought Paul of the Corinthian's deep love and affection for him.

The news Titus brought told Paul that despite some issues that would have to be discussed and cleared up, and apart from some horrible assaults by his enemies and THE enemy on Paul's credibility, he continued to have an important place in the Corinthian's heart. They still loved, respected, admired, and responded to Him.

The passage that begins here (2:14) and extends into the seventh chapter is a great resource for all who are seeking to establish and maintain perspective in life/ministry. It shows that ministry is a fruit of life lived obediently to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ministry is not a matter of certain tasks and so neither is it a matter of having great talent with respect to the execution of certain kinds of tasks or events. Properly understood, ministry is us participating with God, contributing what His Spirit wishes to do through us, adding these to the greater sovereign workings of God among people. So it is simply living out a Spirit-filled life before whomever God places you in front of, in whatever places His sovereignty leads and through whatever tasks the moments call for.

This is not to say that ministry is strictly "natural," coming without effort and sacrifice on our part. It is dying to self, which is never natural. It involves skills that strengthen as they are practiced and that are carried out more precisely through lessons of experience. But the primary skill to be strengthened is that of walking in the Spirit. Strictly speaking ministry is not just skill in the tasks associated with ministry.

The phrase that begins Paul's lengthy comments on ministry is, "But thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." No doubt the celebration of Roman generals after their victories in battle were in Paul's mind as he wrote these words. Paul is made aware by the news from Corinth that God is winning. He is not just winning in Corinth. Yahweh's will is advancing always. It is doing so in Corinth even when Paul was not present there to guide it. Paul realizes that this that had been giving him such anxiety that he was unable to focus on matters that had been in front of him in Troas, was all in good hands—those of God Himself. That work hundreds of miles away in Corinth was advancing just fine without being under his own watchful eye. The movement initiated by Christ, now carried on by others was advancing quite nicely amid great trouble

Paul states four things about this triumph of God that we are a part of. First, God leads it. It is His. That assures it will be triumphant. Second, He always leads it. That adds more to its certainty. He will persistently prevail in what He has planned and promised to do. He will not lapse in leading. That He always leads reminds us that seeking and knowing His leading in matters of real life is the essential task of all who would be part of His triumph. Third, He leads us in it. He is doing that which from the beginning was His will for humanity, that we rule for Him (Genesis 1:26). What God does; He does through us. Fourth, God's triumph is "in Christ" in every sense of that expression. God's triumph is founded on the work of the God/man, Jesus, His anointed one. Jesus is its centerpiece. It is explained only by Jesus' sacrifice of His life for the forgiveness of all who embrace faith in Him. It is grounded in Jesus' sinless character. It aims at producing that character in every thought and deed of those who believe. It exalts Jesus and aims at Yahweh's glory every mouth will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:1-10).

But this phrase, "in Christ" also communicates an important characteristic of ministers and ministries that remain healthy. We are made competent for the hands-on tasks of ministry through relational oneness with Christ. The conversations, acts of service, teaching and spiritual leadership, all contribute to Yahweh's triumph when carried out in close fellowship with Christ Himself through His Spirit. As we grow in our experience of living in Him, we will enter more of God's triumph. So the triumph is "in Christ," meaning in the affairs of Christ. It is "in Christ" meaning in intimate fellowship with and submission to Him.

The news given by Titus enables Paul to stand outside all concern and anxiety of his ministry and remind us of certain truths about engaging the mission of Yahweh. Through this short opening statement, he reminds us that to be part of this great movement is to constantly witness the leading edge of God's triumph as it spreads to transform individual lives. The movement of all who were embracing Jesus as Lord was expanding against all odds. It is doing so always. In fact, it is doing just as the Prophets had proclaimed. It is gradually becoming the movement that will envelope all the world's kingdoms (Daniel 2:31-45; 7:13-14).

The ministry carried out by the apostles and all of us who follow in their steps is distinctly different from the leadership of those who led under the old covenant. Paul will speak to the differences in some detail later. There the mission was destined to failure. It was carried out among a people who lived in a state of perpetual spiritual decline. Humanity could live no other way given the consequences of Adam's fall. This perpetual spiritual decline was foreseen by Yahweh. It was strategic to His plan to allow it, due to His desire to restore His glory to His creation in its wake. Paul was living in that glory, the glory of the new covenant. What follows has been aptly called by many a treatise by Paul on new covenant ministry.

Paul lets us know in the second phrase of this verse that now through this new covenant people, God is making something known to others. His nature has always been to reveal and make known truth which otherwise would not be known. He is using us to do that. Paul says He is making known "the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him," that is, the pleasant nature of and beauty that comes with knowing Him. The knowledge of God is a pleasant thing God is displaying to others through us. That is first and foremost in our objectives today.

God is doing this in every place. Paul is noting this as a contrast to what characterized the old covenant. We can easily miss that contrast. Under the old covenant a sweet aroma of the worship of God was an experience confined to a place near the Temple

in Jerusalem. In those times it was the plain literal smell of sacrifice and incense. Under this new covenant it is this figurative aroma that lingers in every place where the life of the Spirit is being lived. Paul is speaking of the pleasantness of temperament which comes with a life lived this way. Our knowledge of God does not produce arrogance, brashness, exclusiveness, narrowness, pessimism, or any such things that leave in the minds of others the bitter aftertaste of partial truth or hypocrisy. Knowledge of God when it has been used by the Spirit to do its complete work, produces a loving, gracious, and sweetness of spirit. Our capacity to live such a life is vital to God's process. He is winning through the aroma that we exude as the work of His Spirit is completed in us. But it is critical to state that this that we do is not a marketing strategy to produce what will be pleasant for others. The next two verses will clarify that.

2:15 For we are fragrance of Christ to God among those who were being saved and among those who are perishing.

Paul has been presenting ministry as something that flows out of a life lived in the Spirit. Ministry is the outgrowth of a certain lifestyle. Ministry is not something we strap on as we go out the door, as we might a backpack. Paul merges life and ministry in our thinking. We live in such a way with the Holy Spirit that we respond to each event and each person as Christ would. Our desire should be that because of how we live we show that we are one with Him and do so in a very natural way.

The actual goal of our life/ministry is to be a fragrance of Christ to God. That is a very significant switch from how we normally take this verse. God is the one whose senses we are seeking to satisfy and conform to. The battle is not to get others to like the smell. The battle is not even to get them to think they smell a fragrance of Christ. It is our ambition to be an accurate portrayal of Christ to God. We live in the Spirit for Him to see Christ in us.

Clearly from Paul's perspective this describes the intended result the Spirit seeks to bring about in us. He seeks to order our lives so that a fragrance of Christ is sensed by God as we carry out our lives among diverse people. We focus on living as Christ would and we focus on what God has made known about that as we do it. We do it for Him not to gain a certain response from others, or certain results for ourselves. So our lives and our mood do not depend on results in others, but on pleasing God. When we focus on knowing and following the Spirit's leading, we find that there is naturally an impact on others. The natural outcome of Spirit-filled living is ministry. Approached in this way ministry is as organic as odor! Ministry is no longer compartmentalized as something we do as we might a sport or an occupation. It is a way of living.

We seek to carry on this life/ministry no matter whose company we are in. We have the same goal in any environment, whether in school, church, business or at home, to be in all situations a fragrance of Christ to God. The perception of our lives and message is very different depending on the perspective of others. But we remain the same.

2:16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

In the ancient world the smells of victory to the returning triumphant army were the smells of death to their captives. In the same way the fragrance of Christ which we exude is to those who do not believe is the smell of death. To them we are unpleasant to be around. They are repelled by the aroma of Christ.

This is important. A life lived according to the leading of the Spirit is not necessarily attractive to those who are perishing. To them we are not a pleasant aroma, stirring up pleasant thoughts. To them we are the smell of death. Death to self cares the person of the world. We produce guilt and conviction in them. The thought of judgment offends them. Condemnation offends them.

Among the saved our fragrance is a pleasant aroma. It evokes wonderful thoughts of grace, salvation and victory, of hope and eternal life. They recognize its source, and they know whose presence they are in and they are drawn to it. It smells like life, spiritual life to those who are spiritually alive.

So God is doing amazing things through us. We are instruments of God's revelation of Himself. No longer do people go to Jerusalem to see the people of God, smelling the aroma of the Temple sacrifices. The aroma of fellowship with God, the fragrance of Christ and the knowledge of God is made known in every place. God revealed Himself through Christ and he reveals Christ through us. The natural question is that which follows.

To think of us as to some degree and varying degrees incarnations of Christ who is adequate for such a thing. Who can imagine adequately representing Christ...to God! Paul will only pose that question here. He will answer it directly in verses three and four of chapter three. For now, he wants this idea to linger in our minds. He will reveal the reason we dare to aim so high without lives.

Before Paul answers this question, he seeks to defuse accusations of those who are seeking to erode his credibility. His treatise on new covenant ministry takes on the tone and language of a defense of himself. Titus has let him know that he has detractors and enemies in Corinth. Some were "medicine show" evangelists, trafficking in religious matters for personal gain. Paul wishes to distinguish himself from these. Others apparently were saying "where are Paul's credentials for the authority he is wielding and this following he is attracting? Who is recommending Paul? Who commended him to you Corinthians?"

Among those of traditional Judaism such practices involving letters of commendation and endorsements were common. Information came from the hierarchy in Jerusalem. Perhaps "Approved teachers" had arrived in Corinth that had letters of commendation. Paul had once had such letters when he himself was party to those of influence in Judaism (Acts 9:1-2). In the fledgling church such lines of authority were still developing. So though the news from Corinth was overwhelmingly good, Paul still faced some sticky issues. He could not match the level of organizational preparedness that had developed over centuries in traditional Judaism. He appeals to a kind of commonsense evaluation which he challenges the readers to engage when they think about the questions some were raising about Paul's authenticity. This defense of himself will take center-stage later in Paul's letter. For now, he gives only a few thoughts in that regard.

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

Paul places himself in different company than those who are defaming him. He is not in the business of selling the knowledge of God as some of them are. That has been a distinct mark of legitimate representatives of Jesus. Knowledge is not something we dispense incrementally and charge accordingly for. Revelation of Christ and God is not some carried out as others might market a product, for maximum financial gain. In this statement there is an acknowledgment that some of Paul's detractors do this. Paul will seek to show their motives in doing it.

The truth even today is that many do not approach ministry in the way that Paul advocates. They peddle the word. That is, they see it as a means for their own gain and pass it in such a way as to provide for them a maximum profit. Instead of such sordid motives Paul describes his own with such words as sincerity.

When Paul speaks of sincerity he is speaking of transparency. He ministers with no hidden agenda or motive. He ministers truth to them because he himself has embraced it and he lives by it. Because he lives it, it is natural that he declares it to the Corinthians. Sincerity here means "Sun-tested." It was an assertion that the product was examined in the sunlight. Perhaps in the case of pottery, it suggested that it had been tested by exposing it to the sun's heat. Cracks and imperfections were sometimes concealed by unscrupulous merchants with wax and then painted over. When exposed to heat the cracks would be revealed. Paul is saying that there is nothing hidden regarding him or his ministry.

Paul carries out his ministry "as from God". He was doing what he was doing because God had ordered it and was scrutinizing it. God had commissioned Paul and his attitude was that "woe is me if I don't do it." Paul's motive was first and foremost because he embraced his own call, and second because he was being constrained by God to continue.

Paul states that he spoke in Christ. He meant that he spoke only what Christ had directed to be spoken. He meant that Christ was the centerpiece of His message and that He spoke in harmony with how Christ was leading Him through His Spirit in the moment. Paul did not speak about himself and he did not promote himself. Paul was not dreaming or scheming when it came to the message that he proclaimed. His message was sourced in Christ.

Paul says that he spoke "in the sight of God." By this he meant that he was accountable to God, was always mindful of God, and was always seeking to be in harmony with the message of God as it had been revealed and recorded in Scripture. He was always seeking God's wishes and sovereign leading and submitting to these. He spoke in words and tone that he sought God's judgment and approval on.

Paul had made doing things "in the sight of God" big in his life. He had learned to understand the significance of the fact that God sees all and is watching all and that this is bigger than anyone else who might be watching (1 Corinthians 4:1-5). In this sense he always had an audience of one.

2 Corinthians 3

3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

Paul is apparently referencing an accusation that had been made against him that he had not become an authority in a legitimate way through "proper" channels, but by simply commending himself. He was "somebody" only because he had made himself out to be somebody. In this phrase Paul is anticipating the possible reaction of some. Encouraged by the word from Titus that the recipients continue to hold him dear, Paul decides to go after his detractors and give his supporters a basis in which to answer them. In effect he is asking if they think that all this glorious ministry, he had done was just empty boasting or was it a true sign and an assurance to them that he was a genuine apostle?

Paul is also going after his detractors who have apparently told the Corinthians that before the word of teachers such as Paul was received, they should be made to produce "some form of ID." These should be in the form of references from known authorities in matters of faith that would authenticate who they are and that would authenticate their ministry. These detractors had apparently come to Corinth with such letters and messages and so had been received by the church. They had apparently then gotten such letters from the Corinthian church and moved on to others.

The question a careful reader would ask is, since they brought letters from previous churches to authenticate themselves here, then we gave them letters for their next stop, who supplied them in the beginning? The situation in Paul's mind is absurd. His argument in the book will be, "how could you doubt me when I have invested so much to gain so little, while at the same time trusting those who have gained so much from you and have invested so little?" His question is "do we, of all people, really need letters of commendation to be accepted as legitimate?"

3:2 You are our letter written in our hearts known and read by all men.

To this question about letters of recommendation Paul is replying to the Corinthians that his authentication was they themselves. His legitimacy as one who revealed Christ was the changed lives of the people walking around on the streets of Corinth. Paul's fragrance of Christ had rubbed off on they themselves. What better recommendation could there be?

Paul says that the Corinthians were written on his heart. He is expressing the idea that they have a special place in his heart, that he has a deep love for them. The presence of love as a driving motive in Paul authenticated him. His relationship to the Corinthians was not simply a professional one. What Christ had done in them had become etched in his heart in a way that permanently bound him to them. They were not mass produced by process. They were born again out of a loving relationship. Even now others knew of the Corinthians because they were so much on Paul's heart. A person did not have to know Paul long to know of the Corinthians. They were on his heart and in his heart. Their story was read even by those who did not know them when they began to see and hear Paul's heart.

It is in this sense that the Corinthians were "known and read by all men." The story of their lives was out on the table for many to see. So Paul's commendation was not a carefully crafted recommendation done by him or by some other party with ink on paper. It was living in the conduct of real people there in Corinth, open for examination by all whether friend or foe, believer or unbeliever. In Paul's living letter of recommendation there were no ambiguous words, there were no broad generalities, there were no self-flattering statements. Rather it was composed of real lives in which their had been substantial change. It was out there for all to examine, to scrutinize, and draw conclusions about.

The Christian life and ministry must be so conducted. It must be a fragrance of Christ to God. When it is, it is distinguishable among those were being saved and among those who are perishing. It will speak of God. Humans will draw different conclusions according to their spiritual condition. But ultimately it is God who authenticates us as true.

3:3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.

Paul calls the Corinthians a letter of Christ. This relates to the phrase immediately before it. The Corinthians were known as a story of Christ in the sense that as others noticed and examined their lives either by watching them personally or hearing about them from Paul, they saw Christ. It was obvious to all that Christ was being formed in them and that it was He who had accomplished what had happened in their lives.

As the wise and humble heard or observed the story of the Corinthians, there was in that story the authentication of Paul's work and identity. That authentication of Paul was not happening in Corinth, though it should have been. But Paul was not what the Corinthians lives were about. Paul had written the letter. But the Corinthians were not a letter about Paul. They were a letter about Christ. Christ was being manifested in them, even though in Corinth the calling of Paul was apparently not being affirmed by their story. To the astute the changed lives of the Corinthians should be proving Paul's sincerity, his singleness of heart and his lack of ambition. But Paul is not the primary subject their lives make known. Christ is, and that is as it should be. Paul's role in the story is that of one who cares for them. They were a letter about Christ and a letter that manifested Christ to others.

There was no mistaking that Christ was the One the Corinthians' lives were about and He is the one who had done the work in them. But it was also clear that it was Paul and his company who provided the care of Christ for them. That Christ had done so through Paul should have been a powerful authentication of Paul as a minister of Christ. Certainly, Paul's authentication in Corinth need not come about by him picking up a pen and writing a letter or by someone doing that in his behalf. It should have come about because of the Holy Spirit's working in Paul and then in the Corinthians. What better recommendation could anyone ask for?

This "letter" that the Corinthians are to others of Christ is a work of the Spirit, the work of God done first in Paul's heart and then in the Corinthians' heart. It was the story of deeply personal relationships between God, Paul and the Corinthians. The result was that God was revealing a new way of living with Him. It was not just centered in humans conforming to a written code of law. The message itself was not chiseled on tablets of stone like God had done in the case of the law. Rather He was revealing

Himself in a living way, in and through human hearts, in deep individual relationship with all who came to Him.

There is a shift in metaphor in this verse that emphasizes that a historic shift had come about in Yahweh's dealings with humanity. Paul prepares the reader through this to begin to ponder contrasts between life and ministry under the old covenant with life and ministry under the new covenant established by Jesus. He switches metaphors in this verse to set up the things that he will say next. So we would expect the verse to read this way, "being manifested that you are a letter of Christ cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, *not on paper*, but on tablets of human hearts." If that were the wording, we would understand the contrast being this: The letter written to recommend Paul was not written with ink on paper but with the Spirit on the Corinthian's hearts. Instead, Paul says, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, *not on tablets of stone*, but on tablets of human hearts." The contrast is not simply between an inanimate letter and a living one. It is that, but the contrast is also about two different kinds of ministers, two different kinds of ministries, and two different sorts of impact and results. The contrast commends Paul as a totally different kind of minister, ministering a power that has never been seen among the people of Yahweh. This was something better than Moses brought to humanity.

So we find buried in this verse a contrast in the results of ministry under the old covenant with ministry now under the new covenant. The law God wrote on tablets of stone never reached the heart of His people. Their hearts remained evil. Yahweh knew this and made it known even as the law was given (Deut. 5:28-30; 29:1-4; 30:1-8). The new covenant provided forgiveness of sins and so the reuniting of God's own Spirit with the spirits of His people. This new covenant explained the transformation of the Corinthians and authenticated Paul as Yahweh's spokesperson regarding the much-anticipated new covenant. This switch in language is deliberate so that Paul can speak to this important change in life/ministry under this new covenant.

3:4 and such confidence we have through Christ toward God,

The assertions Paul made about the uniqueness of this ministry that he was carrying out in every place are very bold. His confidence could raise alarms. He is indicating that something greater than all that Moses established is here. Before plainly stating that, Paul will make sure his readers are not alarmed by his own bold assertions. He will deflect these concerns by affirming again Christ as the centerpiece of this entire wonder that is happening among unlikely people like himself everywhere.

Paul's confidence was distinctly different from the teachers cycling through Corinth. These teachers were primarily Jewish. Their teachings were at best a mix of Jesus and Jewish tradition. Their message was based on a wrong understanding of the old covenant. Some no doubt believed that obedience to the law of Moses was essential to salvation. That was never an accurate view of the purpose of the law, but that is the default thinking of humanity toward God and so flourished under the law. Therefore, the confidence and boldness toward Yahweh that Paul had were extremely rare even among the faithful. It is still not possible among any who think in terms of this old covenant mindset, IF they rightly evaluate themselves. The truth is that by the terms of the old covenant all of Israel, including Moses, failed. Israel is still clearly under the curses of the old covenant (Deuteronomy 28). The message of Israel is that a merit system whereby humans gain God's favor does not exist.

Most people have an old covenant mindset, though they do not live historically under it. The mindset is what we term legalism. Legalism is a belief. Contrary to popular understanding, when we adopt a rule for our lives and follow it we have not necessarily become legalistic. We may be just being wise! Legalism is the belief, trust and confidence that by obeying the law we gain God's approval or in many cases the approval of the gods. In more biblical language, it is the belief that by works we can be saved.

We can easily see that this mindset is our default one as human beings. To please people, we learn at a tender age to do what they want us to do. We may be rebelling inside, but we learn to perform. We bring this into our relationship with God so that going to heaven is a matter of doing enough good—so that our good outweighs the bad. It is a natural theology that develops in us.

Many Christians fall into a mixed belief system. They have rightly believed that they cannot be saved eternally by doing good deeds. So they believe in Jesus' death in their behalf. But once saved in this sense, they seek to curry God's favor through performance, so that their life is blest. They pray, attend church, obey the ten commandments, all so that God will be pleased with them, answer their prayers, keep them healthy and in other ways bless them. This is an old-covenant mindset.

This mindset is so common and natural to us that most all Christians have remnants of it. Paul wrote Galatians to a group of Christians who had fallen back into this old covenant mindset. It is certain that all who have this old covenant mindset miss the full experience of the Spirit. They may or may not have been born again. They may or may not know that they are at odds with God. They do not relate personally to Yahweh. To varying degrees, they do the tasks and deeds they have come to associate with His people. They follow select people in front of them and may have relationship with them. But there is not much by way of relationship with God Himself. If they evaluate themselves rightly, they cannot claim with absolute certainty to be a pleasing aroma to God. They cannot boldly and confidently assert their own authenticity before Him. To these the mindset of boldness and confidence that Paul had was and is brash and unspiritual in their eyes. They are in a dry place spiritually.

But as pathetic as the faith experience of these is, they are closer to real life than those who do not evaluate themselves rightly. These imagine that they have kept God's commands and have no need of new birth. In this self-deception they can be quite bold. They can imagine their moral makeup to be other than what it is. They are devoid of the Spirit's influence and conviction. In this sense they are not Spiritual. They are religious. It was these that rejected Jesus and crucified Him with no pangs of conscience. They thought they had rid the world of a rebel.

The writings of the old covenant had been given to undo the entire idea that Yahweh's blessing could be gained by personal merit. When given ten simple laws and told that they would be blessed by God if they obeyed them, Israel failed miserably. The old covenant projected this and forecasted that through Christ all this would change. But though many such Jewish teachers were well versed in these Scriptures, they did not understand them. And this was because self-deception got the upper hand in their minds and hearts.

Through Christ's work, Paul had great confidence toward God. That short phrase that Paul uses in this verse, "toward God," is important. It was not merely self-confidence, or confidence toward other men that Paul had. It was a confidence toward God. That was an amazing position to be in. It is through Christ that Paul had such confidence.

This "through Christ" concept is so critical, and Paul so wants to make it clear that he restates the idea in a different way in the next verse. He did not want his confidence dismissed as brashness. Paul was confident enough through Christ's work to say, "If you examine us, you will find us to be a letter of Christ, the living letter to all from God." The next thought Paul expresses will further reinforce that his confidence is not the brash, arrogant sort.

3:5 not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves. But our adequacy is from God.

Paul wants all to understand the confidence he exuded in ministry is not that which characterizes fools a brash and inflated view of themselves combined with a blindness to their own liabilities. It is not the unrealistic type that states, "I can do and be anything I set my mind to." Paul has examined himself thoroughly and his conclusion is that he is not adequate for what he does. That is an important conclusion. Paul has looked at his education, his personality, his talents and ability and says, "they're not enough."

This line of thinking, that we are inadequate, grows out of understanding the vision of ministry. Paul had stated in metaphorical terms the grand work God is bringing about through our ministry (2:14-5). We are raising up out of idolatrous, immoral people those who exude an aroma of Christ to God. We can give good speeches, we can organize, we can lead, we can inspire. But in the end, we cannot change hearts. We are inadequate for that task. Yet we, who cannot even know our own hearts, bring about changed hearts in people. That is from God.

Is a remarkable thing Paul says, that he does not "consider anything as coming from ourselves." Paul is aware of the critical role of Christ, through whom he has been declared worthy to be entrusted with the things of God. He is aware of the Holy Spirit, through whom he is energized for the work of God. Compared to the critical nature of those two persons, the other factors do not register. Paul is not suggesting the human factors make no contribution. He is simply saying that on their own they do not make one adequate for the noble work of producing for God the aroma of Christ in people.

God uses human beings. He can do so through the work of Christ. Our summons to this work and our being renewed and equipped for His work all happen through Christ's work. It is all sourced in God. We are not in our position for any other reason, nor do we maintain that position for any other reason. Christ's work allowed for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to be expanded so that His presence is not simply with us, as in the old covenant. He indwells us. He lives and resides in us, united with our own spirits. Thus, we are made eligible to do the work we do by God the Son, and we are made capable to function in that work by God the Holy Spirit. All this comes to us because God the Father willed it so. In the fullest sense our adequacy in changing hearts and reproducing in people the character of Jesus Christ is a result of God's work. It is not our own. Our confidence is toward God and so it naturally follows that we are confident regarding men.

3:6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

The thought of the preceding verses is repeated in this statement. God is adequate to do what He wishes to do through humans. He has imparted His adequacy to us. A plain rendering of the words of the original language would be this: "Who also made us adequate servants of the new covenant." God has made us adequate servants to lead and facilitate the movement of His Spirit under the new covenant. There can be no doubt that for what He has for us to do in connection with His movement we are adequate.

Critical to our experience of this new covenant life is that we be willing to become servants of Him and His interests instead of our own. That is what this role requires of us. It is what the Spirit is leading us to do. He makes us adequate for that critical step. If we are willing to follow the Spirit's leading to humble ourselves and serve, then we are capable of this ministry under the new covenant that changes hearts. He is convicting us of our willfulness and leading us to serve God's purposes and He will equip us with the words and actions the moments call for.

His equipping of us is complete, and thorough. We are not adequate simply because we are somewhat casually aligned with Him and then natural talents take over. It is deeper than that. He has made and is making us adequate servants, through His Spirit. The Spirit's work is bringing about a change in our makeup. We are not the same as result of that work. Yahweh's salvation has become such that we are being made fit for each moment by Him.

We are being made fit to teach, lead, inspire, encourage and generally help strengthen this life of the Spirit in others. We help them confess and set aside sin. We teach them how to listen to the Holy Spirit. We model habits and thought patterns that facilitate this way of life. We build equity with them so that in critical moments we can lovingly appeal to them and inspire them to persist in their faith. We are dispensers of grace and mercy so that they rise above their sins. This is all part of ministering the new covenant.

After this great acknowledgment of God as the source of the ministry he has carried out, Paul begins to speak to what we can term the "nature" of this ministry of the new covenant. By speaking of the "nature" of new covenant ministry we mean that Paul speaks of the power that propels it, what it focuses on, how it can be discerned, and even the methods it employs. Beginning in the middle of this verse Paul will give a series of contrasts between ministry of the old covenant and of the new covenant. He will even contrast what we do as ministers with what Moses did under the old covenant and what Moses' ministry produced with what our ministry produces. His description of these contrasts will continue into what we know as the seventh chapter of his letter.

The focus of the old covenant was what Paul calls here "the letter." He is speaking of God's written words that He gave His people. Specifically, it was what was later called the Decalogue, literally the ten words, what we know as the ten commandments written on tablets of stone. The agreement with Israel centered on these. The agreement was that if they obeyed these laws, then Yahweh would bless them and use them to rule the nations and His creation (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) If they did not obey these then they would inherit the curses of that covenant which would devastate and subjugate them as a people (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) . The old covenant was an

agreement between Yahweh and Israel with conditions and specific performance clauses. It was like a written contract governed by words.

The new agreement is not to obey a code, but to respond to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. We respond to His testimony of Jesus, that He was God appearing in human form and that He died as a sacrifice for our sins. In obeying this message that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life we are obeying the witness of the Spirit and He takes up residence in us. He then convicts and leads us in embracing more of the truth and to make appropriate changes in thought patterns and actions. An entire way of life is produced by Him from within us.

In contrast to this life produced by the Spirit, the old covenant and its law produced death. In understanding the old covenant, we must understand that any conditions imposed on humanity's behavior for God's approval have only one result, forfeiture of life. The letter of the law could not impart life. It imparted death. It still does. As when it was instituted it makes one painfully aware of their own spiritual bankruptcy. The old covenant could not instill confidence in one's position, or adequacy for ministering it. It could just impart a sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. Thus, it imparts spiritual death, or separation from God. Where there is spiritual death there is eventually the second death.

There is this starkest of contrasts in results between the two covenants that Paul speaks of here. The Spirit gives life to those the law has killed. The law teaches men their need. It tutors them regarding their spiritual condition. The Spirit helps them understand they are dead. When they turn to Christ, they find the solution. The Spirit gives life to those the law kills. We must die before we can be given life. The law provides a means for us to check our spiritual vital signs. It is a means of detecting our spiritual condition. It lets us know we are inadequate. It removes any illusions we might have of our spiritual vitality. That was the message of the old covenant carried out through Israel, recorded in writing for the world to read and see. Humankind is spiritually dead. The purpose of the code of the old covenant was to prove the moral bankruptcy of humanity, the fact that we are spiritually dead. It serves that function to this very day.

3:7 but if the ministry of death in letters engraved in stone came with glory, so the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading as it was,

Paul reaches back to two statements he has made about ministry under the old covenant. The first is from verse six. The old covenant ministered death. Spiritual death is primarily what Paul is referring to—separation from God. So relentless is it in this function that we learn we don't just DO immoral things. We are immoral. We are totally different, distinct and separate from Yahweh morally.

The phrase "ministry of death" seems to be an oxymoron. Apart from Christ and apart from an understanding of the law and the Old Testament era the significance of this statement and its accuracy would not be understood. The fact is that the mission of the law was to prove our spiritual lifelessness. In spiritual terms and in biblical terms the law was given to "kill" any who thought they were alive (Romans 7:9). We don't associate ministry with what grieves. But a "ministry" is a noble service when it leads people to Christ. The law is holy and its mission the holiest. To bring about death in this case was good. The law makes us feel inadequate and ashamed. But it also opens our heart to a Savior.

The readers first saw Paul use the term letters engraved in stone in verse three. It was a passing allusion to the law, which was engraved on stone tablets. Here he brings this idea to us again to emphasize that ministry under the old covenant not only brought about death, it gave to us a lifeless instrument. It was simply letters engraved in stone. It was cold, calculating, detached, factual, unfeeling, unbending. It was a businesslike witness to our shortcomings. Its focus was on external actions of individuals, not on they themselves. It was all about a code of law that they were to conform to. It showed no mercy and made no attempt to fix the root of humanity's problem.

Yet, despite these shortcomings the entire era of the old covenant came with glory. Though it was a ministry of death, a lifeless instrument that was the eternal bearer of bad news, it came with much pomp and ceremony. There was an aura surrounding its introduction that was at once beautiful, awe-inspiring, and terrifying. There was lightening, thunder, and the like. The phenomena were consistent with the law's mission and purpose. The law is holy (Romans 7:7-25). It is a creation of Yahweh that describes His holiness—His "moral otherliness." The law engraved His holiness and His might in our minds, to our own guilt and shame. It is always glorious when God reveals Himself. But the effect was terrifying because of what He revealed to men about themselves as He revealed Himself.

Paul's accounting of the glory of the old covenant draws the reader back to what Moses' encounters with God would bring about in Moses' body. The glory of God, the light of His presence was transmitted to Moses as he fellowshiped with Yahweh (Exodus 34:29). His face glowed. Aaron and the rest of Israel were frightened, so Moses covered his face with a veil.

Moses' face was typical of the glory of the old covenant. It was spectacular, an amazing phenomenon. One does not experience the presence of God and not experience a certain glory. In the case of this era the glory was external in nature. Paul's point is that the glory that accompanied even this lifeless instrument was of a great and very intense nature. That lifeless instrument came with glory, even though its purpose was to condemn.

Paul notes that this glory that shown on Moses' face was fading. That is an important statement that Paul will bring us back to. He merely notes here that the glory of Moses' face was not permanent. It gradually slipped away as Moses was apart from Yahweh's presence. There was no permanent change in the face of Moses. That was a visible illustration of the effects of the transformation that the law could bring over humans. Paul will tell us some significant things about how Moses dealt with this fading glory that are not given to us in the Exodus account. For now, he wants us to be focused on the fact that the old covenant did have rather spectacular glory accompanying it.

3:8 how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory.

Paul's point here is very simple. If the revelation of a lifeless instrument that revealed our sin came with such intense glory, then the revelation of forgiveness and of inner transformation established in us by the Holy Spirit will certainly be even more glorious. It is logically absurd to see it any other way.

Glory is inherent in this ministry we are carrying on. If the old ministry vindicated its ministers, will not the new ministry do so to an even greater degree? Will there not be a glory that accompanies it? Will there not be a glory it produces? Will not the glory

enabled by Christ's death, His exaltation and His gift of the Holy Spirit be even more personal, compelling and real? That glory is as different as the leading and prompting of the Spirit is from the ten commandments engraved on stone tablets!

3:9 for if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

The word "if" at the beginning of this verse could be rendered with the word "since" and it would capture the force of what Paul is expressing. His point will be that since the ministry of the old covenant had an accompanying glory, we can anticipate a greater, overwhelming glory in the new covenant.

The old covenant had glory even though it ministered condemnation. Paul is referring to the fact that it brought out and highlighted the moral failure of Israel and sent that message to all of humanity. It sends a continuous message to us that we are unclean and guilty in Yahweh's eyes. This message of guilt was ministry in the sense that it helps us see our need for Yahweh's salvation. We have only to admit our failure and trust Yahweh.

So the old covenant ministered deeply to humanity. Its history continues to do so. It clearly shows that our natural theology is in error, our belief that we can earn our Creator's favor by work. By reading the old covenant we learn that we are incapable of obedience, incapable of tipping the scales of God's justice in our favor. So the history of Israel under the old covenant performs a great function to this day in that when read with care it points us to Jesus the Christ.

Though this was a ministry of condemnation, the great glory of Yahweh accompanied it. There were great signs and wonders when God appeared to Moses on the mountain. The glory of it was so intense the people feared for their lives (Exodus 20:15-20). There was also the cloud of Yahweh's presence that traveled with them (Exodus 13:21-22) and that filled the Tabernacle at its dedication (Exodus 40:34-38). There was manna that fell from the sky each day for a period of forty years (Exodus 16:1-21). There were many other miracles in which Yahweh clearly showed His presence with Israel (Deuteronomy 8:1-10). Such things were described in writing by Moses and clearly communicate that though the era was one in which Israel repeatedly failed and provoked Yahweh, there is no doubt it was also an era that demonstrated His glory.

Israel under that old agreement by all counts manifested a certain glory at times. This certainly was the case under Solomon. There was a glorious history in this sense. So in the law and in the old covenant, as inadequate and debilitating as both were, there was still a glory. It was a visible glory in terms of God's blessing and presence in the lives of men. It was also a functional glory in terms of the eternal ends it achieved. In both senses glory was brought about through the law.

But Paul expresses the fact that the glory that accompanies the new covenant is much different and much greater. The terms "much," "more," and "abound" emphasize that the new covenant has a greater degree of glory than did the old. In the ministry of condemnation one can find a certain glory. The ministry of righteousness by comparison has much glory, much more than the ministry of condemnation had. In fact, it is found to "abound" and overflow in glory. The new covenant is saturated with glory!

Now it is important to remember that the glory of the old covenant was not second-rate in and of itself. That which can make someone's face glow to such a degree that it frightens observers has a significant power! So the old covenant's glory was very significant. However, when compared to the glory of the new covenant it fades. The next verse will affirm this.

3:10 for indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory, on account of the glory that surpassed it.

Again, it is important to remember that the glory of the old covenant was not second rate. Light which appears in great darkness is welcomed and considered great. But if a greater light appears, the magnitude of the first light is revealed. Its usefulness diminishes, and it can be totally discarded. A lantern is essential at night. At sunrise its role is diminished though its light is not. Its light is of the same brightness, but it appears faded in the presence of the greater light of the sun.

The old covenant had a glory that accompanied it. The law was from God, given by Him. Because it came from Him, the law came with a certain aura about it. It was brilliant and it was humbling to stand in its presence. It imparted wisdom. That was a demonstration of the Person behind the law and the old covenant, Yahweh, who was glorious. The stone tablets had no glory inherent in them. Rather it was whom these letters revealed, their source, that gave them their glory.

But the new covenant reveals even more of Yahweh. It also equips us to understand more of Him, and it impacts the weak inner being of us that the old covenant exposed. Its glory is such that we are transformed in our innermost beings. For more than an external, fading glory is passed along to us by it.

3:11 For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

Paul provides two contrasts between the old and new covenant in this verse. The first is very apparent. The glory of the old covenant fades. This is the second time Paul has mentioned this idea of the glory fading. The fading glory of it was illustrated physically in the face of Moses. After meeting with God Moses' face glowed. But between meetings that glow faded. Similarly, the law produces an initial behavioral change in people that was repeatedly demonstrated by Israel. The change in behavior is glorious. But the change fades and we lapse into disobedience.

The solution to this problem was a change in the human heart that Yahweh promised even as the old covenant was being given (Deuteronomy 30:1-8). That is what the new covenant does. It enables transformation. Presently it is not that we can achieve perfection. But we are capable of sustained periods of obedience and of achieving a level of completeness not possible before the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It produces a glory that does not fade. This glory will be more intense when the new covenant is fully realized, when we are given new bodies, immortal ones.

Paul provides a second contrast for us between the glory of the old covenant compared to that of the new. This can be seen in the two different prepositions he uses. Whereas the old covenant was with glory, that is the glory accompanied it, the new is in glory. The glory of the new is inherent in it. The old covenant was lifeless, its glory derived from its giver. We were given a holy though lifeless thing under it—the law. Under the new covenant we are given a living being, the Holy Spirit. The essence

of God, with all His glory, is joined to our spirits. We find ourselves amid and a part of the fellowship that goes on between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are immersed in the glory which we could only see from a distance under the old covenant.

3:12 having therefore such a hope we use great boldness in our speech

We have great hope and confidence given the glories of the new covenant. We have the confidence that it is God who through the Spirit supplies us for this ministry. We deliver to others the potential of new identity and life due to this glorious new covenant God has established. We deliver hope for hearts. All this inspires great boldness in our speech. The word boldness is in Greek *παρρησια*, which means outspokenness or frankness. It also conveys the idea of transparency in speech—speech that represents what really is going on in the person. There are no veils to be put on to cover up what is really going on in us. There is no attempt to present oneself in a better light. Paul wanted the readers to know that he felt no need to utilize duplicity to be credible. He was who he was by God's great grace—open, frank, honest and sincere. He was representing himself as nothing more than he was. The reason for his confidence was that he understood all that had been accomplished between God and humanity by the work of Jesus the Christ and the incomparable treasure it was.

3:13 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.

Here we are given information that is not included in the account of Moses himself in Exodus. We should view this as Holy Spirit inspired commentary on that incident that provides this additional information.

The information is curious. Moses apparently covered up the fact that the glory was slowly fading from his face. He enjoyed the authority the glow of his face gave to him. It made his leadership of the Israelites more effective. He used the veil to conceal its passing. In essence the veil replaced the glory, creating the assumption in the minds of those who looked at him that the glory remained. The veil enabled him to create an aura about himself and reminded the Israelites of their past experiences so that they responded more correctly to him and to the law.

By our evaluation in the age of the Spirit, Moses gave himself a fleshly kind of assist. We see in the entire age of the old covenant that this type of thing was present in Israel. There is a very noticeable mixed bag in those who carried the torch for Yahweh. But there are also very notable moments of great power in their ministries as well, times that we long for. Who would not want to have an audience with God as Moses did! Who would not want to be used to part the Red Sea! The reality of that era day in and day out was not near as glorious as these relatively isolated incidences of great glory make it appear to us. The nature of the work of the Spirit under the old covenant was such that the ministry of such men as Moses had an accompanying glory. But we see some sad endings, such as that of Moses where he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. So we see that the works of the Spirit were quite dramatic under the old covenant. But His union with the spirits of the congregation had not yet occurred.

We also see sad endings for the Israelites in their history. Whole generations missed out on Yahweh's blessing due to their fleshliness. They were characterized by short, brief renewals that always gave way to a more natural heartless, outward conformity to external routine. Traditions were in place, but godliness was not.

3:14 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.

Neither the Israelites nor any other believers of the era were indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit as believers have been fifty days after the death of Christ (see Acts 2). Their hearts always led them astray.

Moses adopted his strategy due to this condition, the hardness of the Israelites' heart. The problem was not in Moses' presentation of the truth to them. It was sin and rebellion in them. The antics of Moses could not help that problem. Moses simply gave himself an assist for very pragmatic reasons. He did it to enhance his credibility in the eyes of Israel. The glow of his face scared them and they revered him. As one charged with leading them, that helped him. So the veil was Moses' attempt to enhance his image and his spiritual influence.

Interestingly, Israelites responded likewise to the law. They conformed externally to create an image. The veil was Moses' attempt to conceal the reality of the fact that the glory was slowly fading. Israelites as they read the law attempted to conceal their own shortcomings—their lack of glory. The veil was Moses taking matters into his own hands, the addition of human effort. The Israelites approached the law as a sort of guide to the kind of human effort that would earn them God's favor. So pragmatics led Moses to employ the veil. A different set of pragmatics, the desire to experience Yahweh's material blessings, led Israel to cover up their sin rather than face it.

Ultimately then, the veil is pride. This veil is removed in Christ Paul says. Human effort ceases when one comes to the cross of Christ or at least it should if the cross is rightly understood. The gospel when rightly understood releases us from the horrible pressure of having to impress others including God with our own righteousness.

3:15 but to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their heart;

This tactic of covering up one's true condition remains one that is employed by most of humanity. It is the standard by which most operate who are concerned with eternal life.

Paul bears witness to the fact that in the era he was living in, Israelites were steadfast in their belief and their presentation of themselves as righteous. And so, to that very day as the law was read in synagogues they nodded their heads in agreement and presented themselves as those who believed, obeyed, and exemplified its words. But it was all external and cosmetic. They did not repent of the evil that was in them. It was lip service. Their actions were directed by their own agendas.

3:16 but whenever a man turns to the Lord the veil is taken away.

In Exodus 34:34 we read that whenever Moses went in to speak with the Lord, he removed the veil. Paul is suggesting that today when individuals through the gospel meet the Lord in His grace through the gospel, this veil of pride and pretentiousness is taken away. Human effort ceases when one understands and believes in the work done through the Christ for us. There is a constant inflow of Yahweh's glory happening within them as the Holy Spirit convicts and encourages them.

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

Yahweh is not a corporal being. He is spirit. Yahweh is present within us through His Holy Spirit. Wherever the Holy Spirit is present there is liberty as opposed to the condition imposed by the veil. Where one covers themselves with the veil of self-sufficiency, they become blind to their own sin. It is impossible to be free when one's spiritual senses are so limited.

Because of our pride, the law, though it was holy, imposed slavery. It does so when approached wrongly. However, it does so even when approached rightly. Even when approached rightly it reveals our guilt but supplies no solution. Thus, it is characteristic of life under the old covenant that one is enslaved. Liberty can only be guaranteed where the blood of Christ relieves our guilt, and the Holy Spirit's restraint is actively present and cooperated with. Otherwise, there is slavery due to the nature of sin.

3:18 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.

All those who are inhabited by the Holy Spirit together form the household of God. To the degree they understand all the implications of the gospel, these family members maintain no pretense, feel no need to conceal reality, have no desire to project themselves as better than what they are. Ideally, they can live and relate to each other with complete spiritual transparency. In this sense their faces are unveiled as compared to Moses, who covered up the reality that the glory of His face produced by Yahweh's presence was fading away.

Paul says that we "behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." The term "beholding" is the rendering of the word κατοπτριζομενοι. That word in the active voice would convey the idea of beholding. However, in this case, it is a participle in the middle voice and so the meaning of this word is to reflect as a mirror does. So here it should be understood in this way, "but we all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord...." In addition, this may also be viewed as a temporal participle so that the phrase would have the meaning "while we are reflecting the glory of the Lord." So the main verbal idea, that "we are being transformed," is occurring while we are reflecting the glory of the Lord.

The glory of the Lord is that which is weighty about the Lord himself. The term Lord here is a descriptive genitive and so means "a Lord-kind-of-glory." The emphasis is that we become a steady reflection to others of the kind of glory seen in Christ when He was on earth. No one Christian reflects this. Individually we are a mixed bag—still in process. Individually we reflect some aspect of His glory. Together, corporately, we present the more complete picture of His glory to the world.

Paul says that while we are reflecting Yahweh's glory as a mirror might, we become glorious. This glory does not fade as it did Moses. It takes up residence in us and transforms us. Paul also says we are changed from glory to glory, meaning from one degree of glory into an even greater degree of glory. So we see the idea that our growth in Christ becomes progressively greater. More of Him can be seen in us as time goes by.

This verse ends with the phrase "just as from the Lord the Spirit." The idea of that phrase is to define the uniqueness of this glory that begins to take up residence in us. It is not the glory of self-discipline, though self-discipline is a work of the Spirit. It is not the glory of self-improvement, though our faith does bring improvement to our character. Rather it is glory as of the one and only Lord/Spirit (the term Lord and Spirit both stand in the original with no definite article). We become through union of our spirits with the Lord's Spirit partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). His nature is reflected through ours.

2 Corinthians 4

4:1 Therefore since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,

The ministry described in chapter three and our capacity through the Spirit to be an aroma of Christ and a reflection of His glory, motivates us through trials and troubles like those mentioned in chapters one and two. Ministry done in the strength given by the Spirit is of such a nature that as it is carried out it strengthens the inner being and keeps us going. This ministry is unnatural enough that there must be a constant reflection practiced by us on the true nature of it. Our perspective on what ministry is must remain accurate. The ministry is such that we change as we do it. Done as Paul did it, ministry impacts us in a genuine way that helps us endure in it, though not without pain.

In saying that “we do not lose heart,” Paul is saying “we do not falter in our motivation to quit.” The implication of Paul’s words here is that if our perspective of the glory of what God is doing through us is not maintained, quitting is inevitable. We will revert to a fleshly pattern of ministry. We will fall into a pattern of doing ministry in a way in which we are displaying our strengths and concealing our weaknesses. Ministry must be changing us as we are doing it or it will destroy us.

4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

A part of ministering by the Spirit’s leading and power is to see and renounce things in us that bring shame. To have renounced such things is to say we have dealt with them and bade them farewell. Though this happens slowly and repeatedly, over time it is a great “metamorphosis” described by Paul earlier (3:18).

There are two common methods of dealing with shameful things that Paul alludes to here. One is to lead a double life. It involves covering up shameful habits. Essentially, it is tricking people and getting all the benefits of the ministry while hanging on to the habits and pleasures of the old life. Another way of dealing with shameful things is to “adulterate the word of God.” This means changing what the Scripture says about our shameful things. We can make them appear okay and even good if we are willing to change or ignore Scripture.

Paul says that he and his company have neither concealed shameful things by leading a double life nor have they changed Scripture to condone them. Instead, they have renounced them. They did not package the truth to make their sin more palatable and to achieve the results their egos longed for. We will not do these things either if we are ministering in the Spirit.

Paul also says he and his company lived in such a way as to produce no inconsistency between what they said and what they did. He reminds the readers that his own behavior and that of those who stood with him conformed to the clear dictates of conscience, both their own and that of the Corinthians. The result was that there was a witness in the spirit of others, a connection of sorts, that assured hearers and readers that they were speaking truthfully.

Ministry done by the Spirit makes an unmistakable connection with the inner-most being of those hearers that are being led by the Spirit. This is the connection it strives for. This is not to say that it ignores the hearer's interests and their felt needs. But it is not concerned merely with what they desire to hear, but with what they need to understand. It does not aim simply at picking them up where they are. It may take them back to begin anew their thought processes. What seems to be true is that ministry done according to the Holy Spirit is received by anyone who is being themselves led and convicted by the Holy Spirit. It may well be the smell of death to those simply following what they want to be true or hope to be true.

Paul adds that he conducted ministry according to the reality that he was doing it under the watchful eye of God. He engaged ministry not just to make an outward show, or to please certain people that might see or hear us. "We minister in the sight of God" Paul says. Paul once again expresses that there is an absence of duplicity in him and his company. This verse reinforces that there are no veils covering up the reality of who Paul is.

4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

All what Paul has said about boldness and about being an aroma of Christ might make it seem that his message was crystal clear and understandable to all people. The fact is the gospel message is veiled to the unbeliever. But that is not a result of what those ministering in the Spirit do. Paul says, "even if our gospel is veiled . . .", and in saying that he indicates that indeed it can be veiled. But the gospel is not veiled to those listening to the Holy Spirit. It is veiled to those who are perishing, who are living by their natural instincts.

Paul's contention is that it is not the nature of those ministering in the Spirit to carefully package the truth. What they proclaim is straightforward. It is not in need of being decoded or brought to light or packaged to be attractive. Any veil involved is not his doing or the Lord's doing. Rather the only reason our message is at times unclear to some has to do with their hearts. Those who are separated from the Lord will struggle understanding the truth. They do not believe because they will not believe (John 12:37-40).

The next verse will reveal that this veiling of the gospel is accomplished by a spiritual entity, a person.

4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Beginning in this verse and extending through the end of verse 6 we find a chiasmic structure that compares the god of this world with Yahweh. At the midpoint of this device is verse 5 that gives the emphatic conclusion of this comparison, that we must proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as servants of others for Christ's sake—with His interests in view in our servanthood. Verse 6 then proclaims the glory of Yahweh that far surpasses that measly stuff in which the god of this world is occupied. The contrast between the two is one of their regimes, their work, and what they accomplish for humanity.

Paul acknowledges in this verse that a lack of clarity comes into play in the minds of many who hear the good news. This is because of the activity of Satan. Paul calls Satan “the god of this world” because God has allowed Satan a degree of influence in this world, though He knows ahead of time Satan’s every move and tactic. Satan is the god of this world in that he presides over the fallen state of creation. He is both its author and he is the one that increases its corruptions. Both knowingly and unknowingly, millions follow Satan’s influence. Satan can conceal the truth from these who have hardened their hearts against what the natural world and their own conscience might say to them about God and His Son. Satan is empowered to do this by our own stubbornness and arrogance. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can reverse such a condition. Paul was himself evidence of such a one who at one time was a hard-core unbeliever, who was changed by the Holy Spirit.

This veiling of the gospel is accomplished by Satan through false truth systems. These have great appeal to us in that they present as true things that we want to be true. The result is many systems of belief to choose from that give us permission to behave in a way that serves us well.

All such spirituality has a common thread. Their truth systems lessen the glory of Christ and therefore the good news. Either His humanity is diminished or His divinity, or both. This is to be understood in that if He is the faultless image bearer of God then He is the one whose right it is to rule creation. That is a threat to Satan’s desire. He gives spiritual energy to all that diminishes the glory of Christ.

Truth systems are available to us in both liberal and conservative packaging. That is, they can be very moral with tight boundaries of right and wrong. They can also be such that all moral standards are discarded. Most false truth systems lie somewhere in the middle, not harmonious with the ten commandments, but championing some flavor of goodness that pleases the individual. It is important to remember that we cannot simply choose truth by being conservative, liberal or moderate. What is true is true regardless of where it falls on the conservative-liberal continuum. Satan provides an a la carte truth experience where we can craft a system of beliefs that serve our desires. This is the religion of today in the western world. We have travelled from the point where our morality was rooted in Christianity to the point where our own truth system now veils Christianity’s core truth the Gospel.

There is a very good reason why Satan veils the gospel. Just as Moses veiled his face to preserve his credibility, Satan veils the gospel to preserve his credibility. He passes himself off as God and he veils all that will reveal God’s glory so as to make his own glory appear greater. He does not want the glory of God as it has been revealed in and through Christ to shine fully. If he allows that, his own kingdom will appear as it really is. Since Satan cannot increase his own glory, the only option is to seek to cover up God’s glory. He does that by veiling the truth of the gospel. He does that by compromising our personal view of good and evil, which then compromises God, the gospel and the truth about our need of Jesus’ work in our behalf.

4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.

In the chiastic structure of verses 4-6 this statement stands at the center-point, the thing that Paul wants to highlight and emphasize. When Satan and God are compared as Paul does here, it reveals the absolute necessity of us keeping as central to our message the clear declaration of Jesus as absolute sovereign over creation.

All Satan's disruption is necessary because our message, the gospel, teaches the authority and the exalted state of Christ. If the gospel taught that we were of some special nature and of fantastic moral capability it would not need to be veiled by Satan. It would be used by him. He would love it. Satan can easily be god over us if he diminishes God's glory and the authority of Christ. But Satan's glory fades when the glory of Christ and His authority is revealed through the gospel.

The gospel reveals that Jesus is Lord. It does so by showing that the schemes of evil humans in rejecting Him as King amounted to nothing. In fact, they played into His mighty hands and sovereign plan. He acted against these evils to bring about through them His great desire—to justly redeem humanity. Satan's strongest weapon—death—He overcame. He accomplished against Satan and evil humanity all that He had said in writing for thousands of years He would do. The smallest detail of His plans was executed, though He had laid them out in plain sight of His enemies. Satan is shown to be who he really is when the light of truth shines.

Our gospel reveals the truth we who have believed as well. We are simply bondservants. We are serving Jesus first and by delivering the gospel and by doing Jesus' work we are performing the greatest of services to humanity. Jesus work on the cross reveals who we are. We are sinners in need of forgiveness and redemption. We must know who we are to realize the glory of the gospel. The gospel and the accurate portrayal of the gospel did not and does not venerate any human, except to affirm the depth of Yahweh's love for them that led Him to become a human Himself and die for them. It is in acknowledging Him, trusting His testimony of what is true about Himself, about us and the world, that we find our great dignity. Paul did not proclaim Himself special and worthy of veneration. He proclaimed that like all who believe the gospel he had been forgiven and had become a child of God.

4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ.

The same One who originated by His word physical light, has also brought about spiritual light. He brought both physical light and spiritual enlightenment to where only darkness had been.

Paul is speaking of complete spiritual enlightenment, not of the partial spiritual awareness that moments of reflection bring in the normal course of living on this planet. Those may be part of our journey. But the gospel and the truth God has revealed further clarify the nature of things we have only stumbled upon and felt while still in darkness. The light shines on these things as we hear from the Scripture the Creator Yahweh's supernatural work in our behalf, the gospel and sense the truth of it within us. Everything makes sense considering the truth. As we live by this light, we come to understand God's glory which then enlightens us even more. The very thing Satan prevents, the φωτισμον, enlightenment in English, is the very thing God brings to us from within by His Spirit

Paul refers to this as the moment when we accepted the gospel as when God "shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ." Literally, "He has shown in our hearts toward enlightenment of the knowledge of glory of God in the face of Christ." Paul is describing the fact that we have at that point come to recognize Christ's identity as God through a supernatural act of God within us. We have seen God's glory revealed in the life of Christ. More than that the preposition *pros* is used, indicating that God has shone in our hearts to "bring forth" the enlightenment.

In other words, He has shone in our hearts not only to enlighten us but to use us to help the enlightenment of others.

Paul alluded earlier to Moses' face shining in the aftermath of his having been in the presence of God's glory. As God's glory was reflected temporarily on Moses' face, God's glory was shown even more dramatically through Christ when He took on humanity and lived physically on this earth. Testimony of the Spirit within us as we hear and contemplate that life illuminates our hearts and we believe. A heart illuminated is one that has been led to an understanding of the truth of the work of Christ on our behalf and so knows something of the glory of God. The glory of Christ increases in us as we obey and respond to greater truth that the Spirit guides us into. The glory of God shone ON Moses resulting in visible though fading radiance on his face. It shines IN us resulting in transformation that increases.

With this Paul's contrast has been completed. It has presented the God who presides over the fallenness of Creation versus the God who spoke into being the creation. It has presented the work of blinding the minds of the unbelieving versus the work of bringing life and light to the unbelieving. It has presented the end of people held captive and destroyed by their ignorance versus being transformed into Christ-likeness. In the center of it all is the declaration of Jesus as Lord and us as servants representing His interests to others. That message makes the difference. It is powerful. It must not be discarded in favor of the masks and manipulation of fleshly leadership.

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

Paul speaks here of the treasure of this knowledge of Christ and of participating in doing His great work in others through the power the Holy Spirit. The essence of this treasure is the great and unsurpassed knowledge of Jesus Christ. More than knowledge this great treasure is the actual presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This great, great treasure of spiritual enlightenment is posited by God in us. We are imperfect people who somehow have value in His sight and are entrusted with this great gift from him.

A common practice of the day was to hide treasures in clay pots, vessels used to store food, water, and things of everyday life. Would be thieves would pass over these common clay pots not suspecting to find any treasure in them. That everyday practice perfectly describes who we are. There is great treasure in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The result is that we are very ordinary people who must live ordinary lives and solve ordinary problems. But in all this normalcy God is doing an extraordinary work in and through us. This partnership now can impact all we do. It is not that God does it all and none of our effort is required in ministry. It is that we give the little we have and He strengthens mightily our efforts. He adds a supernatural effort to our feeble effort and accomplishes supernatural things.

The power we are able now to exhibit in ministry is not a result of the unique ability on our part. Rather, it is the result of the presence of God in us. If we are better or appear so, it is due to the power of God. If we seem more capable it is a result of Him working through us.

We must never forget we are earthen vessels. We do not do what we do because our bodies have changed and our fleshliness removed. If we do what our bodies and our earthly desires lead us to do spiritual catastrophe will result. At the same time, we must

not forget we have the great treasure of forgiveness, the truth in our minds and the Spirit of Yahweh joined to our spirits. We are different as children of God. We are fit for a different and glorious function of representing God in this fallen world. Both things are now our reality.

4:8-9 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

In these two verses Paul makes a series of statements to illustrate the principle of how all this feels as we live our faith as fallen yet redeemed souls in this fallen world. We are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down in every way. These words tell us that we do not escape normal human experience through the power of God in us. We have a treasure, but it is very much in earthenware vessels. That is, we live in fallen bodies experiencing and living out the full range of human experience. We do not expect God to free us from normal hassles of life and we do not expect ministry to be carried out with no obstacles and no suffering. Good ministry flows out of a Spirit-controlled life not a trouble-free life.

Through the Holy Spirit we are strengthened so that we triumph over the things that might undo us. Each of the emotions Paul mentions are potent. They can easily cause us to shift our course to one that is easier. The Spirit gives us resolve and persistence so that we can push through these hard seasons.

4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

With this phrase Paul describes one aspect of what it feels like to carry out ministry in the way he himself had done it. Paul always approached life with firm rule over his body. He was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but he lived life in a fallen body that screamed to have its needs and desires met. The same attitude of Christ, absolute submission to God for the sake of obedience, even death on the cross, is the rule the Spirit helps us live by. We deny the voice of the body that screams for pampering, and we make our bodies submit to the will of God.

In speaking of the dying of Jesus Paul is certainly speaking about the suffering of physical pain Jesus modeled. But there is more. Obedience is always death-to-self. Jesus died that death long before the cross. He died that death throughout His life perfectly in every moment. He did ONLY what the Father did (John 5:19). We die this death-to-self in every moment when we are serious about representing Jesus and engaging ministry through the Spirit. We place others ahead of ourselves. We don't enforce our own personal rights. All of this is involved in dying to oneself.

The results of this submission of our bodies to the same death-to-self as Christ is that God reveals to others through us the life of Christ. He demonstrates the Spirit-filled life clearly. It is fully revealed to all through us when we die to ourselves.

4:11 for we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

When there is absolute obedience and death-to-self, physical death is always possible. In Paul's life this danger was constant because of the level of obedience he had chosen and because of the severe opposition to the gospel he encountered. There was also a

constant pouring out of the body for the strength required for ministry which Paul engaged. It was gradually taking its toll. So in multiple senses Paul was being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake.

The real reason that Paul was willing to die to himself is that he knew by this he would demonstrate the life of Christ fully to others. It was a conscious decision on his part. He chose to be obedient to the point of death because he wanted so badly to demonstrate Christ to others. The unparalleled power of example should be something we seek and sacrifice for.

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

The results of this intentional choice by Paul were that death constantly hung over his head. He seemed always to be close to physical death. Perhaps more significantly, Paul was always dying to his own agenda, his own needs and his own rights. The result was he had little of the things in life most view as valuable. But the other result was that the life of Christ was demonstrated to the Corinthians and spread through them to others. This great impact was made by Paul because he was faithfully obedient.

4:13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe therefore also we speak;

Paul gives the reason why he is willing to speak the gospel and endure the hardship. He believes strongly. It is that simple. Paul quotes Psalm 116:10 in which the psalmist is looking back to a time of delusion saying he believed certain negative things about life and humanity. Certain experiences had embittered him, and this Psalm is about him finding his way out of that darkness. Whatever the experience, it so agitated the soul of the Psalmist that he spoke in his bitterness that "All men are liars." Paul was not identifying with the Psalmist's deluded mind. He is saying that regarding what was true and right he himself had the same intensity and compelling urgency as the Psalmist had in his delusion. Paul too spoke things he would not speak as a natural man. But they were truthful things, the sort he had not known before being taught of the Spirit. The truth of the gospel and its significance burned in Paul so that He had to speak. He believed not only in its truth but in its value and urgency.

This statement by Paul is the first of what will be a series of three faith statements (4:18, 5:7). Faith is the reason why Paul persisted in speaking a grace message which consistently created problems for him with the Jews.

4:14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

In this verse Paul begins to talk about the content of our faith and the hope of it. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ whose resurrection means we ourselves will be raised and those we minister to will be raised from the dead to eternal life. We might die to all that is held dear by the world in this life. But we will be raised to real life. This would be the privilege of all to whom he made the proclamation that believed.

Paul makes it clear that what he is doing is for others. It is for their well-being and their hope. We know the ending. It helps us sacrifice in the present. The future of all who believe is secure with God. That is a great motivation for proclamation to everyone who will listen.

4:15 For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

Grace produces thankfulness. That is because it is the story of undeserved favor. The truth of God's grace is by nature one-sided. If this one-sided grace is compromised the first thing to go in people is thankfulness. Their thankfulness is replaced by a smug pride, a "look what I earned" attitude.

If one wishes to test the purity of a doctrine of grace being taught to a people simply look for the thankfulness. This grace message was what led to Paul's persecution and affliction at the hands of the Jews. He had simply to abandon grace and the Jews who stirred things up would have embraced him.

4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

In this verse Paul comes back to the thought he stated in 4:1. He drifted off subject explaining how they could have compromised their message, but how instead they have managed to persist through difficulty. This is now a summary of all that discussion.

Paul says he did not lose heart despite all sorts of troubles that took their toll on his "earthen vessel" his body. All the trouble and all the stress of ministry had an effect. Outwardly the effect was decay. Our bodies are wearing down as we go through these things. But inwardly the opposite effect is being brought about. We are being renewed by all of this. Our inner being is being developed. Our inner being is getting stronger and more glorious as each day goes by. So the same thing—trouble—is producing two things simultaneously. There is outward wear and tear, but it is producing inward renewal!

4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

This verse gives us Paul's perspective on his own troubles. We must remember that by our standards in America today his troubles were huge. But to him, because his inner man had been so strengthened, they were momentary troubles. He always saw their end and their passing nature. He saw them as light-weight troubles. It is not because they felt light. They were after all "beyond our strength to endure so that we despaired even of life (1:8). The key was in Paul's perspective of these troubles. When he viewed them in terms of the eternal weight of glory then they were all light and they were momentary afflictions.

This entire verse is a very remarkable statement made by Paul. But more importantly it is a statement made by God to us about our future reward. The current things we go through are affliction. They produce glory. They are also light. The glory they produce is of a weight that is far beyond comparison. The affliction is momentary. The glory is eternal. Affliction then, is a kind of token that is exchangeable in eternity. Through affliction we exchange quality of life in the present for the future and eternal quality of life. This remarkable idea and the contrasts in this verse are profound.

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

There is a visible, human reality, and there is a biblical reality. Both are real and can be seen together simply as reality. What can be sensed and perceived by our minds in the present state is the sum of reality to those outside the faith. That is not because it is all there is. It is because that is all they know. The unseen is still very real. Those outside the faith just are unaware of it.

What we might call “biblical reality” is in fact reality. It is the sum of what we know and see and what God testifies to be true that we don't know and see. What is seen is temporary. Not all we see will fade away, but its present meaning/significance will pass. All of it is seen differently when viewed eternally. Its real nature can only become apparent when seen from the point of view of the eternal reality we know through truth. Without this truth perspective, reality is only what can be rationally verified. That reality can not only be grim but very misleading. The only way to grasp true reality is through the eyes of faith. Bringing someone back to reality includes bringing them back to functioning by faith. It is what we see held up to the light of what Yahweh has revealed that we cannot see. This is the opposite of what we might normally think about living in the realm of reality.

2 Corinthians 5

5:1 “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Paul begins this verse with the word “for” (γὰρ in Greek), a conjunction that links what is about to be said with what has been said. It indicates that what follows is explanatory.

Paul’s previous thought was that he did not lose heart. Though outwardly his life was difficult, full of contradiction, disappointment, and outright stress, though he was getting older, and his outward circumstances had deteriorated, something else was happening inside him. Inwardly he was being renewed.

Paul has said that this happens because he looks at the unseen instead of what is seen. His focus is not temporal things, things that relate to his time on earth. His focus is on things related to heaven. He approaches the things of this life through the lens of heaven. The things of earth had value to Paul only as they relate to heaven. These are the ideas he has been dealing with in the previous verses.

The verses that begin this fifth chapter explain to a greater degree these thoughts. They explain how life and its difficulty can work good things inside us through knowledge of certain truths.

In the first verse Paul talks about death, the time when our physical bodies that house our spirits are “torn down.” This is a euphemism for death. As we look ahead to the bleak eventuality of death there are three things that Paul says we know. These help us in the present, while we are dying outwardly, to be renewed within.

First, we know that God has another body for us. At the time of death, we enter what we call “the intermediate state,” that time when our spirits are in Christ’s presence but our bodies lie in the grave. But we are not destined to be in this “intermediate state” forever. God has a body for us. This is the first thing we know. The end of our earthly life does not mean the end of our bodily existence.

The second thing we know is that our new body is not made with hands. Now what does this mean? Our present body is not made with hands, it is created by God. Why does Paul make this statement? He likely has several things in mind by using this expression.

First, our new body will not be made by hands in the sense that it has not been weakened and impaired by human acts. Our present bodies have been. We die physically because of Adam’s act of sin. We know that when he sinned something happened physically to him. Whatever that was, whether genetic or otherwise, the result was weaknesses and vulnerability in our physical bodies. Ultimately every human would physically die in some way. So physical death came about as the experience of all humans because of the spiritual death of Adam. In this sense our experience of life in our present bodies has been shaped by human hands.

Second, we know that something happened to the appearance of the body so that Adam and Eve knew they were naked. It is possible that the glory of God had given their bodies a glow previously, light of some sort emanating from them, so that their nakedness was indistinguishable. This is speculation, but we do know that something

occurred that made them aware of their need to be clothed, and it very well could have been an actual change in the appearance of the body. In this sense our present bodies are the work of human hands, the result of acts of human will even though they were originally created by God.

Third, our new body will not be made by hands in the sense that much of our present visible appearance is the result of our own work. Our clothing and other accessories we add give us a certain appearance that is our own creation. Our present appearance is certainly very much the result of our own efforts, whether through the clothes we wear or what we eat, or how we exercise. What we do manifests itself in our bodies.

Fourth, in saying that our new body will not be made by hands Paul could be alluding to the fact that our new bodies will be comprised of a different type of matter. They will be material, but a different type of matter than we are accustomed to in our present world. It seems evident that this was true of Jesus' resurrection body from the description we have of things He did. He was not always recognizable. He could pass quickly from our sight and our perception. The expression "not made with hands" could be a way of expressing some of these kinds of features of our new bodies.

So there are several things Paul likely had in mind as he stated this second thing we know, that when our present bodies fail we have one "not made with hands." Our new bodies will be very different than our present ones, and the phrase "not made with hands" may be a way of summarizing these differences.

The third thing we know is that these new bodies will be "eternal in the heavens." They are made to function in the realm of God, whatever that involves and wherever that is. We know that this demands a change in how our present bodies are constituted (1 Cor. 15:50). They are also such that they will not wear out. They will not be subject to the ravages of time. They will be eternal.

These are three things that we know, and they can absolutely change the way we perceive and react emotionally to the events of our present lives. They can transform our entire demeanor. To capture their force, we must zoom out slightly and remember that these facts are being stated by Paul as part of the reason he does not lose heart, or lose his will to press on in the calling God has given him. They are the reason that he is not brought down by life to a point of despair. On the contrary, he is being continually renewed on the inside, given what he needs to plow forward.

Life's biggest threat, the loss of life, and the grim reality of passing time with the onset of old age, hold no real curse over us. That entire experience of every human is covered in the plan of God. We are well provided for. This life is not all there is, and its purpose is understood in the context of what will happen next.

5:2 "For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven."

As we live life as fallen people in a fallen world there will always be a feeling in us that something is missing. There will always be a sense that there is something more. This is because of our design. We were created to be united in spirit with God. Through this union we would carry out His rule over His creation. This union was broken because of sin. That means that our basic design has been violated and our purpose is beyond us. Though salvation restores our relationship to Yahweh and moves us along in a very rich experience of His presence, we still are fallen creatures living among other fallen

people. Our relationship with Him can never become in this life what it was designed to be. Our inner being will feel the ache, the dysfunction of all this. That is what Paul refers to here as our groaning. It is the ache of our innermost being for oneness with our Creator.

Most do not rightly understand this groaning in them. They feel the ache but are oblivious to the truth about it. It is an ache that drives every person's search for meaning. It must be understood as essentially theological, not emotional or physical. That is, it can be solved only by oneness with God. That means turning to Him continually is the best solution for the present life. It is a good solution that yields the best possible return. But that is not to say that our present experience with God fixes the problem completely. Rather it gives us enough of a taste of the solution that we have hope and confidence that His plan is our salvation from this groaning of our beings. In Him we find the deepest meaning possible as fallen people in a fallen world.

This shortfall in our experience of life is not to alarm us. We feel it because in our fallen state we can never enjoy unbroken fellowship with Him. We cannot be occupied with the great eternal matters we were meant to be involved in as part of our partnership with Him. We were made to rule with Him. Instead, we are occupied with survival. It is a situation that will only be remedied when the presence of sin is completely banished from our beings and when He exerts His rule over evil. This will happen when we are clothed with our body from heaven and He rules as King over the earth.

Now does this mean that our bodies are evil? No it does not. It does mean that sin's impact on our world, our thought processes, and on our bodies works together to limit our capability. All of sin's dominion over us will be broken by God on a set day. This is an important event, the transformation of our earthly bodies into heavenly ones. When we receive new bodies, we will be free from sin's power and presence due to all the various works of God that will coincide with that event.

5:3 "inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked."

When Adam and Eve committed the first sin something immediately changed. Whatever that something was, they were found to be naked and they were ashamed of that. Part of the human experience ever since has been the shame and inadequacy that our fallen state produces.

The drive of humanity since Eden has been to cover their nakedness, that is, to conceal their lost glory. This lost glory likely included a visible physical change, as mentioned earlier, possibly the loss of a visible glow of some sort emanating from our bodies as it did from Moses' face when He met God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:29-35). Adam and Eve's first act after sin was to be ashamed of their nakedness. The glory had departed and Adam and Eve were aware of what they were. They didn't like it and covered it up.

Ever since that event humans have been seeking glory, usually apart from God. Eden was the birth of pride and ego. It was the beginning of the quest for self-glory and the drive to gratify our new need for significance. Humankind had begun to operate by a new principle that the Bible calls "the flesh." It is a self-focus, a quest to meet our needs first and foremost.

A certain amount of this self-focus had become essential for our survival. But this was about more than survival. It was to try to gratify an insatiable appetite for things,

pleasure and acclaim to stand out in the crowd, to affirm our individual worth. It was a search to fill the void that was created when we were separated from the significance conveyed by Yahweh our Creator. Yet this only compounds our shame. We were made to do much better morally than we now do, and so we are ashamed when the truth paints a picture of who we really are. We were made to accomplish work at a much higher level than we are now capable of and so we feel the inadequacy of that shortfall. We never thought of pleasure when we were Yahweh's partners. Now pleasure takes the place of God and the more we indulge the more elusive it becomes.

When we are clothed with our new bodies the shame of all that we now are (or perhaps better, aren't!), will be gone. All the covering up, the compensating, the image building, which only led to more evil will be gone.

It is fascinating to ponder what began in the moment that Adam and Eve found themselves naked. The pursuit to look good and be beautiful began. It has occupied us and, in most cases, has pre-occupied us ever since. Everything from exotic clothing, to makeup, to jewelry, to cosmetic surgery, to diet fads, gym membership, athletic prowess, power automobiles and country clubs, have come about because we found ourselves to be naked. The glory went away, and we have sought to replace it with a glory that we strive to create.

The collective effort of humankind to compensate for this simple fact has been staggering, beyond our ability to compute. We long to be rid of the effects of sin. Even those who don't believe in sin long to be rid of its presence without understanding what it is. It is a great hope that the day will come when we will not be found naked.

5:4 "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."

In verses 2-3 Paul has spoken of an inner groaning that is part of the human experience. Our design has been violated. Our innermost being longs to be united with our Creator. Until it is our entire being will not function right, for our spirits are the very essence of who we are. We can only be as healthy as our spirits are.

In this verse Paul adds the idea of being burdened. Our inner beings groan because of the burden we bear. It is a burden of unmet expectation, of unsatisfied need, of personal guilt, of unfinished work, of failed relationships, of grief, the list goes on and on. Our groaning is over what life should be, what we by design were meant to be, versus how we live. We long to be 'clothed,' or we might say restored. We are longing for the original state, to be clothed with the glory that was present in original creation, to have the original design be our reality. Our lives are burdensome because of what sin has done and is doing to us, to others and to the entire creation. In fact, elsewhere in Scripture we learn that all of creation groans along with us (Romans 8:18-23).

Does this mean that this life is awful and no good? Does it mean that it is not worth living and that if we are thinking right, we will long for death? No! If our thinking is right and healthy, we quickly chase away any idea of giving up. As Paul has said, "Our inner man is being renewed day by day" (4:16). The force of Paul's statements in this verse reflects that renewal.

We know by revelation what was and what is coming. The new creation will be even better than original creation. In God's new creation we will not only be perfect but impeccable, that is, unable to sin. In that we will become immortal. That which has been mortal, painfully mortal, will be swallowed up by life. In the meantime, there is an ache within.

It is important to address that ache through faith. When it is simply brooded over and focused on it becomes quite unhealthy. We must remember that these verses are an explanation of how this renewal process Paul had described to his readers worked in his life and how we can facilitate it in our own lives. We are to be renewed day by day by the hope of and confidence in God's plan. His plan richly provides for our soul's deepest needs. Embracing the truth and uniting with Him moment by moment is the only effective means of dealing with the inner ache that is a part of our present lives. It will be satisfied only when we are made perfect by God.

5:5 “Now He who has prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”

God's purpose, that for which He has made and reclaimed us, is for us to be restored and given new bodies to be perfectly united with Him. We exist to rule over creation with Him (Genesis 1:26), and to that end His plan will take us. Our rebellion against Him did not thwart God's plan. It was in fact provided for by His plan. He Himself became a man and died for our sin. As a perfect man He shed His blood for us. He gave His physical body to redeem our essence, our spirits, so that He could once again unite Himself to us.

Our present experience, living by faith and enjoying the presence of the Holy Spirit is not the end. It is the earnest, the payment given as a pledge of His intent to fulfill the remainder of the covenant. The Holy Spirit's activity in our lives should be a daily reminder to us of our destiny to be joined forever to Yahweh. For this we have been prepared, to this we are journeying, and of this we are tasting when we experience the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the present life.

5:6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

Based on this knowledge of what lies ahead for us physically we are always of good courage. Paul spoke of not losing heart at the beginning of chapter four. He mentioned this again in 4:16. He has spoken of how he has learned to deal with the difficulty of the intense people-centered work that ministry is, the spiritual dynamics that go with it and the emotional weight of all of it. He can cope with it all because of his strong theology of hope.

This strength of hope is based on the immensity of what Yahweh has made known. He has made known His great beauty and power and grace. He has made known that our inheritance is Him and all this that He is. Our hope regarding this life is realistic. We know that while we have these bodies and this earthly existence we cannot and will not enter all God has for us. We do not expect this life to completely fill us. We “groan.” But we have the promise from God of redemption from simply being consumed by our earthly existence. Through the death of Jesus we receive from God His Holy Spirit, who empowers us and leads us in a life of eternally meaningful work. In death we enter the conscious experience of living with Jesus. We know that just as

Jesus was raised from the dead so we will be raised and given a new body as He was, and so live forever with Him. Even physical death does not intimidate us. Our hope lifts our spirits when life is at its worst.

5:7 for we walk by faith not by sight—

The key to our courage is our hope. That hope is energized as we constantly remind ourselves of it. We do not focus exclusively on the present life and its urgent tasks as our end. Our being led and ministered to by the Holy Spirit in those tasks is our focus and our eternal lives are our dream and our end. The Spirit in us leads us to accomplish eternal things even in the most mundane of tasks. That is what controls our day-to-day mindset and life. We are not shaped just by what we see. We are shaped by what we believe.

5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Faith teaches that to be at home with the Lord is better than to be at home in the body. Faith as it is lived out produces this preference. Any other perspective is the result of walking by sight instead of by faith. Any other perspective skims off our courage and creates a desire in us to preserve our lives and hold on to what we see rather than spending our lives for His purposes.

5:9 Therefore also we have is our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Paul states what the thing of chief value is in the minds and hearts of the apostolic company. The word he uses for ambition is φιλοτιμου/μεθα. That word is formed from the word for dear or affection combined with the word that expresses price or value. It could be used negatively to describe being fond of honor. Paul uses it in a positive way to describe what we would call a prime personal value (see also Romans 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:11). So in this short phrase Paul has stated for us a prime personal value he held. That is helpful information to have.

His use of the word therefore to introduce this statement of value marks this as a conclusion to the various realities he has been speaking of. Chief among these realities has been the idea of an eternal existence in a heavenly body that he knows awaits him after his earthly body is gone. He has just stated that due to this hope he prefers to be at home with the Lord. This hope impacts the pursuits we engage with our time and energy. It impacts what sorts of honor or prestige we consider dear. Knowing and believing in eternal things drives us to please Yahweh, the Creator of all things eternal and temporal. Paul's values were formed around walking by faith and not by sight. His knowledge of the eternal changed everything. The next verse describes further the rational for holding this value.

5:10 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.

Paul has just stated his prime value. It is to please God. This verse gives his explanation for why the most important thing in life is God's opinion on our decisions and behaviors. It is because His opinion is the only one that will stand.

This verse then is explanatory. It puts forth more detail as to why our ambition is to please God. We will be paid back for our deeds done while "at home" in our bodies. Paul notes that we will be paid for both the good and the bad. The term most often used when Scripture speaks of our reward is μισθος, the term for wages. It is sobering in a very helpful way to realize that any way we choose to live has its appropriate wage from Yahweh.

5:11 Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

This verse gives a very practical answer to questions like "What does pleasing God look like? What kinds of things should I invest myself in as I live out my years? What does it look like to "fear God?"

We know that God is judge over us and so we live in reverence of that. We seek to impact people, to persuade them by word and action to live as we do. That He will judge all people is continually on our minds. This important for us and it is important for others. So we persuade others. We seek to change their minds so that they live in response to the prospect of that day.

As we do this work we seek to live transparently before God. We do not deceive ourselves as to who we are and what we are. Our work reveals our true nature, our level of commitment, our true values and passions. We are transparent about that. We act and think knowing that both our thoughts and actions will be evaluated and compensated by God on that day when we stand before Him. His judgment will be completely justified and rationalized by our history. The fear of the Yahweh was the mainspring of Paul's service, not the fear of man and not the love of man.

Paul's hope was that as others watched his work, they would become convinced of his values and his level of commitment to Christ and therefore his true nature as a man. He hoped that there would be that witness in their spirit that he was genuine and real because he knew that would lend great power to the message and was the highest use of his life.

5:12 We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.

These words must have been an answer to an accusation by Paul's detractors, perhaps that he was really nothing in terms of spiritual authority. Their accusation may have been that he was not recognized by anyone who was anyone and had by self-exaltation and by inflating his own achievements, wormed his way into a place of authority in the minds of churches like the one at Corinth. This was an accusation not easy to refute since there was not a person such as a pope or a president to clarify who was what and since the entire organization of the early church was somewhat

loose. This and the fact that news traveled slowly are probably why Paul had to continually live with such accusations. Several times in the epistle he will simply appeal to the Corinthians logic in such matters.

When Paul tells the Corinthians he was giving them an occasion to be proud of him he means he was attempting to establish credibility by describing what made him function on the inside. His goal was that they would come to trust him and emulate him. He was giving them a cause or reason to do so. The causes and reasons to trust Paul lie in his motives, knowing how he was thinking and knowledge of his honorable ambitions.

In stating that he wished that they would be proud of him Paul knows that people need to feel confidence in those they follow. They also need to feel that others too will be attracted to their leaders if they simply know what those already following know. Paul calls this pride. He wants the Corinthians to have this healthy pride in them of him as their leader in the faith. This is especially hard because Paul's detractors apparently were men of skilled speech with a very enticing message who behaved very professionally.

People need to know how to sort out legitimate spiritual leaders from those who will lead in the wrong direction. Taking pride in appearance rather than heart is the essence of legalism. It is overly concerned with how things look and unconcerned with the attitude of the heart. A leader should help people see what they need to be looking at to develop a healthy confidence/pride in those that lead them.

5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are sound mind, it is for you.

Paul indicates by these words that some were apparently saying that he and his company were not thinking normally. Paul is saying that in a sense this is true. They are not thinking normally. But it is only true in the sense that they were thinking for the benefit of God's work.

There is a sense in which this thinking is out of the ordinary. It is thinking, which is aimed at pleasing God, instead of pleasing ourselves. It is thinking of the most unnatural sort and yet of the best sort. So it was accurate to say Paul was not thinking like people normally think. In this sense Paul was "beside himself."

Paul goes on to say that where he and the others in his company had made sound decisions, it was because they were thinking of the Corinthians. Paul was motivated by their needs not his own. In no case were they thinking of their own need for significance or seeking to bring glory to themselves and meet their ego's demands through the Corinthians.

If at times Paul made decisions which didn't make sense to those scrutinizing him, those were attributable to God's leading. Sometimes God leads us in ways that seem foolish from a human point of view. If at other times he made decisions the Corinthians agreed with, it was for the same reason, God's leading for the Corinthian's benefit. So Paul is saying that the Corinthians can have a high level of confidence in their leadership because of what their motives are.

5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, and therefore all died;

The legitimate motivation we must seek for any of our actions is Christ's love. His love for humanity motivates people with hearts moved by His Spirit. Such people understand that His love is all-encompassing. His love for us has drawn us to Him. His love for others has drawn us to others. His love for us and for others motivates us to seek transformation in ourselves. His love is great news for us. It is essential for those around us to know. It has huge implications in terms of how life should be lived by all.

Paul states here the conclusion that is easily drawn from study of the truth of Scripture, that Christ's death was substitutionary. He died for the sins of the world, in the place of every human being. There is no one He has not died for. There is no one who cannot embrace Him as their substitute. Therefore, it is logically true that all are under the sentence of death apart from Him. They are dead spiritually, separated from God forever apart from belief in Christ. However, since Christ died for them if they believe they can be made alive. All are spiritually dead and in need of Christ's love. None are excluded from the invitation of the love of Christ.

Christ's love provided the good news—the gospel. Christ's love compels us to spread that news which is of great import to all mankind. It is compelling. Would Christ have died such a death if it was not His will to offer salvation to all? Can we think we are serving Him fully if we ignore pushing the frontiers back in terms of spreading that news? No one need live apart from God, alienated, and enslaved by sin. No one need stumble along led by half-truths trying to fulfill their need for glory/significance and salvation. He died in their place so that they might be rightly related to God and not remain on the same old merry-go-round.

This is powerful truth, that all of humanity is separated from God eternally, but that they can be saved through the gospel. It is compelling. There is no more critical mission than to deliver the news of the love of Christ to humanity. It changes everything about a person.

None of this is to say that salvation will be universal. It is freely extended to those who believe in this good news. Though Christ's death is of sufficient value to provide salvation for all it has specific application only to those who believe.

5:15 and he died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Paul states the ultimate purpose of Yahweh that led to the death of Christ. Note that Christ died for all, that some things might come about in "they who live." The term "they who live" is used by Paul to refer to those who believe and so are made alive spiritually. The Spirit of God Himself is joined to such people who believe and they are capable of living a totally different way as Yahweh's partners. The intended result of Christ's death was to bring about a huge shift in the thinking of such ones who believe. They should no longer live according to their own needs, desires, and agenda. They should live life for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

That a people should be gathered and enabled to live for Christ, advancing His cause, being His voice, eyes, ears and arms, carrying out His will on the earth by bringing others along in the faith, was and is God's design. Such transformation is what Christ had in view in His work of redemption. His salvation brings us out of a life of sin for the

purpose of living a life of righteousness. It enables our obedience and conformity to Yahweh's purposes. His salvation does not stop at forgiveness. Yahweh wants to save us from all that we would certainly become apart from Him

5:16 Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Defining an individual by what they accomplish or don't accomplish when living life for themselves is a pursuit Paul did not engage in. Significance in the body of Christ should not be assigned based on looks, intelligence, or achievement, the things that people do or become in their effort to restore their glory and compensate for the fall. The things done apart from Christ have no bearing on who they are in Christ. The flesh, even good flesh, veils the full glory of and potential of a person in Christ.

There are at least two ways to take Paul's statement that "we have known Christ in the flesh." First, Paul could have been speaking about knowing Christ while He was in an earthly body. Even if Paul himself had not seen Christ on earth, there were many that had. So "we" refers to many within the body of Christ alive at that time. In that case by knowing "Him thus no longer" Paul would be referring to the fact that we now perceive the fullness of His glory. In effect Paul is saying this, "Jesus was at one time to us a flesh-and-blood person. Now we understand Him as God, as the Christ in His exalted state." We must remember that Paul had seen Jesus in His exalted state.

Jesus' glory was veiled by physical flesh during His time on earth. He voluntarily laid aside His glory and took on human flesh, a body that was as ours with its inherent weaknesses. Though Jesus never sinned, His full glory was still veiled by that physical fleshly body. Since this was true of Jesus, then we should certainly expect that every person's potential, their glory, is veiled not just by a fleshly body, but by their fallen state. They live according to the flesh not just in a fleshly body. So we cannot recognize them for who they are made to be.

There is a second way of understanding Paul's thought when he writes "we have known Christ according to the flesh." Paul could have been referring to the fact that all of us, before we are regenerated and while still in the flesh, have known Christ. In that state our "knowledge" of Him is very limited by our own spiritual limitations. We might see Him as a great man, or a great moral leader. We might see Him as one who had great spiritual impact. We likely will not perceive His glory. We might know a great deal about Him, but we will not know Him. In fact, our opinion of Him might be blasphemous. Such was Paul's knowledge of Jesus at one time. Once in the Spirit, Paul knew Jesus in a much deeper and different way. Paul not only knew about Jesus, but he perceived His significance and had begun to understand His glory. This is to know Jesus not merely in a fleshly way, but in a spiritual way. It is to know Him in a way that only is possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.

It could be that both ideas were what Paul had in mind when he wrote of knowing Christ "according to the flesh." Christ's fleshly body veiled His glory so that He was not fully known. Our fleshly condition apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit veils our understanding of Jesus. The result was and is that we falter in embracing Him as our Lord and Savior. Our past attitudes toward Jesus give us a great reason for not recognizing any person according to the flesh. The flesh, both our own and theirs, distorts our view of their value and worth.

5:17 therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.

Once in Christ, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, a person possesses a whole new set of potentials. These potentials give them a new identity, a special fit in the body of Christ. What a person was, they no longer are in this sense. What used to drive them need drive them no longer. What used to occupy them need do so no longer. What they used to be he no longer is. What they could not be, they can now become.

Once a person is in Christ the person they used to be is dead. Their old liabilities before God, their limitations which kept them out of God's family, all are gone through Christ. This does not mean the desires and appetites are gone. But the paralyzing effect of these need no longer be.

The potential of a new journey has been entered into with a completely different destination and different stops along the way. The old road to self-vindication and authentication with its stops at various excesses, need never be walked again. The hunger for glory and significance is satisfied in carrying out one's role in the body of Christ. The old things glorified self. In that life, self-provide proved insatiable. The new things we can now embrace glorify God. In glorifying God our glory is realized and felt.

5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

The things Paul is referring to here are the new things that have come about in verse 17. But the phrase probably reaches way back to all that Paul has described since 2:14. It is an all-inclusive statement made by Paul of all the elements he experiences during Spirit-directed life/ministry. It is all the things that keep him from losing heart.

The Lord's work is that of reconciling people. He is dealing with hostilities. God's hostility toward humanity has been dealt with through Christ. People's hostilities toward God we deal with. It is these that we try to bring an end to. Therefore, love is such an important ingredient in what we do. Though these hostilities within individuals are quite meaningless in terms of any effect on God, they are huge in terms of the price they exact on individuals. We deal with these hostilities through providing an alternative example, through teaching, through prayer, through encouragement all done in the context of personal relationships. We do not do the reconciling, but we become the agents of the reconciliation process. We do this by being a fragrance of Christ to God, thus revealing God and Christ to others.

5:19 namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

This is the central truth and core content of the ministry of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is passing along the truth about God acting through Christ toward humanity in a very special way. It is not about humans reconciling themselves to God. It is not just about God being reconciled to man. It is about God reconciling man to Himself through Christ. God became the man history knows as Jesus. Jesus was our sin-bearer. God satisfied justice by becoming the man Jesus and giving His life to pay for our sin. Through that act of God we can be reconciled to God by believing these things. Making these facts known is the ministry of reconciliation.

Though this ministry involves a host of different activities it is summed up in this brief message. God reconciles us to Himself through Jesus' death. It is wonderful news that God does not count our trespasses against us. He is not doing the very thing He has every right to do and He is not doing the very thing all other religious systems of the world have Him doing. This is the best possible good news. The greatest message that can ever be delivered is that God is seeking restoration of humanity to Himself and because of Christ neither His justice nor His immutability requires Him to hold our sin against us.

This message has been entrusted to us. It will not get out apart from us. Its declaration is subject to our faithfulness and obedience. God has done all the work regarding making reconciliation possible. He has done so at great cost to Himself. But the news of it is deposited with us. In the communication of that truth God is dependent on humans, but we do not do it alone. Energy and direction of this ministry is given through the Holy Spirit. Such grace is what we live by under the new covenant, and this grace is what we must teach, demonstrate, and pass on to others. Grace is the story of God through Christ reaching out to the world, pleading to them to follow Him

The new covenant merges life and ministry. To have a new covenant relationship to God is to be a minister of this truth of reconciliation wherever life takes us in every given moment. It is not a case of a specific occupational calling, nor is it just a case of engaging certain activities. It is an always-present responsibility, empowerment and privilege every moment of our lives.

5:20 Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Because the message and the revelation about reconciliation is entrusted to us, we serve in an official capacity. We represent Christ in an official way, as His ambassadors. Now here is how this is working and the sense in which we are ambassadors. God has provided the means of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. That work is done. Now He is doing the begging, the convincing, the persuading of humanity through us. His ambassadors are working for His benefit and in His place, We are the advisors, teachers and the attractors the Holy Spirit empowers to draw others along to initial faith in Jesus. But there is more we do as ambassadors than draw others to belief in the work of Jesus.

Interestingly, the term "be reconciled" is an imperative. It is a command given in the second person plural to all of Paul's readers. There are two observations we must make as we absorb this command. First, we live with a tension as ambassadors between appealing to others and imploring them and at the same time directing them in this way for which there is no alternate action that will result in eternal life. There is something about our posture towards others that is described by our English word "beg." Like rescue workers we plead with them for their safety and benefit. But this imploring appeal is also done with the knowledge that faith in Christ is the will of the Creator God for humanity. Each of us must get this right if we wish to be right with Him. There is no alternative with respect to being reconciled to God other than through Jesus. In our begging we also command, and obedient hearts respond.

There is a second thing that we must conclude, and it is because this command was given by Paul to Christians. We should understand this ministry of reconciliation as ongoing both among unbelievers and believers. In other words, the task is not simply bringing people to initial belief in Christ, but to help them reconcile to God their entire

way of thinking. Reconciliation produces agreement. God is seeking to have our thinking and conduct reconciled, put into agreement, with His. In giving the readers this command Paul indicates that we should never regard our being reconciled to God as finished. We must always be commanded to be executing this important work of reconciling all our thoughts and actions with the fact that He has called us into the light of truth.

This begging in Christ's behalf was the apostle's ministry in a nutshell. It describes the content of their words and the object of their efforts. It was their vision for ministry and for people everywhere. It remains the ministry of the Church and every believer.

5:21 He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God made Jesus sin, the one who had committed no sin, in our place. The doctrinal foundation underlying the ministry of reconciliation is recorded here. Reconciliation is not about God being soft toward sin. Nor is it good news that our sin isn't really that bad. Reconciliation is possible because God, at great sacrifice, went to this extent to satisfy the demands of His own justice. He did this by imputing our sin to Christ's account and punishing Him for it. Jesus became our substitute. Jesus was able to do this because He Himself had no sin of His own to pay for by death. There was no one who needed to be His substitute or Savior, hence He could serve as ours.

Paul follows this great statement with another statement of result. Since Christ took to His account our sin, the result is that we are left with no sin to our account. For accounting purposes, we have become righteous before God based on Christ's work, or when viewed "in Him."

This verse then is a summary of the great doctrine of Christ revealed slowly through the Old Testament, affirmed by Jesus Himself, then taught in the writings directed by the Apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 6

6:1 and working together with him we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain;

An unfortunate chapter break occurs here that can interrupt the continuing thought of Paul about being ambassadors of God. The translators have added to the short phrase “working together” the words “with him” to link this verse solidly to the previous verse, linkage that could be lost due to the chapter break. Paul will be speaking of all he has risen to in this work of being an ambassador, seeking in God’s behalf to inspire the readers to the “next things” God has for them.

When we speak of being reconciled to God we are referring to coming to belief in Christ and being forgiven by God. We are also referring to the ongoing challenge of reconciling our thoughts and actions with God’s heart and will for us. As ambassadors of God we seek always to work together with Him to facilitate growing faith in those around us. The things Paul wrote about in the verses that follow speak to how we need to endure and persist in this great movement of God in ourselves and others.

To hear of the work of Christ and not believe is to receive the news in vain. But also, to hear, then believe, but not move on to all the implications of faith is to fall short of all God would like to deliver to you. In this sense it is to have received grace in vain in terms of God’s purposes in extending grace.

Yahweh’s plan for us that was motivated by grace is to draw us to belief in Him and then to empower us to rise above our moral impairment as fallen people to partner with Him in His work in the lives of others. His Spirit is within us for this very purpose. He does not want us to live enslaved to our instincts for survival and pleasure. He wants to lift us to the noble work He is doing in fallen creation. His plan is to accomplish His plan in humanity through humanity. His grace makes that possible. Paul reminds us not to receive that great grace in vain. This is a reminder not to settle in to a mediocre, predictable, sluggish and lethargic spirituality.

6:2 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”;

Here Paul introduces more information that further supports what he has just said, namely, that there is an urgency to follow through on what grace God has given. Paul quotes an Old Testament Scripture (Isaiah 49:8). Isaiah 49 can be confusing because in its beginning verses it speaks alternately of Israel, Isaiah, and Messiah as Yahweh’s servants. That term servant is appropriate in each case. Israel was chosen by God as His servant with respect to His plan for the nations. Isaiah served Yahweh by serving Israel’s spiritual need and contributed greatly to God’s revelation of Himself to the nations. But certainly, Christ was the ultimate servant of Yahweh, who also served Israel and all humanity.

By the time we arrive at verse eight of Isaiah 49 we find that The Servant is no longer portrayed as the nation of Israel. Instead, the servant is an individual in Israel. He is, like Isaiah, formed from His mother’s womb to bring Israel back to Yahweh, in order that they might be re-gathered. So Israel has dropped out of the imagery of the Servant because of the curse they incurred through the Old Covenant. They are suddenly

represented in this verse as needing to be rescued. Isaiah has dropped out, unable to bring Israel back to Yahweh to be re-gathered. That leaves only the Israelite, the Messiah.

Beginning in verse eight Isaiah has composed a section of Scripture that captures what the Servant will bring about on behalf of the people that He shepherds, a people made up of the tribes of Israel and of all the people groups of the earth. It is one more witness in the writings of Isaiah to the expectation of the Messiah who would rule righteously and justly over all the earth.

Isaiah 49:8 alludes to a prayer from a Psalm attributed to David (Psalm 69:13). That Psalm appears near the end of Book 2 of the Psalms. It is likely a Psalm included in that book as an appropriate prayer to be prayed by the righteous remnant in Israel in a season when the glory of Yahweh had left them, and a period of decline had swept over them. It came to be understood as Messianic in nature—for certain a prayer of the righteous, but because of this, the prayer of THE Righteous One.

The appeal of the righteous and the Righteous One in Psalm 69 is;

"But as for me, my prayer is to Thee, O Yahweh, at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Thy lovingkindness, Answer me with Thy saving truth."

Isaiah represents the Messiah as having prayed the prayer of Psalm 69 to Yahweh. Isaiah 49:8 is Yahweh's answer to the Messiah,

"In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped you; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people . . ."

Though the discipline of Yahweh was heavy upon Israel as Isaiah wrote, Yahweh Himself was regarding the prayers of the Messiah to already have been offered and answered. Though the advent of the Messiah was over half a millennium away, by Yahweh's decree it was certain, as was the answer to the prayer of Psalm 69. Though to us His reign over the earth still lies in the future, it is a virtual certainty. It has been accomplished because it has been promised.

Significant in this verse written by Isaiah is a portion not quoted by Paul. But Paul's knowledge and understanding of it has been the foundation of all he has stated about the new covenant. He chooses not to quote Yahweh's statement that He will give the Messiah for a covenant of the people. This amounts to a prediction by Isaiah of Jesus' sacrificial death and the blessings inherent in it. Jesus was provided by Yahweh to make substitutionary atonement for the sins of Yahweh's children under the terms of the old covenant. By His death the old covenant could be set aside and a new one established. So this sentence is one of the profound statements of the Old Testament writers in terms of a proper understanding of the Messiah and the inauguration of the new covenant. Paul had given the Corinthians a good understanding of the basis of the new covenant and felt no need to re-establish it.

We can summarize all this in New Testament language in this way: In Isaiah 49:8, Yahweh answers the prayers of Jesus. Yahweh, on the day ordained as "salvation day" helped Jesus to bring about the work of salvation on the cross. Jesus' suffering and death was THE event planned in eternity past to which all of history pointed, the central event in God's plan of salvation.

The application Paul is making of this passage from Isaiah is clear. He can be understood as telling the Corinthians and us this; “Do not fail to act on this great event, this special act of salvation that God has brought about through Jesus in human history. There is in that event not only salvation from sin’s penalty, but also grace to live differently, to help carry the good news of it to others with credibility and power. It is grace to be involved partnering with God Himself in His mission of spreading the truth of the gospel.”

6:3 giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited.”

Paul’s concern is that we appropriate God’s grace to live as we should in all situations. It could have been stated positively in this way; live with precision. Let the driving force of your behavior be this; how can I live in such a way as to authenticate the truth of the gospel? How can I be a tribute to and demonstration of its power? Paul chooses to state it negatively. Don’t live in a way that undermines the credibility of the great work God is doing through His ambassadors.

6:4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

By all our deeds in all the various kinds of situations we must seek to be distinct. Our conduct should be such that it is consistent with our claim to be carrying out God’s agenda and doing His work. The word rendered “commending” by the NASB is συνισταντησ. It was formed by prefixing the preposition meaning “with,” to the verb meaning “to stand.” It has a broad range of meaning. It is used in the well-known statement of Paul, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Paul has used this word often in 2 Corinthians (3:1; 4:2; 5:12). It means to “stand with” someone in the sense of recommending them to others. It means to “stand with” certain principles, meaning to authentically demonstrate them. Here Paul is calling for us to be a living demonstration of those who serve God. We want to be led by the Holy Spirit so that we are authentic representatives of God Himself and carry out His mission no matter what the outward circumstances. With this in view Paul gives us a list of descriptive terms that provide definitive examples of how such a life/ministry demonstrates itself. The list Paul gives extends through verse 10.

An important observation to make about these terms is the prepositions that govern them. In verses four through the middle of verse seven we find each term is governed by the Greek preposition εν, rendered in the NASB by the English word “in”. That Greek preposition serves three different functions. It can signal to the reader that they are about to be told for whom or to whom the action was carried out. It can also signal to the reader that they are about to be told the location, place, or position of the action either designating the physical aspects of these or the logical sphere the action impacted. It can also signal to the reader that they are about to be told how the action of the verb was carried out—perhaps through whom, by what means, with what manner or with what accompanying circumstances. In the use of that preposition in verses four through seven Paul describes circumstances in which we are to demonstrate our authenticity, the way we do so and how we do so. Paul is instructing us in very pragmatic terms that help us know when we are on course with the Spirit and when we have left that course.

Paul begins by expressing several things that are how we commend ourselves. In any field credibility comes by means of endurance. Enduring involves repetition. It involves fighting off the urge to quit. Enduring implies pain a sacrifice of some sort. It implies difficulty. When we endure we must overcome obstacles. Much endurance is what we want to demonstrate. Do others endure? We more. Do others fight off the urge to rest? We are more. Do others fight through discomfort and pain? We are more. We authenticate the truth, and we demonstrate that we are of God because we endure.

Through all those things that could make us quit or could make us behave in an unholy way, we behave in such a way as to authenticate the truth and establish ourselves as credible. There might be afflictions, things like sickness or weakness of body. We cope with these without losing credibility. There may be hardships imposed on us by the times, by the enemy, or our own lack of resources. We cope with these difficulties in a way that is a tribute to God. There may be distresses that cause inner turmoil, personal loss, personal pain of various sorts and great uncertainties. We get through these in a way that underscores and demonstrates the truth. These kinds of circumstances do not dictate what we become. We remain steady by the Spirit's help and encouragement.

6:5 in beatings, and imprisonments, and tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, and hunger,

Paul continues to name circumstances he endured in his quest to be a legitimate and effective ambassador of God through the strength given by the Holy Spirit. The things listed in this verse include various abuses that were heaped on the early Christians by their enemies. They are self-explanatory. Over the years these have become part of the overall Christian experience. They can and do invade our lives because they are part life in this fallen world. Even through these there is grace to thrive as God's ambassadors.

It is hard to imagine in our current culture not assuming these things would disable us as effective ministers. But such things need not influence the impact we have on others. In all such things we can rise to model the life of faith presenting to others an example of Jesus the Christ. We must remember that no one was humiliated or abused more than Jesus.

These can be seen as specific experiences of the more general families of difficulties spoken of in verse four. They are specific experiences of Paul that we read of in Luke's history of the early church, known as Acts. We find in that record not just the story of such circumstances, but the evidence of grace that Paul and others received from God to triumph in them. They did not just survive them. It is not small stuff they endured. These are big-ticket items. We are enabled by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate grace even when evil forces its way on us.

6:6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,

Paul's list begins to take on a different tone here. He begins to list things that are the flip side of all evil seeks to draw us into. They are things the Holy Spirit inspires in us to enable us to commend ourselves as servants of God. They arise in us even amid various adversities and abuses. In the language of Paul, these are life working through

us even while death works in us (4:7-12). It is through these qualities that we command ourselves as servants of God.

The terms here continue to be governed by the Greek preposition “ἐν”. But here that preposition expresses the means through which something is done. That is important. In these terms Paul is offering us a list of counterinfluences that occur in us through the Holy Spirit. So for example, we should chose purity in moments when we are tempted by more instinctive motives. We should behave based on what we know to be true when we sense strong feelings about to sweep in another direction. We should choose kindness though we feel like retaliating. These are the things through which our conduct will authenticate the truth even amid great difficulty.

Each of these can be used to fill in the blank in the following statement: Through _____ I show that I am an authentic Christian even during trial. Some of these terms describe the thing others see in us which authenticates us to them (i.e., purity, patience, kindness, genuine love). Others describe the force at work in us that enables us to be something to others despite our trial (i.e., knowledge, the Holy Spirit, the word of truth and the power of God). The circumstances remain evil in nature, but these are means by which God works against evil through us to bring about something other than the evil’s intended purpose.

6:7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,

Paul’s list of such things that transform circumstances from their intended purpose continue here. The first two ideas are governed by the Greek preposition “ἐν”. The message of truth is one of the most powerful means by which God brings about change through us. Certainly, the power of God is resident where the truth is proclaimed and ultimately our hope in the mission rests squarely in His power. These are two powerful means by which we experience partnership with God in His mission. They add credibility to our words.

Paul switches prepositions in the middle of this verse, using “διὰ,” instead of “ἐν.” The use of “διὰ” is another way of expressing how the action of commending ourselves as servants of God is accomplished. So what Paul has been doing is continued, but this is a way of freshening the thought mid-stream and re-engaging the readers.

In a day when warfare was so dependent on hand-to-hand fighting, the imagery of fighting with both hands was a powerful one. It would have been advantageous, and perhaps essential (see Judges 3:15; 20:16). Whether or not this capacity was real on a large scale or simply desired, it is a powerful figure given the number of weapons available to us. It may be best understood as introducing the series of contrasts that follow.

6:8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true;

Through a series of contrasts Paul communicates the constancy we can experience through the wide swings of emotion that occur during normal ministry. Normal ministry is full of irony and paradox. It is complex. All its contrasting seasons can be survived. But these words give us a greater hope than just hanging on and surviving.

There is in passing through such things the great potential of being endorsed as servants of God.

As one looks at ministry in general it is hard to say which circumstance in each of these contrasting pairs is more useful in terms of accomplishing God's purposes. He seems to work equally through both and there seems to be something equally at stake in both types of circumstances, whether one is dealing with a positive situation or a negative one. There is opportunity in all to advance the cause of Christ and to authenticate oneself as a true servant of God.

Paul is urging us to make it our business to behave in a way that authenticates us as servants of God. This is our ambition whether we are being affirmed or being spoken against. God uses both means to show others who His people are. God uses our reaction to what people say about us whether good or bad, to prove who we really are. So for example, to be regarded as a deceiver can be a situation that becomes a weapon of righteousness. Our conduct in such a season and amid such accusations can reverse its intent. Paul's enemies said of him that he was a deceiver. But Paul, by his conduct proved that the opposite was in fact the case. Millions have followed Paul. We don't even know the names of His enemies.

6:9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,

Paul continues to present us with the contrasting circumstances in which the Spirit helps us be constant. Previously we read a series of contrasts that had to do with the reactions of others. Here we read of contrasts that have to do with the contrasting realities and perspectives we will feel in our ministry. These are also contrasts in two different ways to view the same event. It is quite likely that Paul is stating certain things that rivals were saying about him their perspective that he then had to cope with.

The overwhelming majority of Christians labor as unknowns. Yet who can say they are unknown when they are known by the Almighty God and the forces of heaven regularly intervene to answer their prayers? Both perspectives are important to have. In either situation enablement for righteous living flows into us so that we can be commended as servants of God.

Living always with the threat of physical death was a part of Paul's life. The threat followed him in his ministry always. Yet the reality was that he was still alive physically and he was certainly experiencing life as God intended it to be lived.

Paul had endured punishment at the hands of civil authorities and condemnation in that sense, yet he had to this point not been condemned to death. And how could he possibly allow himself to feel condemned when confident that God endorsed him?

6:10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

There is always that in ministry that makes one genuinely sorrowful. There is always enough to break one's heart. At the same time there is always that about which one can rejoice. Both situations require special handling to reflect both godly sorrow and holy celebration. It is important to be always rejoicing even amid sorrow. One is able with the Spirit's help, to think then feel that which brings rejoicing always.

One of the great ironies of ministry is that it involves the dispensing of the greatest treasure, but it has typically been advanced and carried out by individuals who are poor. The challenge of ministry is to successfully live and be content with this irony. Can I cope with having less, and have great satisfaction with my eternal wealth? Can I pass that wealth on to others in the way that authenticates my identity as a servant of God? The answer is always "Yes!" through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The same irony is stated two ways in the last two phrases of this verse, "... as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things." This is the perfect way to sum up the entire matter that began in verse four. The key to living well through all the things Paul has listed is the absolute and complete surrender of all personal clamoring for things, experiences, affirmation and title. It is to live as if you have nothing, while realizing that all things belong to you. In that though you are poor, you will enrich many.

6:11 our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is open wide.

Paul states that he has spoken to the Corinthians everything that was on his heart. He has held nothing back. There is nothing that has remaining unsaid. There is no need at all for them to be wondering what he was thinking or what he was really up to.

Not only this, Paul says he has made himself very vulnerable. He has initiated conversation about things that were unresolved, with the desire of restoring normalcy and even intimacy to the relationship. He had spoken his heart both in terms of what he thought and how he felt. He had even spoken of the emotional highs and lows that he was experiencing. He could not have revealed more of what his mind was thinking or his emotions feeling.

6:12 You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections.

The Corinthians had perhaps suggested that there was uncertainty in the relationship because of their uncertainty about Paul. They were uncertain of the degree to which he could be trusted and therefore the degree to which they should entrust their welfare to him. He points out here that himself and his company have been completely transparent and made themselves vulnerable. There were no hidden motives or agendas. There was nothing Paul "was up to." Therefore, the Corinthians were restrained only by their own fears. They needed to let go of these fears.

6:13 now in a like exchange I speak is to children open wide to us also.

Paul's own plea reminds him of what children might say. "Play fair!" Paul had opened his heart wide to the Corinthians. He is asking them to respond. The "to us", words supplied by the translators, might better be "your hearts." Paul is urging them to do as he said in verse eleven, he had done with respect to them.

Paul longs for a restoration. He doesn't want just credibility, but the relationship itself. He longs for the emotional tie that binds, the deep fellowship they built with one another in the past. He longed for the spiritual oneness, the partnership in the things of the Lord and in the work of the Lord. This had all been marginalized by their carnality, and by false accusations made by Paul's enemies.

6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

This is an important statement about something that deeply impacts relationships Christians enter. Paul states this principle here just after he has pled with the Corinthians to "open wide to us." He seems to be indicating that they had entered emotional bonds, the kind he himself was longing for with them, with unbelievers. In doing so they were damaging the kind of relationships that involve a mutual and unconditional emotional exchange, against relationships that nurture and stimulate spiritual growth. The full impact of Paul's words in this verse and the one before it is something like this: "don't be showing restraint toward us and unite your hearts and souls with unbelievers."

Paul gives four contrasts to emphasize the absurdity of this that they were doing. They could not reasonably expect righteousness to result from a bond with a lawless person. They could not expect a sharing of the life God had given with those who were not a source of truth.

6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

Paul has moved from "partnership" (verse 14), an agreement to combine efforts, to fellowship, a sharing of common concerns and interests, and here in verse fifteen to harmony. Harmony speaks of the blending together of diverse elements that results in a pleasing tone. Christ and Belial have no blend together. The term "Belial" comes from a Hebrew term that means worthless and is an epithet of Satan. Christ cannot combine with Satan to produce a harmony! In harmony there is diversity yet unity, producing beauty. Between Christ and Belial there is no such potential and no such beauty.

Paul moves further down the scale to things held in common. The things of eternity are of such importance that Paul here implies that anything else shared in the experiences of unbelievers and believers is nothing when held in the light of eternal matters. Any possible similarity disappears when viewed through the lens of eternity.

Righteousness says, "how can I please God and do what is right by Him." Lawlessness says, "how can I please and gratify myself." Righteousness seeks to be bound to God. Lawlessness seeks to be bound to nothing and by nothing. There's nothing in common in the agendas of those seeking to follow the Spirit and those simply following their desires. What then would lead us to think that we could share life at any deep level with such people? What mixing can there possibly be of truth and untruth? What does one have in common with the other? What sharing of passion or objectives, or concerns could possibly be imagined in such relationships?

6:16 and what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God and they will be my people."

Would these two elements, God's temple and idols if humanized have anything about which they agreed? Paul moves from partnership and the bond that it implies, to mere agreement and shows there is no common ground. There is complete contradiction in placing an idol in the temple of God. Why would such a thing ever occur? It would be

totally absurd logically and morally, to build a temple to Yahweh and place an image in it of another god, or the trappings of another god.

Each one of us and all of us together are the temple of God. God resides in us through the Holy Spirit. He does his work through us, and it is in us that others find Him. Given this mission and partnership, our lives should not be cluttered with the paraphernalia of idol worship.

As Paul moves on, he quotes Jeremiah 31:1. This is a quote from a passage which is projecting the future relationship between Yahweh and restored Israel under the new covenant. They are living in the land and in a rebuilt Jerusalem with a restored monarchy under the Messiah. This occurs after Yahweh's wrath is spent and all the curses of the old covenant have been carried out. The new covenant will be experienced in its fullness. But Paul is referencing the fact that we have the lead edge of this movement of God in the world, the spiritual blessing of the new covenant, the presence of Yahweh's indwelling Spirit. So God is with us on earth now, in a body of people. He is not in a temple. He is revealed, found in and made known through His people.

6:17 "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you."

This is a quote from Isaiah in which God is exhorting Jerusalem to rise to her destiny, to once again be the dwelling place of God. There are implications to such a calling. To such a privilege there is a proper and fitting response. It is to separate oneself from all that characterized the life of seeking one's own glory apart from the Creator. All the trappings of the former quest for one's own glory are to be set aside. All that is unholy and man-made is to be discarded.

The last phrase of this verse and the first phrase of the next verse draws together thoughts expressed by various prophets (Hosea 1:10, Isaiah 43:6). It is not a direct quote. There is a promise in these words of the relationship enjoyed by those who pursue holiness, who separate themselves from all that is unholy. It is the promise of closeness to Yahweh Himself and the very special family life that goes with that.

6:18 and I will be a Father to you and you should be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

The promise begun in the previous verse and carried through to this verse is one made by "The Yahweh Almighty." This is an interesting choice of words by Paul. It describes a relationship in tender terms and familiar terms which reflect God's immanence. It describes God's person with a "big" term emphasizing His transcendence.

2 Corinthians 7

7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Again, there is a logical response to such promises as were made at the end of the previous chapter. There are defilements our beings gravitate toward. They appeal to us at a fleshy level. They have spiritual implications should we engage them. There are many such fleshy issues that carry spiritual consequences. As we free ourselves from these sins of the flesh, we get rid of the foothold of demons, and our spirits are cleansed. The cleansing is not just an outward one but one of thought and motive. As this cleansing goes on our holiness is brought to completion. The fear of God has then had its intended work in our being. This is what we are to press on toward. It is the thing for which God has called us.

7:2 make room for us in your hearts, we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.

Paul's calls his readers to "make room for us in your hearts." This is a continuation of the thought in 6:13. Is a call for a restored relationship. Paul wants to do away with the awkwardness, with the defensiveness and with the lack of transparency that had developed. He wants the coolness that he sensed in the Corinthians to be done. It was time to rid themselves of all that had developed as result of false reports and accusations made by those who wished to supplant Paul in the Corinthian church. Paul wants the Corinthians, by an act of their own will, to start thinking right again, to come to their senses and let there be the relationship that once had been.

None of the things that anyone suspected had happened. Paul had been accused of all of them. Here he confronts reality full out and straightforward. He makes a statement that would invite those with a contrary feeling to step forward with evidence if any existed. It is a statement by Paul of confidence, meant to get the Corinthians to wake up to the facts as they really were, and to resolve the contradiction that had taken root in their minds.

7:3 I do not speak to condemn you; for I said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

Paul assures the Corinthians that he has not said these things to make them appear evil. He knew that some of them were thinking these things. Others were saying them. He knew that laying everything out before them in a very transparent way would make the accusations appear foolish and very evil. His motives in doing so were not to devastate or simply win an argument or an altercation. Paul assures them that he has done these things because he longs for the relationship, which is very dear to him, to be restored. He says all of this out of deep sense of love, grief over lost fellowship and the passion for a restored relationship.

7:4 great is my confidence in you great is my boasting on your behalf; I'm filled with comfort. I'm overflowing with joy in all my afflictions.

In words meant to convey Paul's respect for them Paul seeks to assure the Corinthians more of the fact that he is not saying these things to shame them, nor to make them feel he has been let down by them. Nor does he want them to feel they have contributed to his trials. He is confident that once they have thought it through, they will understand the truth of the accusations. He assures them that their reputation has not been tarnished by this and that he is not spreading an evil report about them. On the contrary he brags on them. This is a means of "calling them up" to a greater level in these matters.

The Corinthians are still a bright spot to Paul, and he is doing just fine despite all that is coming his way. He has "overflowing joy," in his afflictions. All the trials of chapters one and two have not defeated him. He is overflowing with joy especially now that his relationship to them has been partially restored. In fact, it is news of them, that brings in him this constant overflow with joy.

7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.

When Paul, concerned about the welfare of the Corinthians and the welfare of Titus, took leave from the rest of his party, whom he left to go through the open door in Troas and crossed the Aegean Sea into Macedonia, trouble followed him. The same resistance they had confronted in Asia that made them despair even of life (1:8), dogged them in the cities of Macedonia. Paul felt no rest, no respite from the rigor of the spiritual battle. There was resistance on every side so that they were in danger all day every day. There was actual persecution that threatened their physical beings. There was the strain and stress on an emotional level that goes with conflict, and there was a natural reaction within them of fear. There was wariness that went beyond physical fatigue.

7:6 But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

God comforts, literally encourages, the depressed. The word for depressed is ταπεινους. It is a word that can mean humble in the good sense of that term. It can mean humbled or humiliated, and thus have a twinge of shame in its meaning. It can also mean depressed in the sense in which we use the term, of one who is downcast and discouraged.

God encouraged through circumstances, a person, and a people. The circumstance was the sudden appearing or presence of Titus, who became the person God used to encourage Paul and those with him. It was also the news that Titus carried to Paul of the Corinthians. God orchestrates comfort in His time. Trouble comes in seasons, and in such seasons it can be overwhelming. We are not immune by a vital walk with God from being downcast. But God will bring comfort to enable us to march on.

7:7 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 rejoice even more.

The mere sight of Titus lifted Paul's spirits. We've all experienced that, especially when the well-being of that someone we love is in doubt. Seeing them brings a great wave of joy over us. But we can see in Paul's words that there was more than just the sight of Titus that brought comfort to Paul. He was comforted by his mood and overall demeanor, by Titus' joy.

Titus was "up" over his trip to Corinth. They had lifted his spirits and Paul knew this could only be true if there was spiritual health there. He was also comforted by Titus' words as he expressed all the Corinthian's current feelings toward Paul. The words used by Paul here assure that they had more than an affection for him. There was still, perhaps more than ever, a strong attachment to him on their part. It was a bond that had not been broken. It led them to be loyal to him and to want to please him.

7:8 for though I caused you sorrow in my letter I do not regret it; though I did regret it for I see that letter caused you sorrow, only for a while-

Leaders must be willing to cause others sorrow for a period. It is the only way to shape character, to right wrongs, and to be moved into a course of action that pleases God. This will be abundantly clear from Paul's words that follow. It is a very painful thing for the one who is a Spirit-led leader to inflict sorrow on his followers. But He is their shepherd with a God-inspired love for them and his agenda is to protect them against all that threatens their well-being, including those things that cause pain.

To inflict pain is to seemingly go against the whole set of God-given instincts the Spirit gives us. It is agonizing for the shepherd. But it is never-the-less true of the true Shepherd that His will is to use us in this way at times. Paul was under the direction of the Head-shepherd. He had to do what God wanted done.

The key at such a time is to realize that you will cause sorrow only "for a while." Sorrow for a while is worth the eternal joy it can yield. Sorrow presents others with the opportunity for eternal reward as Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

7:9 I now rejoice, not that you are made sorrowful, that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

Sorrow comes as a result of suffering loss. But there is a sorrow that prevents loss. It is a sorrow that comes when God stops us in our tracks and confronts us with our behavior that is not according to His will. This comes as a result of seeing our deeds for what they really are and leads us to change our minds about them, to repent. Where we once thought they were fruitful, we now see them as unfruitful. When we understand their unfruitfulness, we are equipped to change them, and this leads to fruit.

And so godly sorrow accomplishes eternal things, and we are used of God at times to produce it in others. It should be always done with great care, prayer and in love, but the leader who fails to do it is leading in the wrong direction and will never lift his

followers to very high ground. Aaron was unwilling to cause sorrow. He created a mess that his brother Moses, who was willing to cause sorrow, had to make right.

After the agony of causing sorrow and once it has subsided there is great joy. Through it we see God bring about holiness in His people. Holiness is the will of God that will rarely come about in another way.

All this poses some important questions to the Church and its leaders today. What is happening through us in the lives of our followers? Are they following leadings that lead to holiness and add to their eternal inheritance? Or are they squandering the opportunity? Are we, like Aaron, delivering to them what they want? Or like Moses, do we bring to them what they need?

7:10 for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Almost all sorrow leads to regret of some sort. Regret is generally part of the emotion that adds up to sorrow. Godly sorrow is different in that it leads to a change of mind for which we are grateful. This repentance leads to salvation. This word salvation is used here in the broad sense of the term. When we use salvation we think of an event, the moment we are justified. We equate salvation with being rescued from the penalty of sin and generally use it in no other way. In the Scripture this word is used in several ways. The word itself conveys the idea of rescue and the resulting state of safety or soundness or health (see for example its use in James 5:15).

Now, we know the Corinthians were "saved" in the American sense in which we use that term, that is, they were justified, declared righteous in God's sight through belief in Jesus Christ. Paul caused sorrow and caused them to repent as Christians. The "salvation" this led to was they were free collectively from the power of a specific sinful pattern in their church. Their eyes were opened regarding the truth, they changed their mind, then their behavior, and so were saved from that state of fleshliness that they were living in. They were changed from sickness to health as a church.

Godly sorrow produces this type of "salvation," the salvation we continually need. The sorrow of the world produces death. The "death" spoken of here could be physical or spiritual death. Because spiritual death occurred, physical death followed. Physical death is a product of a sorrowful life in biblical imagery. Being sorry about a deed in the worldly sense leads to regret, which leads to a seeking to compensate for it by our own merits which leads us further from God, spiritual death. So the normal emotion of sorrow, that is produced by the world in the normal course of life, produces death in several senses. Sorrow produced by the Holy Spirit through understanding of the truth, produces life.

7:11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, when avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourself to be innocent in the matter.

Paul lists seven things that godly sorrow produced in the Corinthians. They were all good and could be clearly seen. There was an earnestness, a renewed sense of urgency about matters of importance to God. We need such adjustments of focus because the routines of life tend to entangle us.

Godly sorrow had also produced a vindication of the Corinthians. They had taken action to demonstrate their faith. Many circumstances in life are opportunities to let truth's light shine, but our sluggishness covers its light.

The godly sorrow also produced in the Corinthians indignation. Sometimes we need to just get real mad at our sin! The things of God should matter enough to us that once we see they are being compromised we should feel a righteous indignation as Jesus did. It was Martin Luther who said that he never accomplished anything until he got angry.

This sorrow in the Corinthians also produced fear. This word can be used of emotions along the whole spectrum of fear, from terror to respect or reverence. Sorrow produces fear in us, fear of failure on those things that truly matter, and reverence and respect for our God.

Sorrow also produces a longing in us, a desire to clear up messes. It is a longing to have done what God wants done, the way He wants it done.

Godly sorrow also produces zeal. There is a passion to go beyond the immediate problem or issue and prove the intensity of one's love for good. It leads to growth in holiness in all areas of one's life.

There is in godly sorrow a righting of wrongs done, a setting straight in the practical arena of things and relationships that have been damaged. The wrongs that had accompanied the sins of the Corinthians were righted, the damage repaired and restitution made. Guilty parties were held responsible and slighted parties were compensated. Justice triumphed.

This work of godly sorrow in the Corinthians had led them to respond perfectly to the situation. They took all the appropriate action in whatever the matter was that Paul had brought to their attention. They had proven by their response that the evil they could have been accused of was not true of them. They had proved their innocence in whenever the matter was. This does not mean that Paul had unjustly accused them. Rather, they had proved their good hearts, that they were innocent of the evil intent that they could have been accused of.

7:12 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.

Sometimes people forget just how important certain things and relationships in their lives are. They thoughtlessly put them at risk, and then go through the deepest of agonies when they are damaged or lost. Good leaders know how to keep people mindful of what is at stake in such thoughtless moments, and wise followers know how to ponder such things ahead of time.

Paul reveals here what his motives were in writing to the Corinthians what had apparently been a very confrontive letter. He wanted them to have a taste of what it would be like to lose their relationship to him and the other apostles and to some degree to the Lord. He wanted them to know the depth of their own love for him. He wanted them to feel it. When people are acting impulsively and based on feeling, as apparently the Corinthians were, this is what they need. The Corinthians were apparently not dealing with a sinful individual in their midst out of fear of losing the relationship with him. Paul has made them feel the pain and sorrow of the damage

relationship with him. They are then forced to make a choice in their feelings for Paul and his company and this push them in the right direction.

This is a power that leaders have but this is a card they should play very sparingly, never just to advance her own interests. Only when the interests of the Lord are severely at risk and only with much prayer and soul-searching should leaders do what Paul has done here. Good leaders, Spirit-led leaders, do it with righteous and holy results. The Corinthians through Paul's letter, are stripped of all façade and pretense by God himself, come face-to-face with her deep love for Paul and what the loss of that relationship would mean. It is a wonderful experience that all should pray for, to know what they're really feeling and thinking!

7:13 For this reason we have been comforted. Besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

Paul had been comforted by the response of the Corinthians to his correction because it proved both their love of Christ and their love for him. It rekindled their commitment to the truth that Paul had brought them. He was also blessed by how the Corinthians had ministered to Titus. He had great joy from his visit with them and his spirit was "refreshed" by them. The word for refresh is αναπεπνυται. It is a perfect tense verb, so it is an action that transpired in the past with an ongoing result that was evident even with the passing of time. The word itself means to rest and relax. Etymologically, it is a compound formed by prefixing the preposition ana to the word παυω meaning to stop. When ana occurs in compounds it often conveys intensity, or repetition, or reversal. So the etymological meaning, to stop repeatedly, or to really stop came to be used for rest.

One can only imagine the anxious spirit Titus had as he arrived in Corinth, sent on this very rough errand. But through the Corinthians response to himself and to Paul's words, the turmoil of his spirit was stopped and came to be at rest.

The ministry has its own ebb and flow. There are times when the actions of people bring us great turmoil and anxiety, no rest of spirit, as Paul mentioned in 2:13. But the actions of people can also produce encouragement and rest in our spirits. This is the nature of the work and the wise minister is not surprised by the extreme of the day-to-day experience.

7:14 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.

Paul was proud of the Corinthian church. He was proud of their progress in the Gospel and the desire to do what was right and good. He boasted of them to Titus. But there was a haunting fear that he had assessed them wrong, that they did not have such good hearts and would not live up to Paul's representation of them to others. Their reputation was on the line. Titus' mission was a test for them. They passed with flying colors! Paul says that Titus experienced the truth of his words, finding that all Paul had represented about them was in fact, truth. Paul's word about them was true and his assessment of them correct.

7:15 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.

There is a special warmth, a Spirit-directed leader feels toward obedient and respectful followers. Fleshly leaders might see in such people in opportunity for advantage. Spirit-directed leaders give more of their hearts and souls in such situations so that the abuse that plagues many human institutions does not affect the church where the Holy Spirit is directing the affairs. Fleshly Christian leaders are another matter, as history continues to demonstrate.

Where Paul was anxious about the situation in Corinth, specifically, whether there was any tenderness in their heart toward the truth and towards him, he finds that they are yielding to the Spirit's convictions and are soft and moldable toward Paul's representative, Titus. Fear and trembling marked their reception of him.

These are two dramatic terms to us. They were common in the vernacular of the day, used to describe those who are submitting themselves properly to authority. It was the authority of Jesus Christ that the Corinthians had been reminded of through Paul. We all need that from time to time a shakeup of sorts. This jars us from the comfortable form of Christianity that we can easily settle into, where Christ is an authority but is restricted from those areas of our life that might upset our world. Paul's letter had brought renewal, a renewal of the Corinthian's submission to Christ's authority. That is always what renewal is about. The result is that Titus engages a group that receives him as Christ's representative and with the appropriate respect and eagerness to listen and obey.

7:16 I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.

It marks a wonderful landmark when we see in people their absolute obedience to their understanding of truth. We can be sure that where there is such submission, God will be faithful in bringing truth. The result is that such people might make mistakes due to ignorance, but they respond to the light. Toward such people we can have absolute confidence in everything. We have only to pray that God will provide them with the conviction of truth, a prayer He is certain to answer in the lives of the faithful. We only need to be bold enough to be willing to declare the truth to them when God so wishes to use us. When given the truth such people are predictable and to be blessed with such people is the greatest blessing any minister could ask for.

2 Corinthians 8

8:1 now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

Grace is the favor of God. It is not something Scripture portrays primarily as a warmth of feeling He has, though it certainly can involve that. It is not something we see even as simply a favorable outlook toward us. It manifests and demonstrates itself as God's power brought to bear on individuals to enable the extra-ordinary to happen. It interrupts the status quo so that there is a very different outcome than would naturally be expected.

In 6:1 the Corinthians were told not to receive the grace of God in vain. The idea is that grace can achieve a certain outcome. It can bring about extraordinary deeds of courage, strength, and endurance in us. Because God's grace has been freely given to us such deeds should characterize our lives. If we're not tackling and succeeding on things that are beyond us then we are not really seizing the opportunity that God's grace presents us with.

The Macedonian churches, those churches in the province of Greece located north of Corinth, where committed to something that was way beyond them. It was extraordinary. Paul wanted others to hear their great story. His purpose in revealing it to them would be that they go beyond the ordinary and accomplish the extraordinary. This is always God's plan in our life and is the reason for His grace. It was happening throughout an entire region, not just in a particular church.

8:2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

Something significant had happened in the Macedonian churches. They had a grace experience, meaning a special enablement of God that had led them to accomplish something that was on His heart for them to do. From an observer's point of view, they had experienced a "growth spurt." Truth was shaping their actions in a specific area so that a divine thing was now happening among them.

This verse summarizes how this work of grace unfolded in their collective life. Paul's wording is tricky to understand. But it is expressing some very significant thought. The main verb in the sentence is "overflowed." It is the English rendering of the Greek word *επερίσσευσεν*, meaning to super-abound, to be in excess, to be superfluous. There is a compound subject. Two things are said to have super-abounded, their abundance (same word in the noun form, *περίσσεια*) of joy and their deep poverty. So they were oversupplied by God's grace with joy even while living in deep poverty. That people in deep poverty would have great joy is this is abnormal from a human perspective or experience. It was God's work of grace that they had excessive joy in such dire circumstances.

Of this combination it is said to have overflowed. By that Paul is describing something like the chemical reaction when two different elements are combined. We are not told simply that the two elements "super-abounded," but that they "super-abounded" with a certain result. The action envisioned by this verb is governed by a preposition, *εἰς* with an accusative. This construction can be understood as describing the result of the action of the verb or as defining what the action of the verb has reference to. So we

see that richness of generosity is the end product that results from the combining of these two things, poverty and joy.

The full picture of that is this: amid a great trial, God's grace bestowed in the Macedonians great joy. The result was that despite deep poverty they gave with great generosity.

There are two lessons. First, joy does not relate to circumstances. It can be present in great quantity amid dire circumstances. Second, generosity does not relate to what one has or does not have. It can be extraordinary even in the grip of poverty. These two things are true because of the work of God's grace in individual lives. Grace transforms people and it completely alters the expected outcome of circumstances. Grace has produced irony after irony during God's dealings with men.

8:3 for I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord.

Paul had witnessed the work of grace in the lives of the Macedonians firsthand. He offers himself as a witness to their extraordinary sacrifice and obedience. There are three things mentioned about their giving here that are such that they are pleasing to God. First, they gave according to their ability. That is what God desires of us, nothing less. We are being obedient to give in proportion to how we've been blessed. Second, they gave beyond their ability. It is a great act of worship and faith when we give sacrificially, when our giving comes at some personal cost to us. Third, they gave of "their own accord." It was their idea. They did not have to be coerced or pressured in some way. They did it willingly. Paul will speak more of this in the ensuing verses. In these three things the Macedonians provided a great example for all ever since. Here is the challenge for us; if we are unable to follow it, we have fallen short of God's grace. We have missed out on work He wishes to do in this and through us.

8:4 Begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.

God had moved the hearts of those in Macedonia so much that they begged to give money. That is an amazing situation. They asked repeatedly so that Paul says they begged to do it. He states that they did so with much entreaty, literally with much encouragement. So these followers encouraged the leaders, that they should be allowed to give money to support the ministry. That is what the grace of God can bring about in lives. It is significant that grace from God produces acts of grace in His people. The word used here for favor is grace, the same word used to describe the favor of God in verse one that brings about the whole situation. It is strange compared to what we've become accustomed to in people of our times. Is a great work to ask God to do in our churches.

Grace produces great change. By grace we mean not just a certain doctrine, though that is part of it. But what is being spoken of in the Macedonians is in actual inflow of extra power and motivation from God, freely bestowed by Him for His own reasons. It is a power that accompanies an understanding of truth and leads to greater grasp and application of truth. The Macedonians had grasped eternity and the relative insignificance of earthly things and so their grip became looser on what little they had of worldly goods. In addition, their passion for the heavenly things had been stirred. So they begged for the opportunity to give.

The fruit of this extra-ordinary grace is not lacking today because God does not supply such grace. The experience of such grace is given to those who trust what He says. Extra-ordinary grace flows when there is faith that trusts God and what He has said more deeply. It reaches to the very end of itself, and the result is an extra-ordinary reach once God has added His supply of grace to it.

8:5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

What had Paul expected from the Macedonians? He had observed that people usually learn to give first of their things and through that routine of worship they began to dare to give themselves. The Macedonians had skipped ahead. They gave of themselves first. Then the giving of their things was only logical and natural. Theirs was an unexpected maturity and dedication and Paul recognize the uniqueness of it.

It is an important point that it is God's will that we give ourselves to Him and to those who serve Him. Our giving has not achieved its desired end until it has brought this about. This is God's will for us. For this we are made and by it we are filled to overflowing.

8:6 Consequently we urged Titus that as he previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

God had used Titus in some special way to start a work of God among the Corinthians. Works of God are wonderful, and they are clearly of Him. But they seldom occur apart from some key person that is available for God to use as an instrument. This should be clearly understood by us because the rarity of the exception is difficult to over-state. So when God works so that we see a need we should first pray and ask Him to meet that need. Then we should pray for a person through whom the need can be met. Then we should pray that God would meet that need through our effort and sacrifice.

The leader, Titus, was in this case exhorted by Paul that the wonderful work that God had begun in Corinth through him, needed to be brought to completion. In the Macedonians this had come about. Now in the Corinthian Church the work had to be completed. As the artist Charles Russell expressed in a classic Western painting, "meat's not meat till it's in the pan!" A commitment to give has not been completed until someone has received money. So Paul has urged Titus to gather the money together from among the Corinthians in accordance with what they had promised to give, and to oversee the details that would result in its delivery to those in need in Jerusalem. This work of Titus would involve education but also administration, as we see later in the chapter.

8:7 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.

It is instructive that a certain watchfulness or alertness must be present in us to bring about this manifestation of God's grace in our lives, this fruit of His hand working and stirring in us. There is a certain diligence and earnestness that we must supply in this matter. The Corinthians are said to "abound" (and the word means to overflow), in some very significant qualities and graces. It is no small matter to be commanded as one who abounds in faith, or in faithfulness in articulating that faith, or in knowledge,

or in one's overall zeal, or in having "caught" genuine love for the things and family of God. That is quite a list of very impressive qualities that are being manifested in the lives of the Corinthians.

But this work of giving should be cultivated alongside these others to complete the picture being given of Christ by Christians. The discipline of the habit of giving should not be viewed as cosmetic, or as a small matter. Its absence in a life should not be viewed as a minor inconsistency. Giving should be pursued as a grace of God. Even as we are convicted at our lack of love, or faith, or by a failure to "speak up for the Lord," or a lack of zeal in the things of God, so we should be disturbed when we fail to be obedient in the matter of giving money to support the family of God.

Given these words of Paul, inspired by the Spirit, and therefore expressing the mind of God himself in this matter, it is difficult to imagine a gentle or condoning response had the Corinthians failed to "step up to the plate" and respond generously, as God had prospered them, to this need. Yet in stating this, Paul is not heavy-handed. He wants to appeal to their sense of logic and to their spiritual bond with God, His son Christ, and through the Holy Spirit to God's larger family.

8:8—I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

Paul believes that the earnestness of others provides an excellent standard by which we can measure how sincere we are in the things that matter to God. Now matters of faith are in a sense between us and our God. But we can find our way in them by watching others who are walking with Him on the same path. Our sincerity in the faith is "documented," or we might say "certified," when we rise to the level to which others have been inspired. The example of others ultimately becomes a key thing in our own growth, and an indicator of our own sincerity. If we're not rising to the level of the life others have risen to, the ultimate reason is within us. It is as AW Towzer has written, "One thing is certain, we are each as full of the Spirit as we desire to be! But to Paul our earnestness should not just rise to the level of the earnestness of other Christians, as the next verse will show.

8:9 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.

Paul turns the Corinthians not to the Macedonians for an example of earnestness, but to Christ himself. Ultimately it is His earnestness in the things of God that is what we seek to imitate. It is our zeal compared to His that speaks to our maturity, and our maturity comes about as we listen to Him. Graces, qualities built into our lives by the power and work of God, are modeled to their highest degree in Christ, the God-man.

Before Christ became a man, His existence was a glorious one. We need only examine the appearances of the angel of Yahweh, whom we believe was the pre-incarnate Christ, to imagine the riches that were Christ's. But in the submission to the plan of the triune God, He who was a part of the Trinity, willingly laid aside the glory of that existence. Though He in essence remained God, He became a man and lived as we must live. We believe this means He lived by faith, even as we must. He did not draw from his own innate divine power and authority to do miracles or to alter the nature of things, but by faith sought the Father's leading and did only what God the Father was doing (John 5:12). Jesus accomplished God's work by being a perfect vessel whom the

Holy Spirit could fill and empower and so accomplish the Father's perfect will in every moment of his life.

And so, Jesus became a man and lived as we live, and finally died at the hands of sinful people to pay for the he sins of humanity. He did this so that they had opportunity to be right with God and experience the filling of the Holy Spirit in the way He Himself had. He lived as a human and died for humanity and remains forever human so that we might be made rich in this way. If we believe in Him, we are made at that instant right with God and through the Holy Spirit can serve Him and through works of faith and dependence on Him can lay hold of rich eternal reward that He is pleased to grant to all, reward that is obtained through our faithfulness to Him.

In this verse then, we see some of the great truths of Christianity referenced, the overwhelming grace that shapes God's dealings with humanity. The "gnosis" (the act of Christ's emptying Himself by taking on human flesh), the salvation of man, the redemption of humanity, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the substitutionary atonement, all of these are represented in this profound statement that "for our sakes He was made poor, so that we by His poverty might be made rich." He is our example. No one has stooped lower than Christ and no one has given up so much as He did. We must not forget that this short, pithy statement about Jesus was given to motivate us give money to our church!

8:10 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 to desire to do it.

Paul is not giving a command to the Corinthians, but he is encouraging that which he believes will be profitable for them in every sense. It will be good for them collectively and individually. It will be good for their spiritual health. It will be good for their credibility in the wider church community. It will be good for them financially. In every way this act of helping other Christians in need by sacrificing out of their abundance will be good for them. It will be to their advantage—profit in terms of all that is valuable and worthwhile.

8:11 but now finish it also; the just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there might be also the completion of it by your ability.

The Corinthians had led the way a year earlier in the desire to have this ministry to the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Now was time for them to lead the way in terms of the actual gift so that they would follow through on what they've committed to.

In all matters of faith there is the need to have the right desire, but also translate that desire into the appropriate deeds. It is good to have a righteous desire, to desire to do the thing God wants done (and that is the only thing that makes a desire of any sort good). But it is the scourge of our humanity to understand God's heart in a matter and allow some lesser desire to carry the day. Our faith is to be lived in a way that strengthens us to rise above such a low level of spirituality. It is our greatest joy and privilege to know that we have completely executed the plan of God in a matter. There is great reward in living life in that way.

There is grace in this statement. There is an urging to follow through and make good on the expectation that they had raised. There is also in the last three words an allowance for the practical aspect of supply. This will be developed further in the next verse. A primary point in this passage that God only requires us to give in accordance

with our ability, as the next verse indicates. God does not expect what lies beyond our ability to reasonably do.

8:12 for if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have.

Giving does not need to be like the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-42), to be acceptable. The extreme of the Macedonians giving did not make the Corinthians act any less acceptable.

There are two things stated here that make giving pleasing to God. First the readiness must be present. God wants our gifts to be given willingly, not begrudgingly. So giving is acceptable when it is done with joy.

Second, giving should be done in proportion to our ability. This seems to be the rule of the New Testament. Ten percent of one's income is never mentioned in the epistles in any of the instructions on giving. It is the standard of the Old Testament, the word "tithe" meaning "one tenth." It is probably a concept that gives us a general idea of our level of obedience in the matter of giving. But the principle we should remember from this verse is that giving is acceptable when it is according to what we have.

It is conceivable that ten percent could be more than we could afford. It is also likely that it is often not as much as we can afford. What we have should be ruled entirely by our Lord. It is when that is happening that we begin to understand what we need, what we simply crave, and what we can afford in the matter of giving. God is mindful of the cost of living. He does not require as His general rule, that we give all we have. But if we are being led by Him we can be certain that we will be ready to give and we will give an amount that is proportionate to how He has prospered us.

8:13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality

Giving should not be orchestrated for the purpose of creating a standard of living for some that is above that of others. Giving is a means of people who have more sharing what they have with those who have less. Paul was not asking Gentile churches to give what they could not responsibly give to enrich the Jerusalem church to the point of living in luxury. The purpose of this giving was to bring about equality, not by precise exacting economic standard, but in the more general sense of relieving the suffering of Jerusalem saints brought on by famine. It is meant to bring equality in terms of life's necessities that Paul is aiming for.

8:14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality,

This verse develops the idea of equality and Christian responsibility. The situation in Jerusalem is mentioned in Acts 11:27-30, and the response of the church to that situation is mentioned there as well. It was a time of famine in Jerusalem. We surmise that food was available but very expensive, so that money could bring relief, and ensure that the things essential to survival could be gained.

Christian responsibility is defined here as sharing one's abundance or excess to supply the lack of other believers. There is no large-scale relief effort for the general citizenry of Judea and Palestine that we are aware of. Paul's words have to do with what goes on between believers.

Paul's wording seems to make it clear that this practice of responding to such times of need should be ongoing among churches and should come back around to the Corinthian church should the need arise. But again, it is not seemed to be an economic subculture, a form of communal sharing that Paul is establishing. It is a means of mitigating suffering. It is equality in the sense of relief from suffering that comes under the realm of Christian responsibility. This is not an economic manifesto but more of a plan for responding to catastrophic need.

8:15 as it is written, "he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack."

This is a quote from Exodus 16:18. It describes the situation as it stood day after day as God cared for Israel by sending manna and the people gathered it. We are to remember that there is a danger in having too much, as well as there is in having too little. Paul's way of dealing with both is through proportional giving. Paul's way is not to have everyone give the same amount, but to give as we have been blessed and so bring about the equality spoken of in the previous verse. If we are informed and sensitive regarding needs, and if we respond obediently to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can be sure that God will bring about in the church community a situation where his own have what they need and where no one who's been blessed with prosperity falls into sin in managing their wealth.

8:16 but thanks be to God, who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.

Earnestness is a precious commodity. Where there is an earnestness there is the initiation and completion of what God wants. There is execution and follow-through. Where there is no earnestness there is rhetoric and Christianity only in form. Earnestness ultimately comes from God in the sense that apart from His grace it would never occur to us to pursue His business at all, much less earnestly. Earnestness comes from us in the sense that we are commanded to work at it (Romans 12:11). When we feel it flagging, we are to push beyond what we want while asking God to rekindle it.

Titus had been so stirred in this matter, specifically to involve the Corinthians in helping solve the need in Jerusalem. He was convinced this was what God had planned. The result was that he earnestly pursued the idea in a very hands-on way that the ensuing verses will describe.

There is such a partnership in the matter of earnestness and in accomplishing work that we are to cultivate with God. We can be certain that where earnestness is lacking it is not because God is unwilling to give it but because no one is allowing their heart to be stirred by what is stirring God.

8:17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.

Earnestness in this matter started with the Lord. It was "caught" by Paul and other leaders and was then "caught" by Titus. The result was that Titus owned the matter as if it was his own. He took initiative and personal responsibility to involve the people of Corinth. He did this because he was being led by the Spirit in the matter and led to lead others in the matter. The earnestness of Titus was the catalyst that brought about the obedience of the Corinthians. Earnestness and initiative combine to make a vision reality when the vision is of God and people believe it.

8:18 and we are sending along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread throughout all the churches;

The name of this "famous" brother is not given by Paul, so familiar to the churches was he. He was effective in the things relating to the gospel. He was likely an effective leader and communicator who would prove very helpful in the day-to-day challenges of ministry. This man, whoever he was, was to accompany Titus, who would come to Corinth to re-state the mission and goal and then to make sure it was going to come about as expected. Paul himself would arrive to receive the funds given for the Judean saints. But there would be this preliminary check to make sure that all was on course. Paul was leaving nothing to chance.

8:19 not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord himself, and to show our readiness,

This brother, whose name we do not know, had been appointed in some official capacity by the churches regarding this specific ministry of collecting funds for the relief of the Judean church. In the fledgling movement of Christianity there was always some form and order developing, though we are uncertain as to its precise nature.

There is evidence here, though indirect, of some sort of elective process whereby this individual was appointed. The word for appointed is χειροτονθεις from χειροτονεω. It is a compound form from the word for hand and the word for stretch. It could mean to stretch the hand or to vote. While this does not demand an election, since the word simply means to appoint, it is of more than passing interest how the world was formed.

The work of gathering money for the Judean churches is said to be a gracious work carried out for two reasons. First, it is for the glory of God, which should always be a primary goal in any ministry. We do ministry not for how it makes us feel, nor even for the immediate result, in this case the relief of suffering. Ultimately, we do it because it brings God glory. It is right because it does this. God's glory was at stake in this matter and would have been violated if part of the church who had an abundance let another part of God's Church who were suffering simply continue to suffer. A caring family is a tribute to a loving Father.

This work was being carried out for a second reason, to satisfy and further stimulate the zeal of the givers for the things of God. Zeal acted on begets more zeal, and ministry gives birth to more ministry. Participation gives birth to increased vision. Paul and the other leaders knew this was good for the church's health and reputation, That

the Gentiles should minister to the Jews in this way would glorify God as the two groups are brought together, and the zeal of all would be stirred.

8:20 taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift;

Paul knew that a noble act, particularly in finance and giving, can be discredited if suspicions are raised regarding how it is done. Extra precautions must be taken to avoid such a situation. The appointment by the church of a representative would build a "firewall" to protect Paul from false accusations. Gathering and delivering are not the only concerns in financial dealings in the church. Appearances are critical and it is a wise leader who plans in such a way that there is no basis for rumor and that scrutiny will reveal nothing but what they have represented as reality.

8:21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also the sight of men.

There are two things that must be considered by us in all areas of ministry. The first is how does God, who sees all things including our hearts, view this that we are doing? Is it above board and sincere in His eyes? That is first and foremost. The second is how will people, who cannot see our hearts and can only examine objective evidence, perceive this? Will they, with their limited ability to judge, see this as above board and sincere. Both matters are important because perception is the only reality humans know. It is a wise leader who; like Paul, is concerned with how things appear in God's sight and in the opinion of people. They are two different perspectives, and it is painful to be reminded in such matters that people are unable to see from God's perspective. It better look right to them, or it will certainly bring pain to those who orchestrated it.

8:22 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.

There was three individuals Paul focused on in the party of those who would make the trip to Corinth to prepare things ahead of time for the arrival of Paul to receive their gift. They planned to receive a series of offerings (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4), watch over these funds and then go with Paul to Jerusalem to deliver the gift. There was in the party Titus (verse 18), the "famous brother" (verse 18), and the person mentioned in this verse. We do not know his name and obviously very little about him. But it is a wonderful credential to have said of you that you are one who has been often tested. This does not mean he had been set up often for possible failure. The word used for tested comes from δοκιμάζω. This word is not generally used to describe the tests given to prove the genuine or fraudulent character of a thing. It is tests given to certify to others that it is genuine. This man had not been under surveillance. It is one thing to prove faithful in that situation, quite another to prove faithful on in ongoing basis when no one is watching. This man had proven respectable and that he could be trusted. We would say he is certifiably trustworthy.

So this man had proved worthy of trust, and this is likely said of him in the sense that he repeatedly got done what he was sent to do. Now he was very confident with the prognosis of the mission to Corinth because of his confidence in the Corinthians. We almost hear in these words this man saying, "Done deal, like spearing fish in a bowl!"

So confident was he in the Corinthian church that he was eager to make the trip and get the mission accomplished. This is a very complementary picture both of the man and of the Corinthians. It is a leader who like Paul understands human nature well and chooses leaders well, who "calls people up" by encouraging the good he has seen in them.

8:23 as for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.

Of the three key people in this party traveling to Corinth, Titus needed no introduction. He worked at Paul's side in Corinth. They knew him and his character. He was an extension of Paul and nothing more needed to be said. The others in the party had an official capacity of some sort. Whether they had been officially selected, like the "famous" man of verse 18, to be a part of this, or simply recruited by Paul we do not know. They were quite possibly the "security force" that would physically guard the money on the journey. They were not just "muscle" however they were a glory to Christ. Paul made sure that those who were a part of any phase of this mission had this important element of character, for this is what allows us and our mission to be perceived as Christian.

8:24 therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and our reason for boasting about you.

The Corinthians had an opportunity to demonstrate that their reputation had a solid basis, and to do so in a very dramatic way. The phrase "openly before the churches" literally means "under the faces of the churches." The Corinthians could demonstrate in a powerful way, as if in their presence and before their very eyes their love and concern for them, in their obedience to the mission.

We can make at least two observations about this. The first is that such is the power of money when used rightly. The very thing that when loved becomes the root of all kinds of evil, becomes the instrument of great good, especially in the times when distance made it impossible for face-to-face contact. Money is a tangible means of expressing love and concern both for God's work and for others.

The second observation we can make is that ministry and mission require examples, people that can be pointed out and "bragged about." When we have opportunity to be an example, we should regard it as the greatest of opportunities. Like defining moments in athletic, military or business careers, there are strategic opportunities as Christians to be extraordinary in terms of our impact. These show our willingness to be lifted to the next level of faith and sacrifice. They become the inspiration that others need to rise themselves. This is the opportunity to which Paul is summoning the Corinthians and it is a great and significant one.

2 Corinthians 9

9:1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the Saints.

Logically speaking it was beyond what was needed for Paul to be speaking to the Corinthians about their need to do their part in this ministry of giving. The next verse will tell why. Paul states this idea and it is good for leaders to do in these situations as Paul did. Paul's reminder was "superfluous" in the sense that their passion for this mission had always been clear.

Logically then, they did not need to be reminded. But for practical standpoint the leader must make sure something happens and that it happens when it needs to and to the degree it needs to. So in these statements Paul gives the Corinthians credit, and make certain he does not insult their intelligence, but then lays before them the urgency of the schedule and the other practical matters.

The result is a reminder that may have ruffled a few but ensures that the objective will be gained. Give them credit, but don't assume anything. That is the rule for the leader. In talking about it there is less opportunity for false expectations to linger.

9:2 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.

It was superfluous for Paul to be reminding the Corinthians of the importance of this ministry due to the zeal they had shown a year earlier. Titus' and Paul's description of their zeal in this matter had stirred others to act in the neighboring province. But there was the chance, as there is in every human being, that zeal is momentary, a "flash in the pan." Fervor can give way to expedience very easily in the matter of money. So Paul in a very direct way explains that both he and the Corinthians are "on the spot" now. It is always awful when those who have instigated a movement or mission do not follow through and others must make it up. Paul wants to avoid this scenario.

9:3 but I have sent the brother and, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared.

This delegation of Titus, the two individuals mentioned previously (8:18, 22), and the unspecified "brethren" (8:23), would serve the purpose of preparing the gift of the Corinthians. The specifics of what this meant would be laid out in ensuing verses, but this was their purpose. Paul was leaving nothing to chance. Leaders take steps to help people follow through; and in this life there is always a tendency not to follow through on promises and commitments.

9:4 otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence.

There is shame that comes about when commitments are not met. There is embarrassment on the part of persons to whom the commitment was made and on the part of those who made the commitment. There is reaction from those who observed from the outside. In this case the Macedonians, who had been so generous amid their poverty. If the Corinthians did not follow through it would trigger

embarrassment in both Paul, who had apparently spoken openly of what was sure to be a large donation on the part of Corinthians, and in the Corinthians themselves, who had been blessed to be able to give. Paul wants that experience, and the ensuing awkwardness that can easily lead to a loss of fellowship, to be avoided. Good leaders realize that such an awkwardness is rarely over, and in nearly all cases changes the relationship between the parties forever. They take steps to avoid it.

9:5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.

In the NASB rendering one could easily get the impression that Paul wanted to make sure the gift was large, as promised. For the word rendered "bountiful" is εὐλογίαν, which means praise or blessing. Paul's concern is that this might not be affected by "covetousness," the rendering for the Greek word πλεονεξιον, which can mean greed or evil desire. The thing Paul was concerned about was not just the size of the gift but the spirit he would find in the Macedonians and would observe in the Corinthians. Would they see those who were eager to bless, or would they see those who were giving more than they wanted to? Either can be sin. The Lord wants our giving to come from a cheerful and willing heart. The delegation that was traveling ahead of time to Corinth would be checking on cultivating the right spirit in the givers as much as they would the gift itself.

9:6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.

The words "I say" are not in the original. And reading them one might think that Paul is stating some new principle that he is introducing. The principle is an old one, affirmed and taught throughout the Old Testament. This verse begins simply with the words "but this," or "now this." The idea is that at this point in the letter Paul is going to share some words that the Corinthians needed to think through as they carried out this ministry of giving. The entire mission should result in a certain giving habit among all the people who participated. The principle is straightforward and simple to understand. As in all areas of life, one reaps what they sow. In the area of giving this means that however God chooses to reward someone for their financial contribution of ministry, he will do it in a way that is commensurate with your level of sacrifice. If you are generous in your gift, he will be generous in bestowing your reward. Again, the word εὐλογια is used and rendered "bountiful." It conveys giving with blessing, a spirit which goes beyond what is expected. So Paul is not concerned about amount and size of the gift, but relates that to the matter of the spirit of the giver. A spirit of blessing brings about a gift beyond the amount required.

9:7 Set each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Here Paul says our giving is to be as we purpose in our hearts and as we decide. There is no set amount or compulsory amount. That is the first thing we can observe in this statement. Second thing we can observe is that to follow through is the important thing, not simply to intend to give. We are not to give grudgingly, and the word means painfully (λυπησ). Third, giving is according to our heart not against it. But we can be certain that if our heart does not lead us to give regularly, something is wrong with our

heart. Giving should flow from a heart in tune with his, but not a heart that has been drug along against its will.

This verse expresses the critical element of giving to which all Christians must rise. We must learn to give, but we must also learn to give hilariously, with great joy. It is more natural to wince as we give, to think of what we could have done with the money. It should be that our understanding of eternal things grows so that we wince when we must spend money on something instead of giving it. Our faith and trust in God should go to the point that we experience unfettered joy and reactive giving.

And so, in our vernacular, what we feel as we put the money in the plate means something to God. In fact, we are not told often in Scripture what characteristics of man God really loves; but here we are told that He loves (αγαπα) a cheerful giver.

9:8 And God can make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.

God is "able to abound all grace to you." God can control and provide those circumstances that come into our lives that allow us to have the money we need and beyond. They can by His command abound, and "to us." The preposition is εἰς and it communicates here the fact that God can bring such blessings our direction, or our way.

That God can do this involves three things. He is able in terms of His power, which is limitless. He is able in terms of His own desire that is a product of His own love and grace toward humanity. He is able in terms of His justice since His grace has provided Jesus Christ to pay the just penalty for our sins and so enabled Him to behave graciously toward humanity.

Paul speaks then of what generally characterizes God's rule in a life; He blesses so that people are self-sufficient and then blesses so that they have beyond what they need so that additional "good works" can be funded. In the original, the terms "all things," "all times," and "all self-sufficiency" occur consecutively, so that it reads "in order that in all things, at all times, all self – sufficiency having, you might abound." The self-sufficiency is not the sort that walls off someone to the church community. It is self-sufficiency in the sense of not being dependent on the alms and gifts of others. So while we must take great pains to avoid the error of the prosperity gospel that links wealth to spirituality, it is undeniable that God's general pattern is that His people have enough to meet their own needs and to be able to give to the needs of others. This is brought about by the grace of God and is founded on His ability to work in the unseen realms to impact financial affairs of individuals. For evidence of this persistent and gracious enablement of God, Paul will cite the Scripture, Psalm 112:9 to be precise.

9:9 as it is written, "He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever."

The potential impact of God's graciousness has long intrigued those who walk with Him. What would be the potential of such a life that took perfect advantage of His vast grace? Psalm 112 seems addressed by Yahweh to that intriguing thought. It follows Psalm 110, regarded by Jews and Christians alike as speaking of the Messiah. In Psalm 110 David projected the reign of this one, the Adonai, the Christ, his own offspring and yet also his own Adonai, or ruler. This is followed by Psalm 111, an alphabetical acrostic

that offers praise to Yahweh for His great goodness. Noticeable in this Psalm are three similar lines. The first is “His righteousness endures forever,” a line that will also appear in the next Psalm. The second is “He will remember His covenant forever” (verse 5). The third is similar, “He has ordained His covenant forever” (verse 9). Praise is appropriate to Yahweh because of these themes that are the outflow of the blessing David projected that would come to humanity through the Messiah. Interestingly Psalm 111 ends with these words, “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.”

From the statement of the pivotal nature of the fear of Yahweh and obedience to His commandments that ends Psalm 111, Psalm 112 begins with proclaiming the blessing of the man who fears the Lord and who “greatly delights in His commandments.” It goes on to speak of the potential power of Yahweh that would flow through such a righteous person. The line that appeared early in Psalm 111, “His righteousness endures forever” occurs twice in this Psalm. In between is the similar line, “His righteousness will be remembered forever.”

The hope is conveyed by Psalm 112 that just one person whose righteousness would endure forever could have an astounding impact on creation. The result of the life of such a righteous man, would be that the wicked would “gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.” The Psalmist is saying that the desire that has driven evil, to be as God, will be forever removed and the wicked will be forever removed, by just one righteous person. We know that person as Jesus Christ, the seed of promise spoke of by Yahweh in Genesis 3:15.

Paul quotes verse 9 from Psalm 112. It is a statement made just before this grand ending of the Psalm is given. It is about two principal characteristics of THE one man who fears Yahweh—the Christ. The characteristics are generosity and the righteousness that endures forever. This quote is given by Paul as evidence that in Christ we find the full extent of the power of Yahweh’s grace. Therefore, we find the full measure of what can be ours in Christ. Our trust can find strength in this example of Jesus. We find in Christ generosity and righteousness.

We can make at least two observations about this use of Psalm 112:9 by Paul. First, by this same grace seen in Christ and made available through Him, God enables His children to be self-sufficient to “have an abundance for every good deed.” Christ-likeness includes this very pragmatic wisdom to rule material things well so as to be able to be generous with them. This is God’s desire and His pattern over centuries of time that He has worked in those who walk with Him. It has been an observable feature of God’s dealings with man that those who fear God are able to “scatter” their own blessing around and in doing so are generous towards the poor.

Second, we will see in the next verse that there is linkage between this generosity in material things and the accrual of spiritual things, one’s harvest of righteousness. This likely should be understood through Jesus’ statement that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:34). The person of enough trust to obey Yahweh with their material things has already embraced what will lead to many spiritual blessings, true wealth (Luke 16:11). Battling successfully one’s trust issues with respect to trusting God in material things pays great dividends in many other spiritual matters.

The phrase, "His righteousness abides forever" likely is meant to stir us as readers to remember the residual and multiplication effect of "scattering abroad." There is an investment in eternal processes of Yahweh that is made through our generosity. We can start something that lives on to eternity through earthly things. We have chosen to partner in righteous things.

9:10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increased the harvest of your righteousness;

Paul brings together all the inferences he has been making in the direct statement about God's blessing on those who give and His enablement in their behalf so that they can give more. He uses the figure of the sower of seed to listeners that were closer to the earth than we are. There was an agrarian society and they understood seeding, harvesting, and the like.

Just as God has created the entire wonder of plants and their seeds, He likewise is the giver of material gifts that we in turn can enjoy, invest and multiply, then give away. It is like the fact that God supplies the earth with seed. This seed, coupled with our efforts becomes bread which then sustains us. Now Paul says that God, who has ordained this process and sustains it among humanity, has ordained another process. He supplies us with money. As we use it righteously, as He dictates, we gain a harvest of things temporal that is more than we ourselves need. The excess we can be generous with and give away and so gain things eternal. His provision and our righteous stewardship of it work together to produce a harvest, both earthly and eternal.

No investment made in eternal matters will deteriorate. We must remember that in those few places where God speaks of a rate of return, we find He always plays well! So we see that as we give out of what God has given us we are given more, enabling us to give more. This is His grace given as the means for us to share and interest in the growth and increase of the kingdom of God.

But the harvest of righteousness is more than the investment made financially that will pay off eternally. To repeat, there is a linkage in Scripture between how we handle material things and what we come to know, understand, and experience of spiritual things (Luke 16:11). The person of enough trust to obey Yahweh with their material things has already embraced what will lead to many spiritual blessings, true wealth (Luke 16:11). They have embraced faith and trust in Yahweh over trust in themselves and things. Battling successfully one's trust issues with respect to trusting God in material things pays great dividends in many other spiritual matters. The heart of Yahweh opens wide to those of growing trust in Him (Genesis 18:17ff).

9:11 you will be enriched in every thing for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

This is the direction those who are faithful in giving are taken. They are enriched. It does not mean that material wealth results in every individual case. Jesus himself, though certainly faithful in giving, was not enriched in material things. Neither was Paul. Wealth or enriched in this situation means that one is blessed with more than what they need to meet their necessities. This is the general pattern among God's people. Those who faithfully give are enriched for the purpose of meeting needs. In

other words, they are blessed with what meets their needs and receive more so they can give even more.

This in turn combines with the effort of others and God is thanked for His generosity, and the generation of His character in His family through His Spirit. All of us must realize that our giving produces thanksgiving in others, not to us ourselves but to God. It is possible to accomplish the spiritual through the material, and even through that which if we love it, it becomes the root of all sorts of evil. This product of thanksgiving to God is a major thing to Paul, and he goes on to speak of it even more.

9:12—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.

In the human realm the use and handling of money and material things sends messages. If one speaks of their faith and then handles money without integrity or wisdom, they have little credibility. Often people withhold their acceptance of someone's message until they see "proof." True generosity speaks loudly to such people. One can only imagine the doubt in the minds of the Jewish believers in Judea about the sincerity of the gentiles. The generosity of the Corinthians and others would do much to assuage such doubts. There was tremendous power in the generosity of gentile believers that could strongly unite the fledgling Christian Church. Thanksgiving has tremendous capacity to unite diverse people.

The ministry of giving to the needy saints in Judea was being pursued by the Corinthians and it was doing a greater work than simply meeting practical needs. All giving does this greater work when done faithfully and for the right reasons. It is not just the purchase of goods that it brings about. It is thanksgiving to God that is its crowning achievement.

There is a sense of awe inspired by generosity that stimulates prayers of gratefulness in people, strengthens faith, and transforms outlooks. Even that does not quite say enough, for that leaves the impact of giving in the human realm. These words of Paul suggest more than that. The work of giving filled up the needs of the saints, then overflowed, going beyond that to God Himself. In other words, it ministered to God. It is not that God needs to be thanked. It is that He is ministered to as He is thanked. Giving when done faithfully has the capacity to minister to God not just people, and it is for this reason that it is always blessed by Him. God cannot be out given, and every act of ministry to Him will be repaid multiple times.

9:13 because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.

Grammatically, this verse is a clause that modifies the thought of the verbal idea "overflowing through much thanksgiving to God" in the previous verse. It is detail added to that idea so the reader can better understand what was occurring. The ministry of giving has the effect of stimulating thanksgiving among believers because it certifies, or documents, something about the giver, the effectiveness of the gospel, and the reality of God.

Regarding the giver, it certifies that they believe the gospel, because in giving to the needs of others they are obeying it. Regarding the gospel, it testifies of its power to affect lives, because through it people are moved to minister to the needs of those

they don't even know, just because of the idea that they are fellow believers. Regarding God, it testifies that He is both immanent and transcendent. He is concerned about his own, yet above them and able to orchestrate events to provide for them in times of need.

It is no small matter or trivial pursuit this ministry of giving. It is a matter of obedience. It is a matter of being consistent rather than hypocritical. It is "fellowship" in action. In fact, the word rendered "contribution" in the NASB is *koinonias*. The receivers were thankful for the liberality of the Corinthians "fellowship."

When we give, we are sharing in the lives and work of others seriously, not just with rhetoric. When Christianity impacts the bank account it is cause for thanksgiving because it is a reminder that God and his truth are alive and very much at work changing people. It is the glory of new birth on display.

9:14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

The recipients of the Corinthians gifts pray in an earnest way for them. Best, through this "project," the apostles have brought together the Gentile and Jewish churches. They are now ministering to each other and caring for each other, each in the way that they are able.

Giving always accomplishes more than its financial impact. Here Paul describes a depth of fellowship that was developing before the gift was received. The Jerusalem saints were pondering what grace had achieved in these predominantly Gentile churches that they should have such concern for those known only through Paul to them. So the section draws to a close the idea of God's overflowing grace, even as it had begun in 8:1.

9:15 thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Paul saves the explanation for all that has been orchestrated among the churches in this matter of giving and his statement of the primary motivation for giving, to the end when he is ready to move on to other matters. God gave Himself to mankind. He became mortal flesh that we might not just hear the truth, but that we might see it. In doing this he revealed who He was and who we are in relationship to Him. He revealed the truth about all things, for all things must be understood in terms of His design and purpose for them. And He gave that mortal life up for us, dying in our place, enduring the punishment for our sins. And then to those who believe this He imputes to their account his own righteousness, so that they stand in his presence not only clean from all wrongdoing but credited with all that He views as perfect and right. We cannot fathom completely the value of this gift because we have not seen all that it brings to us. It remains for the present "indescribable."

2 Corinthians 10

10:1 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!

With these words Paul transitions to his next concern. In doing so he clearly switches his tone. His remarks become very pointed and direct, beginning with the sarcasm of this verse. There is an ominous tone to the following chapters as he defends himself and his relationship to some of the Corinthians. It all seems headed for conflict. He is responding to those who have taken up a position against him. From what we can piece together these opponents had made some very hurtful remarks of a personal nature about things such as his appearance, his speech, and his supposed lack of courage.

As Paul directly addresses these he opens with a statement of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Meekness is not weakness but refers to the strength of character that allows one to respond to a situation with just the right emotion. Meek people use neither too much emotion nor too little. Christ is the perfect example of meekness. His emotions were perfectly ruled by the Holy Spirit. He also perfectly modeled the quality of gentleness, applying to his words only what force was necessary to effectively deal with the matter. He never used a little more for revenge and never moved beyond the agenda of God the Father. Paul states this to show that his words, though they will be intense, have been submitted to the rule of Christ. The Holy Spirit orchestrates these words to show that what follows is righteous and holy, a God-orchestrated response to Paul's distractors.

Paul refers to one of the personal statements that has been made regarding him, indicating that he was two-faced, lacking in courage. We would say he was "all bark and no bite!" They used the term "meek" as meaning "weak." The lesson that they will witness is one on meekness. But it will be a meekness of Christ, which they knew was not anything to trifle with.

10:2 I asked that when I'm present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I purpose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.

There is great moderation and temperance evidenced in Paul's words he has chosen here. Clearly, he has decided on a course of action that will become confrontational and unpleasant. But this is not something he wants to do. He has decided it must be done, that certain behavior demands it. It would be an unpleasant task. His course was dictated by what was right, not by what was pleasant.

The word he uses for ask is *δεομαι*, a word often used of prayer and formal requests. It reflects a desire for something to change to make the unpleasant thing unnecessary. The word for propose is *λογιζομαι*, meaning to calculate. It expresses an analytical type of thinking process with a conclusion reached based on careful judgment of all the factors. It is used when our faith is "reckoned" or "imputed" by God as righteousness (the word used is *λογιζομαι*). The word for courageous as *τολμησαι*, which expresses the idea of being resolved to do something, of daring to do it. So Paul has arrived at this decision to boldly confront the persons involved in the attacks on him by careful analysis and then determined resolutely to follow through. His face is set like flint in the matter. He knows what his role in God's kingdom demands of him in

this situation. There is no choice. His only hope is his earnest prayer, that there will be repentance and they will make the confrontation unnecessary.

From what the data implies, Paul's opponents in Corinth regard him as a man who "walks according to the flesh." By this Paul meant that they did not regard his divinely bestowed role and authority. This is an easy thing to do, a very natural trap to fall into. When we begin thinking in the flesh rather than in the Spirit, by our instincts and ego rather than in response to the Holy Spirit, we look past what someone's God-given role is. We look only at their natural abilities or talents or personality and their appearance. Of course, we then find them very inadequate. Now it is not that these things should not be considered at all in the matter of choosing leaders. But when God's hand has visibly moved and set apart a person for leadership, and when that has been affirmed by many and confirmed by time as in the case of Paul, then what God and time have confirmed should shape our view of them and our regard for them. We must never regard any person as if they "walked according to the flesh." We must regard every man for what he is, or could be, in Christ. Paul goes on to say why this switch in our thinking is so essential in the administration of God's business.

This is a critical matter in terms of our maturity as people of God, and there is much to ponder in it. Giftedness and calling do manifest themselves in terms of visible ability and certain tangible results. To ignore this completely and assume that in Christ no such visible ability is necessary and nothing of this sort should be cultivated always leads to its own set of problems. But an important key in the matter is that we will never find the perfect package because we are all fallen people in whom the image of God is marred and the representation of Christ incomplete. God's work moves ahead because of Him and it does so through imperfect people. We will always notice the incompleteness of the package as the Corinthians had in Paul. It is a fleshly activity to search for the perfect leader. Our search is for the imperfect people God is leading through.

10:3 For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh,

It is not easy to articulate what the term "the flesh" means. Even in this verse, two meanings are in view. The term can refer to our physical body and that is what Paul has in view in the first usage in this verse. We "walk in the flesh," meaning in this case that we live our daily lives in natural human bodies with all their limitations, needs, and desires. Then when Paul says, "we do not war according to the flesh," the different prepositions shifts us to a slightly different meaning of "the flesh." Here Paul is not just saying we do not war against physical bodies with physical weapons, though that is part of his meaning as the next verse indicates. He is also saying that the normal criteria for choosing soldiers and the normal motives that direct the leaders of those soldiers, these things that are normal to human thought processes in this life cannot govern the flow of the "battle" that God has summoned us to fight. The flesh is more than the body in this sense. It is an ethical force that is the underlying cause of our sin.

Now, the flesh resides in our body, and manifests itself through our body and in some way is linked to it. But it does not equate with our body or we are left with the idea that when God created our bodies He made them inherently evil. So "flesh" relates to our bodies, but also to that evil force that came to reside in our bodies due to Adam's sin and the resultant fall of man that marred the image of God in humanity.

What then is Paul saying here? He is answering those thinking in a fleshly way (verse 2), that is, influenced by their own evil motives, attributing evil motives to him and looking only at normal human criteria such as appearance, ability, and personality. He says, "yes, we live in human bodies and have the short-comings of fallen men. But we do not conduct ourselves like fallen man, driven along by selfish motives and godless agendas."

10:5 "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,"

The objective of ministry is the control of minds; not by us and that is critical, but by Christ. It is the mark of all that is evil when men seek to control the minds of other men. It is the task of every man to submit his own thinking to Christ and to help those around follow in the same process.

Every act begins with a thought. Everything we do is generated by our minds. The greatest enemy of humanity is wrong thinking. It is the beginning of everything that is bad. Wrong thinking is at the bottom of every failed marriage, every domestic dispute, every personal dysfunction, every false religion and every criminal act. In this verse we see that our objective is not just to get people to think in a socially acceptable way. That is the objective of most educational programs, most rehabilitation efforts and most counseling. It is good, but it stops short of helping people become what God intended them to be.

God wants our lives to be governed by truth all the time no matter what our circumstances. In every situation it is the truth that sets us free from the ravages and destruction that start with wrong thinking. Right thinking transforms the results produced by any and every trial. God doesn't want us to simply be free of criminal behavior. He wants us free of the clutter that robs us of the potential we have through His design.

To bring this about He uses people who declare truth to us and this truth helps keep in motion a continuous process that involves two things. First, the process involves a constant undoing of wrong thinking patterns. We have thinking patterns toward certain types of people, events, towards ourselves and God that must be destroyed. We lapse and fail to approach certain things in a way that coincides with what God has revealed is the truth. So there is a constant work we must foster of undoing wrong thinking patterns so that we don't keep making the same mistakes and we don't keep finding ourselves sinning the same sin. We must ask, "Am I thinking wrong about this?"

Second, the process involves embracing new thinking. We must change our minds about certain people, or events, perhaps even about ourselves and God. We must view all of these considering what the truth tells us about them. Paul calls it "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." We must ask ourselves, "How should I think about this every time it comes up in my mind?" We might phrase it this way, "what truth should I handcuff this problem to so that when I think about it I think about it in the right way."

This twofold process is what transforms our lives, and its results demonstrate that there is that about the truth that captivates us. When we are open to the Holy Spirit's conviction we are handcuffed to the truth. It haunts us, even in moments of disobedience. So there is in these two things an ongoing process of taking off and

putting on, of weeding out and planting, and we see this pattern in all of Scripture through a number of different metaphors. It is the work that God is seeking to do in people today.

There is nothing more powerful than truth. It does have the ability to hold us captive. That is why the declaration of truth is so critical. We must remember that we cannot really “love people to Jesus” without the clear, ongoing declaration of truth. We cannot “disciple” Christians and bring them to maturity just through relationships, unless in the relationship we declare truth. We cannot change behavior without changing thinking. God uses us to help do this great work, but the truth is our weapon and we are powerless without it. We cannot do the work just by pouring ourselves into it. We must pour ourselves into the truth and then pass it on to those we seek to impact. There is a work of destruction and demolition God is using us to do along with the work of construction. We must never forget that.

People, ministries, and churches that try to do the work other ways will end up not doing the work. We must fight within ourselves to know and live the truth and then we must inject its relevant and accurate declaration into the various activities that might compose a particular ministry. But we must not suppose that the activity or the ministry is the weapon. It becomes so only when it is an instrument of truth, when it helps destroy “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God,” and when it helps “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

It is important to recognize in these words that to a certain degree the enemy is us. It is not just that we have a personal enemy, Satan, bent on thwarting our spiritual progress. It is that we have within us an appetite for the things that match his agenda. We need only to allow our thoughts to drift from the control of Christ and we begin thinking those things that violate everything we know to be true about God and ourselves. Speculations and fantasies are then raised up against our knowledge of God. Such thoughts will destroy our spiritual health. We soon find ourselves having to re-capture ground surrendered to the enemy. This is the battle we fight for God in ourselves first, and then in the lives of those He has called us to. Our weapons, energized by the Holy Spirit and combined with eternal truth, help us win the battle for the minds of humanity.

10:6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

There is a part of ministry which is tough to understand, to properly discern, and to carry out. It is our response as leaders toward those who are disobedient. Paul mentions here a largely neglected aspect that response. It is usually looked on as un-Christ-like in our times, to “punish” disobedience. What does Paul have in mind in using such a word with respect to his own response to disobedience?

The word rendered “punish” in the NASB is used of exacting justice. The idea Paul has in mind is not emotional revenge, but the just and appropriate penalty for damaging behavior. It is also insightful to note when such action will be taken by Paul. He says he is ready to act when their obedience is complete. A group of people can get caught up together in wrong thinking. They are at that point to be addressed with the truth and allowed time to correct themselves. Once the truth has had time to bring repentance, and the relationships allowed to spread that repentance to the outermost portion of the circle, then action will be taken against the unresponsive who persist in disobedience. In this case we are not told what that action would be. But it would

likely be removal from the fellowship of the church. It would be commensurate with the action Paul prescribed in the situation addressed in 1 Corinthians 5.

Now, leaders can be quick on the draw in this matter of church discipline and carry it out in a fleshly way. The book of 3 John reports such a situation, and it is to be avoided. But the truth is they are negligent if they simply hope it will go away and they do nothing.

10:7 You are looking on things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again in himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

It is the scourge of man that we slip so easily into looking at things as they are outwardly. That was where the trouble began in Eden. This means that even before the fall of humanity we had this tendency. It is at the core of the whole matter of choice. The choice comes down to how we are going to evaluate something, as it outwardly appears or according to certain spiritual truths and realities. Is easy to slip into viewing things within the family of God in they are outwardly.

There were those in Corinth that viewed themselves as more capable to represent Christ than Paul could be due to "outward things." It appears that these "outward things" were things like physical appearance, speaking ability, and overall personality type (see verse 10). While these things are of use to God, they are not essential to the effectiveness of his work. Ultimately, they are not the signs that indicate His calling and anointing of a leader.

Paul tells the Corinthians here that if anyone is confident of their own standing in Christ, they can be tested by their own appraisal of Paul. There was no doubt as to Paul's calling. Those in touch with the mind and heart of God would be aware of God's sovereign purposes at work in Paul. This "considering" of oneself is probably not a test aimed at determining of one being "Christ's" (literally "of Christ"), in terms of saving faith. Is a test of being "Christ's" meaning in step with Him, or in fellowship with Him. It is a matter of being "of Christ" as opposed to being "in the flesh." It is a mark of being "in the flesh" that we look at outward things. Conversely, it is the mark of those in tune with Christ that they see things and people as they truly are, considering what God or Satan is doing.

Paul had begun this entire section of Scripture (see 10:2) with a concern for how those who were regarding him by normal human standards should be dealt with. Here he throws down the gauntlet and says that anyone who is in touch with God will not have such questions as to Paul's position of authority. Their problem is they are viewing things outwardly, literally "you are seeing things according to face." Spiritual people can and must look beyond the face of a thing/person to its true nature.

10:8 For even if I 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,

Paul realizes that the situation calls for him to remind the Corinthians of his commissioning by God as an authority in the church. Like any servant-leader, he did not wish to be heavy-handed. When people are rightly relating themselves to Christ there is no reason for such a reminder of authority. But it is the mark of unspiritual, wandering people that they begin to question the authority of spiritual leaders and officers in the church.

In such a case it is not a shameful thing to "boast" as leaders about our authority in the Lord. We must remember that this authority is given to build up, not to tear down. We must never use it to build ourselves up but strengthen the church and its mission. We see in Paul the truth that to build well there are times we must tear down an individual. Sometimes those who destroy are enemies of good and must be themselves destroyed. But the ultimate desire of God even in such work is to strengthen His church.

There are times when it is the right thing to do to speak of your authority, if you truly have been called of God and affirmed in that calling. It is the right kind of boasting that must be entered into very prayerfully. In such authority there's a safety for God's people. It is ordained by Him for the welfare of his own.

10:9 for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.

Paul does not want to intimidate or bully by this treatise within his letter where he speaks of his God-given authority. The situation, specifically the accusations being leveled at Paul by an element in the church, required that he defend himself by some statement of his spiritual credentials. The purpose is to remind and inform so that those in step with God through the Holy Spirit could discern the truth about him and thus strengthen the church. Paul is not stooping to the fleshly game of intimidation. He wants only to remind the Corinthians of spiritual reality.

10:10 for they say, "his letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible."

This is the opinion of some on Paul. It is staggering from our perspective, given what history has said about him, that anyone dismiss him so lightly. But that is the error of those who look only at outward things. They can be in the presence of one such as the apostle Paul, and regard him as second rate. This has been the constant pattern of the humanity in dealing with God's spokespersons. All who are human must be aware of this tendency.

It is important to see from this glimpse of Paul that he did not accomplish what he did by charisma and personal charm. He was recognizably weak in these things. His weapons really were not of the flesh. He was effective by God's hand not his own.

10:11 Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also indeed when present.

Paul's letters had a tone that was consistent with who he was. He was not simply talking big while absent. But he was in a situation where quite possibly he was dealing with problems that never would have arisen had he been present. His letters have told the Corinthians what to change and they have always repented and changed. The Corinthians should "consider" Paul considering this history they have with him. The word for "consider" is λογίζεσθω, which describes a decision arrived at and a declaration made based on analysis of the facts. They have been spared seeing the stern side of Paul when he is present. Paul is assuring all that there is no duplicity in him. He would become when present what the situation demanded of him in terms of demeanor. That is the mark of meekness. It should not be misconstrued in him as weakness. Thinking and knowledgeable Spirit-led people would arrive at this conclusion regarding Paul.

10:12 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.

Paul says, "we are not bold." This could be rendered "we do not dare." Paul is being accused of losing courage when he confronts a situation face-to-face. He is "bold when absent" is what his detractors are saying. Here Paul speaks of a boldness he does in fact have, which his opponents did not have. He and those he ministered with, did not get into the whole activity of ranking themselves and others in ministry. They did not dare to do this. It is not that they did not hold themselves accountable. Nor was it that the practice of comparing one's zeal for the things of God with that of another is entirely bad (see 2 Corinthians 8:8; 13:5). The thing we must do in such evaluation is to compare ourselves to Christ, not to one another. That is legitimate activity. When this is done properly, the result is not multiple ranks. All fall short, it is only a matter of time and degree.

It is dangerous and fruitless to seek to determine who is a "better" servant of God when we have no idea of the specific nature of assignment, role, heart attitude and motive, degree of resistance mounted against them by our enemy, and virtually all other factors that do not meet our eye. To develop and make judgments about leaders with no knowledge of these things is to lack understanding. Scripture, and quite likely all of history, is full of individuals who are utter failures in what we know is near and dear to God's heart, while very successful in "Christian work" from our point of view. Conversely there are many, the Old Testament prophets being among them, whose success at the mission from our point of view was modest at best (many appeared to fail completely). They were faithful and successful by every standard that God employs.

There is no maturity of knowledge and understanding where there is comparison and classification of individuals as to their value or ranking in God's mission. Ultimately there is only one question they will have to answer. Did they accomplish the work, the allotted portion, they were sent to do? Only Yahweh can answer that question because He knows hearts.

Our work always relates to the representation of truth, not the response to it. One's work might have been to shepherd the disobedient, like the work of many of the great leaders of Scripture. Can we assign rank based on the visual response to such individuals? The Israelites thought they could do so and when they did they learned a hard lesson on how God thinks (Numbers 16). Had certain ones in Corinth pondered that incident, they, like Paul, would not have dared get involved in the activity of evaluating the relative spirituality of leaders.

The pragmatic lessons of these verses are very significant for people in ministry. Don't waste a lot of energy trying to validate yourself by the size of the response to what you do for the Lord. Be sure to be faithful in representing His truth and His heart to people. Responses will vary. Avoid bandwagons, be careful at seminars, shun the desire to "move up". At the same time evaluate wisely, be bold where God wants to use you. Once you know His call be aggressive and fearless and play to win leaving the results to Him. Avoid blindness that characterizes those who refuse to look at results and refuse all evaluation. Avoid service that is outside the realm of giftedness and calling, for which there is no reward in this life or the one to come. Know when God is working and when he is not. Evaluate that continually, carefully, and prayerfully.

10:13 "but we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God appointed to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you."

Literally this verse could read like this, "but we ourselves (as opposed to those others), will not boast beyond the measure, but according to the measure of the prescribed duty which God measured to us as a measure, to reach us as far as even you." Being proud of one's work in the Lord, and even speaking forthrightly of it is not sin. Paul was skeptical regarding the relative value of it (see 11:1 and 12:1). But at times such "boasting" is necessary.

Is important when doing so not to make more of oneself or one's ministry than it is. We should avoid overstating our role. Paul calls it staying within the boundaries of the sphere God has marked out for us. We should seek to understand that sphere, who it involves, where it is, how large or small it is. Then we should stay within it in terms of how we see ourselves, how we present ourselves, and what expectations we create for ourselves.

Paul understood his appointed lot in ministry. It was over a large geographical area extending to Corinth, as will be seen in the following verses, and beyond. He also understood there was much more work being done. His was a measure of a measure, not a huge chunk that was worthy of special claim. It was a measure of a measure, a part of what many faithful people were bringing about in the world.

Now if Paul's work was such, what about all who followed. It has become too easy for us to be arrogant about the size of our churches and the supposed large impacts of them. We're foot-soldiers. The impact of the entire army is the main event, not what is happening along our little piece of the front. It is too easy, and our flesh loves it so, to compare ourselves to other workers and see ourselves as more important than we are. Paul's detractors were doing so. How significant could they have been when history has not even preserved their names? Yet in their day they were apparently eloquent and dynamic enough to make Paul appear inferior.

When we live by the Spirit, we will stay within the measure of the measure that has been measured out by God to us, and we will be at peace with that. There we will be spiritually at rest, free from the fleshly need to grab more of the limelight and more of the human accolades. Paul's detractors were likely claiming he had overextended himself. They were saying he was overextended in terms of his ability. He had overdriven his headlights in their eyes. They arrived at this conclusion by looking at outward things like his looks, and his speaking ability. They'd come to know nothing of God's anointing of Paul. Paul knew his own anointing and stayed within it.

10:14 for we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach you, for we were the first to come even as far as you and the gospel of Christ;

Overextended, that was the word Paul's detractors used of him. By their account he was over his head in ministry. He was not nearly as capable as them to provide the leadership the Corinthians needed. Paul replies to these accusations by saying in effect, overextended? We advance the gospel further than anyone else had when we brought it to Corinth. Paul was doing something right, because he was pushing the envelope, planting and establishing new Churches. He was leading the charge not simply standing pat.

10:15 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.

Paul's detractors had the advantage of coming in behind him and capitalizing on his work. They are made to look good because they followed him. They were boasting on work done outside their measure, that is, taking credit not for work they had done but for what Paul had done. They looked good because of Paul's efforts.

In the language of today Paul says, "We are not overextended. In fact, we are hoping that as you mature, you will open more doors for us so that we can have a larger sphere of influence." This would likely happen in two ways. First, the growth of the Corinthians would give the gospel added credibility and this always results in its advance. Second, their growth would serve in the practical matter of supporting ministry financially and in other ways to move it forward.

This is the way the prayer of Jabez was answered in Paul's life. It can be prayed, but it is answered through the work and effort of the person praying the prayer and the growth of his/her investment in the lives of others. It is this growth and obedience that fuels ministry and extends borders. It comes through God's blessing on our efforts to advance His kingdom.

10:16 so as to preach the gospel even to the region beyond you, and not to boast in what has been done in the sphere of another.

This is the first clue that shows that Paul's vision included an expanded effort in partnership with existing churches to take the gospel to unreached areas. These areas were in his mind as a part of his divinely allotted sphere of influence. His empowerment and gifting were such that he was suited for this work.

When Paul speaks of boasting it is in the sense of being proud of one's work, in a job well done and mission accomplished. In this boasting he equips the hearers to rightly discern the sort being done by his critics. They were taking credit for work that was in fact accomplished by Paul. To move in on what someone else has accomplished in ministry and for reasons of self-gratification to supplant them and take credit as the architect of the work, or "the one who really got it on its feet." It reveals the detachment from the mind and the Heart of the Head of the church and from reality. It is the sorriest form of arrogance.

Paul takes a swipe at his detractors through this statement not to be mean, but to show them for what they are. The reason for the Holy Spirit orchestrating these words is that Churches can waste a lot of time, losing years to those who over-blow their gifting and their achievements in leadership, while all the time neglecting the real work of leadership. The church wakes up only when they find themselves floundering too late to avoid the damage caused by the drift. Then real leaders with real spiritual know-how must fix the mess and it is particularly difficult. Those who have this fleshly disorder must be carefully guarded against, and this is done by testing potential leaders to see if they accomplish the work of a leader or just talk the talk.

10:17 but he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

This is a summary of the thought of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:23-24). It is the sage advice of all who have learned of life to understand its essence. There is a pride in one's accomplishments and worth that is essential to human health. But that pride is rightly found when we discover the thing God would have us do and faithfully pursue it according to His agenda. There is no greater fulfillment than knowing you were faithful to His direction. It is a joy that can be laid hold of each moment of your life. It is a great treasure to have knowledge of the Lord to have experienced His loving kindness, to be rooted in and witnessed His justice, to have pursued and developed His righteousness. There can be no greater wealth than these.

10:18 for not he who commends himself is approved, but when the Lord commands.

We must never forget this important truth that there is only one reward, one commendation, one result that is important, whether our actions were such that pleased our God. That commendation from Him does not naturally follow the laurels that men may heap on us, nor our own estimation of ourselves. It comes to us as a reward for being faithful in our service to Him and the needs of His kingdom. Have we done what He asked us to do, that is the question. We may have accomplished good things and very tangible objectives that stand out in our times. But if we have not done what we have been asked to do we have wasted our time at whatever we have chosen instead.

2 Corinthians 11

11:1 I wish that you could bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are bearing with me.

Seeking to vindicate oneself against faulty perceptions and false accusations is a very unpleasant thing for the spiritual man. He knows that though he is achieved some wonderful things for the Lord, the Lord has been the chief reason he has done so. And so to speak of his achievements is "foolish" in that sense. It is made necessary at times by the influence of the flesh in others. Mature people would have to be coaxed into "bearing with" such an exercise as this that Paul is doing. Such a thing is sought by the immature. This is part of what is reflected in Paul's words.

This recitation of one's spiritual credits is foolish in another sense. People of the Spirit should be able to discern other people of the Spirit. They should recognize and affirm the activity the Spirit once they have had a long-term relationship such as the Corinthians had with Paul. They should not need to be guided or presented with evidence of what their own eyes have seen and their spirit's sensed. But human nature and human affairs are such that such a defense of himself became necessary for Paul to engage in. So skilled at manipulation were his detractors, and so immature at discernment were the Corinthians, that such a thing and become necessary. In this sense it is foolish. It is the mark of the dealings of those who are juvenile spiritually. It is one of those occasions when God orchestrates what is second best due to the weakness of humankind.

There is much in the church like this. It is of the Spirit yet is certainly a reflection of the imperfect nature of the Christian community. Therefore, in every church we find messes at one time or another, and yet it would be wrong to say the Spirit is not present and active.

11:2 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.

It is easy to state that jealousy is categorically wrong sin. So awful is its work, destructive, violent and vengeful its fruit, that we can easily forget that there is a godly jealousy. There is a jealousy God wants us to have. He stirs it up within Spirit-led people. Paul desires the hearts of the Corinthians to be one with Christ. He wants their hearts to be uncontaminated by the impurities of false doctrine and the cancerous attitudes of the flesh and of fleshly leaders who would lead them downward into idolatry. That is the heart of the shepherd and it can be understood in this way, as godly jealousy.

We often speak of a "pastor's heart," and by this phrase we most often mean one who minister's mercy, who wipes noses and eyes and so brings comfort. What we see in Paul is this godly jealousy. The somewhat fiery response in these verses should be a regular part of our experience of a "pastor's heart." Where people's eternal welfare is at stake, there is no room for passive, easy-going shepherds.

The imagery of this verse overall is very fatherly. A father has agreed to give his daughter in marriage to a man. He has represented her to be a virgin. His honor is at stake. The future welfare of the marriage is also at stake. His daughter's honor is at stake in her conduct. Should he see her eyes wandering, or another man seeking to

woo or take advantage of her, he would certainly intervene. Honor would require nothing less of him.

And so Paul felt of the future welfare and honor of the Corinthians was at stake here. He was willing to engage in the utter foolishness of defending the apostleship that had been so dramatically bestowed on him by none other than the Lord of the church. It was crazy in terms of all the events of Paul's life and the history of his relationship to the Corinthians. But they were being wooed, and their eyes were wandering. They were about to be taken advantage of and violated. In such a situation one does not worry about "image," and so Paul is willing to engage "in a little foolishness." His hope is that the mature and the discerning among them would not be insulted.

11:3 but I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

In this life there will always be cunning people, used by the master of deceit to attempt to divert us from what is germane to the faith. From the beginning our foe in the faith has proven himself crafty, never short of a trick, always alert and ready with a mixture of half-truths and noble alternatives to the simple practice of faith and obedience.

Christianity is devotion to Christ. Remove moment by moment relationship to Christ and you have removed the heart and soul of Christianity. So problems of faith begin in our minds when we begin to think wrongly of Christ. It might be false in the sense of classic false doctrine. It might be false in terms of doubting His presence. It might be false in doubting His work in our behalf and feeling the need to add to it. It might be false in the sense of diverting us from the fact that He is a person and focusing us purely on His teachings or ethics. But our troubles always begin when we begin to think wrongly of Christ.

There is always an abundant supply of teachers who, either by legitimate error or by calculated plan lead us away from a single-hearted devotion to Christ. That is Paul's concern in this verse and the Lord's concern as well.

There is some doubt about the actual words used in the last half of this verse, rendered in the NASB "from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Many of the manuscripts said, "from the single-hearted devotion to Christ." The meaning is not in doubt nor the message. Only the exact wording used is questioned. It is certain that Paul's concern is that the simple moment-by-moment practice of relating oneself to Christ has been taken from the Corinthians by some slick-talking, self-serving promoters. When this moment-by-moment practice of one's relationship to Christ is set aside, one soon loses touch with Christ's heart, and Christianity becomes mere religion. It is the same as what leads to poor health in a marriage.

11:4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive another spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

Paul's frustration and the Lord's, along with the frustration of all who ever responded to the charge of leading God's people, can be felt in these verses. People, and by that we mean even God's people, are more easily drawn to what is not true than what is true. Alternate doctrines of Christ many in the Corinthian church did not get upset or emotional about. Strange deities did not get them up in arms or stir a sense of

urgency in them to take corrective action. With such false teachings comes the influence of spirits other than the Holy Spirit. People don't seem to notice or be aware of this significant danger. Most simply want to "feel" their faith and so rush headlong into an experience that gives them a pleasant feeling. Most do not discern perversions to the truth of the gospel. They may dismiss it as semantics or may not even notice it. They combine variants of numerous sorts with the faith as revealed by God and think it's all okay. They don't understand what the fuss is over. This has always been true of humanity, and we have seen it in what has been called post-modernism. To believe in something is the important thing. What or who is the object of that belief is irrelevant.

The truly significant thing we need to understand is that what is not truth is not light. It will not guide us in darkness. Our spiritual lifeline is truth. As soon as we move out of the realm of truth we have moved into the realm of "other spirits." They may be friendly; they may have appeal. They are evil however and we must not forget that.

It is better to discern truth, the correctness and incorrectness of cognitive statements and through this process to discern spirits. God has given us a standard for judging truth, which, when we know it well will give us clarity right down to the individual and particular words of statements used. Discerning spirits is particularly difficult for us because the spiritual world is a mystery to us. It lies beyond our senses. The Corinthians were quickly becoming victims because they were setting aside what their minds told them and affirming false teachers. They were being too merciful and too patient with those who were teaching false doctrine. This then is one of the few places in Scripture where someone is exhorted not to be so long-suffering! It is in the realm of dealing with false doctrine. That makes this a profound and practical statement.

11:5 "for I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles."

We know that this is a Spirit-inspired statement, and therefore this is how God viewed Paul. Some were questioning his apostleship. God viewed him not only as an apostle, but outstanding among the apostles. These verses point to the ineptitude of Paul's critics. They can be so wrong, and so can we in the matter of judging people once the flesh gets involved. However, be that as it may, since other spirits are everywhere present there will always be criticism.

11:6 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.

There is something the Corinthians should have been confident of. It had been amply reinforced in them in "every way" and "in everything." It was that which Paul knew to be true. He was a messenger of truth and his word was authoritative, because as an apostle this was the nature of his empowerment from God. What Paul said regarding truth and falsehood as well as in a few practical matters, had proven itself repeatedly to them. Now the way he delivered his words could be criticized. Paul is conceding here that it might be that his delivery as a speaker of the truth was unskilled. But the content had proven to be of God repeatedly. In the end this is what gives words and messages their value.

11:7 or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel to you without charge?

The logic of Paul's critics was based on cosmetics, on outward things like Paul's looks, his delivery, and the fact that he was not a "pro" in the sense of being paid for his work in the gospel. Here he will lay out the truth regarding the matter of not being paid. He asks a question laced with sarcasm to point out the absurdity of this whole argument. The problem has arisen because humans place more value on what they pay for. Did Paul create a problem by going against the norm of Scripture and offering his services free? Had he not followed God's directive in the matter and so sinned? Elsewhere (1 Corinthians 9), he describes his philosophy and his reasoning in approaching his ministry in this way.

It appears obvious that this is a rhetorical question. Paul was confident his methodology had been willed by God even as his words had been. It is a question that would naturally come to mind and should be asked when a refusal to accept money is made to look like something other than what it is. We might say something sarcastic like, "well forgive me for not charging you!" It is evident that Paul is employing a similar sarcasm here. I would probably say, "well if that's the problem, we can alleviate that right now! Give me a check and you'll feel better!" The following verses reveal that though his services were "free" to the Corinthians, they were not free at all.

11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you.

The truth of this matter is that Paul's way was paid partially by his own work making tents, and partially by support the churches in other places provided for him and his company. The word "robbed" continues the sarcastic tone of the previous verse. If Paul sinned by not charging the Corinthians, then it is also true that he robbed those churches who helped fund his Corinthian ministry.

Though it is not the main point of this verse, Paul's overall financial strategy is made clear by this verse. In 1 Corinthians he emphasized the work he personally did to earn money while ministering to the Corinthians. Here he emphasizes what other churches did to make the ministry and Corinth possible. So Paul's strategy involved income from two sources.

His point in this strategy will be stated in verse 12. It went beyond avoiding the scenario of giving people the gospel and asking for their money in the same breath. So Paul accepted no money personally from Corinth initially, but as their faith grew he sought to get them involved in funding themselves and in the mission as it was carried out elsewhere.

11:9 and when I was present with you and 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.

There were times during Paul stay in Corinth when "ends didn't meet." Even those times he had not asked for anything from the Corinthians. Instead, other churches had helped him with what he needed. Again, this was intentional on his part. He "kept himself" from anything that might look like taking money from the Corinthians. This is noteworthy because it seems from what he has said earlier in chapters eight and nine that the Corinthians may have had more means to help them than the Macedonians, though this cannot be stated with absolute certainty.

Paul's point is that it is very true that the Corinthians did not pay him. But that does not mean he had not been paid. It certainly did not mean that he knew what his message was worth, so he charged nothing, as some were perhaps surmising.

11:10 as the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.

This verse, along with the final phrase of the previous verse, "and will continue to do so," shows that a critical part of the divine strategy to bring the gospel to the province of Greece was that it be delivered free of charge. We will be given an idea in verse 12 as to why, but in these words we see that the matter was not open for negotiation in Paul's mind, nor was there any sense that it had been a mistake. This tactic was a conviction from within, not a mere human plan or strategy. Paul felt as strongly about it as he did about the truth of Christ. There would be no compromise. The unspoken conclusion is that those who were really with Christ and a legitimate part of his effort in Achaia would be working the same plan. This is important, as we will see in verse 12.

11:11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

This is an interesting statement for us to ponder in American culture. We would tend to think that if someone really loved the people in an area, he would serve them free. In that culture and by biblical logic love would behave oppositely. If you love people you allow yourself to be ministered to by them and cared for by them. You become vulnerable to them. You avail yourself of their hospitality and so show that they were your equal. Thus, a bond would be created with them. While this was important, there was something of greater importance that the Lord and Paul were concerned about. So this normal and expected way of doing things was altered in Achaia.

11:12 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.

From what we know of Greek culture and its emphasis on learning and on knowledge, that there was quite a bit of money to be made in the whole field of spiritual leadership. People were willing to hire personal spiritual instructors in much the same way that we hire personal trainers to guide our physical development. It was natural that those false practitioners of Christianity would seek to supplant Paul and take advantage of the Corinthians to profit materially from them.

It is quite possible that this is the reason why in the province of Achaia Paul persisted in the strategy of not being paid by the Corinthians. It seems that this was a strategy unique to that province and not one that marked his ministry everywhere. Here he does seem to directly state that there were those who desired to be regarded as apostles and that their opportunity to maneuver could be eliminated by Paul's example of not accepting pay. His hope was that by example he would establish a policy that would make their whole pursuit unattractive financially and that they would move on once they found out there was no money to be made.

So Paul says he will continue in the manner that had been his custom in Corinth and all of Achaia. The following verses will make it clear that the "matter about which they were boasting" was that they were apostles and more imminently qualified than Paul.

11:13 for such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

This is the most direct statement Paul makes to the Corinthians about his opponents. They are not simply mixed-up people. The problem is not one of semantics or personality differences. These individuals are counterfeits. Their deceit is deliberate, and they have an agenda in this matter. Rather than promoting truth they work deceitfully and promote deceit. There is no other way to state this situation and no spin that can be put on what they do to make it legitimate.

There are people within the church that are simply mixed up and others who cause difficulty because they are disobedient. We must remember that there are those as well who are like Judas, false in their identity. Here Paul does not comment on their personal faith but in verse 14 and 15 he leaves little doubt about what family they are of.

11:14 and no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Satan's MO is to make individuals believe that he is a source of truth, a revealer of hidden wisdom. That is what light represents, truth as supposed to ignorance. The beginnings of his dealings with the humankind in Eden reflect this tactic and movements he energizes often reflected it. The founders and leaders of the world's great religions have usually attracted their following because of supposed "revelation" they have had. This verse shows that they may indeed have had a revelation and even from an angel, a supposed "heavenly being." It is a most common occurrence in the work of Satan in the world.

Therefore, written revelation plays such an important role. It provides us with an objective or concrete standard by which other ideas, including supposed revelation, can be judged. This activity of judging is to be something we faithfully carried out to maintain the purity of doctrine and truth (1 Corinthians 14:29). Even if an angel appears to us, his word is to be judged by the standard that God has revealed and what has been established as truth (Galatians 1:8).

This is the best reason there is for embracing the pursuit of knowing the Scripture. Such knowledge equips us for this activity of discerning the truth. We must remember that right-thinking leads to right living. The opposite is also true. Wrong thinking leads to wrong living. Mastering the truth will keep us from wasted years of following and investing in ideas that are pure and simple counterfeits. God leaves this critical battle in our hands having equipped us with the tool of written revelation, power of intellect, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, all of which enable us to sort the truth from lies.

11:15 therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.

Since Satan gains power through deceitful means those who follow are themselves deceived. They then, unknowingly and in that sense unwillingly, become deceivers themselves. They are quite often sincere and good. We must remember that they have been unknowingly tricked, and we should not necessarily expect as we observe them to see sneering vile, classically demonized people, or it would not be a viable deception.

To be sure there are those who are demonized in the classic sense we understand the term. However, these usually know that. These who have bought into a lie are no less demonized and are to be greatly pitied, but from a distance. Their demons cannot be expelled by our command but must be self-announced through recognition and acceptance of truth.

Were Paul's detractors Christians? I think not due to the comparison with Satan, the figure of disguise that is used here and the "end" that Paul says awaits them. There was in these cases intentionality involved. But this argument over whether such people are believers or not is unwinnable. It is possible as we've seen so far on this letter, for Christians to arrive at a very sorry state once they let go of truth. We can say dogmatically that such people are not walking in the light, or according to the truth, and they are not in fellowship with God. But it is tough to tell those who are deceived Christians from those who are counterfeit Christians. We must speak directly and clearly to their deeds and their teachings. God will speak to their citizenship and there will be no doubt.

11:16 again I say, let no one think me foolish: but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I may boast a little.

Paul didn't want to be seen as foolish. It is normally a foolish thing to speak of one's achievements in partnership with Christ in the cause of Christ. This is because they are impossible apart from Him though we play an important role. Our scope of impact ultimately is chosen by Him so that we cannot manufacture the genuine thing through our own efforts. In this sense to boast of one's achievements is foolish.

The situation in Corinth, where good people's thinking had been manipulated by con artists, made it necessary for Paul to speak of his status in the things of God. Even if he is considered foolish, his words need to be heard and this is his desire. He is saying to the Corinthians, "call me what you want, but please hear me out."

11:17 that which I am speaking, I am not speaking as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting.

Paul is explaining his tone here, not the truthfulness or accurateness of his words. It would not be the Lord's way of doing things to have this whole recitation of Paul's achievements that will follow be necessary. But the presence of the false apostles, the imposters, and the lack of maturity in Christ in the part of the Corinthians in dealing with them cause the situation to drift in an ungodly direction so that this which should not have to occur does in fact need to occur. The undesirable has become necessary, due to the imperfection of humanity. That occurs in the cause of God's will being carried out and occurs in the realm of the church.

In these verses Paul is not abandoning the leading of the Spirit and following that of the flesh. Rather he is following the leading of the Spirit in doing something which was not characteristic of Christ in His death. In His execution Christ set aside the defense of Himself and chose to die for our sin. Though earlier He defended Himself and His identity, at that moment of truth He submitted Himself to His detractors. Paul, at this moment in His ministry is being unlike Christ at that moment in His ministry. But this is not to say Paul was unlike Christ or that defending Himself was un-Christ-like. Self-defense was what God called for in the moment even as he had in the life of Christ in

all aspects of His work until the cross. Though it was all so foolish, the situation made it necessary.

11:18 since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.

Again, Paul was not leaving the realm of the control of the Holy Spirit in boasting. But others who are not operating under the Spirit's control were questioning Paul by their unspiritual standard. So Paul must answer them for the sake of the genuine though very vulnerable children of God that were being manipulated. The Spirit strengthened Him to answer fleshly statements in terms that immature minds would understand. His boasting is not according to the flesh. It is a Spirit-led activity meant to thwart the fleshly boasting of false apostles. It will meet them on their intellectual ground though not on their moral ground.

11:19 for you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly.

This sarcasm is very likely meant to shock the Corinthians and jar them into the realization that they have been had! Paul is chastising them for their lack of discernment, their inability to spot the obvious. They were gullible, vulnerable to an approach which was not even that tough to spot. They are bearing with what was in fact foolish, all the while either commending themselves or being commended by the false teachers for being so very wise. They needed to wake up and Paul was sarcastic to bring that about.

11:20 for you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face.

In these words Paul affirms that he was being facetious in calling the Corinthians wise. Their patience is not patience at all. It is being gullible. He had noticed a trend in the Corinthian church. They were suckers for authoritarian leaders. He makes five statements in this verse that serve as five characteristics or tests for leaders to see if they are fleshly and abusive.

First, do they enslave those they lead. This is probably a way of describing a very controlling person who uses others for selfish reasons. Now this is something all leaders fall into at times this using people to meet objectives. But one who would be termed an abusive leader takes it to the level of not allowing his followers any independence at all. They must follow him in the minutest of matters and they do so out of some strange sense of obligation he arouses in them. Are the followers speaking of a life with Christ as they pursue the leadings of their own conscience or has this spiritual independence been replaced by stories of obedience to a leader?

Secondly does the leader devour his followers? This is likely a way of articulating the abusive leader's tendency to elevate his own standing at the expense of the dignity of his followers. It is frequently mentioned as a characteristic of false shepherds (Ezekiel 34:1-10; Jeremiah 3). Rather than feeding the sheep, they feed off the sheep. They consume their resources, their time, their individuality to meet some need in themselves, all the while reciting their care and devotion to the flock. And their own abnormal minds usually believe their own lies!

Thirdly, do they take advantage of their followers? There are many ways leaders can do this. Followers are always vulnerable to abuse by leaders and it can surface in a variety of ways. It is often a financial advantage taken, often a sexual one. But most often it is at first an emotional one, where the leader strives to have some need met at the expense of the follower. This is tricky business, because legitimate needs of the leader of the ministry are only met by the sacrifice of the followers. But it is usually only tricky in theory. It is usually obvious that the need is personal in some way, not a cooperate need associated with the mind of Christ. The payment extracted is not of the sort we can imagine Christ demanding or requesting. It is usually extracted from those especially vulnerable.

Fourthly, does this leader exalt himself? These types of individuals have an insatiable need for position. Do they behave in such a way as to put their position on display? Now true spiritual leader does not occupy a lofty position. There is no greater calling, but truly spiritual leaders are somewhat uncomfortable with such a claim. They understand and accept expressions of appreciation. But they do not promote an aura of awe around them. They are striving for the Lord's commendation and what this life says of them is almost irrelevant to them.

Fifthly, does this leader hit people in the face? This is likely a way of saying he is insulting and heavy-handed with followers to make it very clear to them what their position is. Such leaders are punitive in response to failings and shortcomings. They put followers down and "keep them in their place" rather than building them up. They go beyond normal discipline to what demeans, punishes, insults, humiliates, and causes pain with injury. Paul saw all five of these characteristics in leaders that the Corinthians were drawn to. Such leaders have a strange ability to gain from others great loyalty, as all abusers do. But rather than legitimate loyalty and respect it is blindness and foolishness. Christians need to stand up to it and run such individuals off in the most direct and decisive ways. There should be zero tolerance in these matters.

11:21 to my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself.

There are seemingly among men those ideal leaders, those multi-gifted and talented men who just seem to know what to do. These types of men people naturally follow for whom the way is always smooth. Of course, these do not really exist except in our minds, as in the mind of Moses (Exodus 3) and perhaps the Corinthians. But there have always been those confident and assertive individuals skilled at marketing themselves that can appeal to this ideal in people and be perceived in such a way. Charisma such as this is due largely to this ideal that exists in the mind of the followers rather than a genuine calling in the leader.

The kingdom of God has not been insulated from such individuals as this. This may be what Jesus was thinking of when he said that "from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is seized and forceful man take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). Such is the work of the unscrupulous, the deluded, fleshly Christians, the work of evil ones and the evil one himself. The result is that the spiritual leader such as Paul whose calling of God was clear and obvious can often find on the horizon these more forceful or as Paul puts it here, "bold" ones, peddling their wares and gaining a large following in the kingdom of God. This seems to go with the era of the Spirit-filled preacher initiated by John the Baptist.

Paul looks at such self-promoting individuals and says that he is weak by comparison. His ongoing sarcasm is biting here, apparent in his use of the word shame. He did not mean weak in terms of the strength that matters, but weak in terms of being “bold”, or assertive, demanding and self-promoting. He had not aggressively sold himself or even spoken in any detail of his past achievements as a spiritual leader. By these words he is saying in effect, “don’t let my silence fool you! Don’t think that because I don’t speak of the great moments, I had with God that there are none!” To Paul the recitation of such things were so foolish, but he realized that the danger of the situation demanded it from him. In the verses that followed he will speak of his qualifications and experience. The immaturity and the poor judgment of his followers demands this of him.

The selling and marketing of oneself can lead to prestige among people of the kingdom and position. However, what is gained is empty of any real recognition by the King. Spiritual leaders will never have to look for those who are in this sense stronger, and there will always be present among those who are genuine those who sell themselves well.

11:22 Are they Hebrews.? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.

The false teachers were apparently presenting at least a verbal resume to would-be followers in which they boasted of their qualifications to lead and they projected a certain superiority and aloofness towards Paul. We surmise from Paul’s rebuttal that goes on through chapter 12 that they boasted of their ethnic and cultural roots in Judaism, of their service to churches, and of their personal closeness to God. So here Paul speaks of his own roots to show that he gives nothing away to them in terms of ethnicity.

11:23 Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more laborers, and far more imprisonments, beaten times without numbers, often in danger of death.

As he hears himself speaking these words, Paul cannot believe how he is rehearsing his strengths and achievements. It was unnatural to him and even unspiritual, though in this case he is directed to do so by the Holy Spirit because of the depth of the slippage of the Corinthians. As he speaks of the whole area of his service to the churches Paul is very aware of how it sounds as he proclaims himself more of a servant than his detractors.

It is very dangerous ground to move into, to view ministry as one might an individual sport with an opportunity to excel and receive recognition from one’s peers. Paul did not want to make the same mistake as his detractors had at some point made in their lives in understanding ministry as anything other than moment by moment obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He did not want to marginalize the empowerment of the Spirit to achieve the divine objective in the occasion.

These unspiritual men had reduced ministry to work and tasks. The reality is that such tasks could be done by anyone. In God’s mind ministry is something different. It still involves certain tasks. But is those marked out for a particular person, to be done in a particular way, at a particular time, with respect to particular people. Therefore, it demands being faithful to a quest to get oneself in harmony to the leading and

direction of God in all aspects of the work of ministry. The tasks are a small part of the work.

For this reason, it is insane to compare achievements in ministry when being faithful and trustworthy is the primary human contribution. Yet, in this case it was of the Lord for Paul to brag because these were impostors. They were false apostles. They had not been servants of Christ. They only claimed to be. They desired the position but not the submission and sacrifice that went with it. So Paul feels directed, though uncomfortable, delineating his sacrifice made over the years in obeying God's leading and his carrying out of the duties marked out for him. His effort had involved more labor and more pain than theirs, pure and simple. He had been to the end of the line on numerous occasions. They had not. They did not know what genuine sacrifice was. They are about to be put to shame. It is the nature of a servant to follow orders and bring about the desire of his master, to give himself to this regardless of cost. They had not been servants, Paul had.

11:24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.

It is well-known that the Jews had a law that allowed them to give thirty-nine lashes across the back with a whip and no more. Thirty-nine was the magic number. Forty meant the line has been crossed into the realm of cruelty. Paul here makes known that he had endured this punishment on five different occasions. Paul's critics were simply claiming to be apostles of Christ. Paul had paid the price for being commissioned by the Lord in his body. They could engage in rhetoric without personal conviction. He had suffered for the depth of his convictions.

It is a high standard to which we are summoned by Jesus in the example of Paul. Whatever the troubles of ministry and church are in America, they look benign next to Christ, Paul, and countless others who have endured the wrath of the evil one and that of depraved man. There are times however, I think I'd rather have the beating!

11:25 three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, and night and day as spent in the deep.

Each of these experiences would be considered harrowing and traumatic by American standards today. We must be careful to throw in that qualifying word, American. Is so very difficult in much of the world today and it has been. One of these experiences to us would constitute reason for therapy, extended time to recover, special speaking engagements, and so on. Paul went through these things on multiple occasions and simply moved onto the next thing. The thought of it is beyond incredible.

"The deep" refers to the open sea where Paul on one occasion spent a day and a half. That is no small trauma in the days before lifejackets! We know of one shipwreck that is spoken of in Acts 27. But this event likely refers to different occurrence.

All these things cited by Paul show the ability of Christian people to get beyond the traumatic and the disabling forces that Satan can marshal to work against our service to our King. They only need to practice their faith before, during and after they suffer.

11:26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in cities, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;

Is his faithfulness to the commission given him, Paul had faced many kinds of dangers. He lists dangers that arise from people as well as natural dangers. Where obstacles were concerned Paul was experienced and was perhaps peerless in terms of enduring trouble for the sake of Christ. If anyone was to compare their track record in this matter with Paul, they would end up silenced. Incredibly, it was in his mind just a part of doing what God commanded him to do.

11:27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Quite a different thing than our experience in ministry in America today is this that Paul testifies of. We must not forget that what Paul describes has been more normal for those who pioneer in the works of the gospel than what we consider normal. The truth moves ahead with our sacrifice. In this sense there is something lacking in the sufferings of Christ that we must add. We join human suffering, though for different reasons. He was the truth. He suffered to make men right with God. We spread the truth about His suffering. We suffer and sacrifice to take the truth to men so that they can be right with God (Colossians 1:24-29).

We must be careful of our expectations as we carry out ministry. If we experience insult to our dignity, then our experience is normal. If we are taken advantage of and experience abuse, then that is normal, though none of this should come at the hands of God's people. It is the nature of the mission of the enemy and his followers to provide us with a steady diet of these things.

11:28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.

There is a notion that if we do ministry right it is not stressful. If this were true, we would have to conclude from many of Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians that he was doing ministry wrong. There is pressure and stress and anxiety in ministry. There are times we have no rest in our spirits (1:8; 2:13), and there is a part of the daily routine that is absolutely exhausting. Everyone who has been in ministry for the right reasons and with the right heart has the daily pressure that Paul speaks of here and expands on in the next verse. The other things are external. There is this great internal weight that never lets up. It is caused by the love and concern that energizes the various pastoral gifts and it exacts its toll on the heartiest of men and women. There are ways to deal with the stress and stay healthy emotionally and physically. It is critical to lead oneself to be able to stay in the race. Diet, exercise, relaxation, a solid devotional life and simply learning to say "no!" are important elements of setting a pace that is sustainable. But in the end ministry will take its toll on one's body and this should not be looked on as bad. It is good to pour one's self out in the course of a lifetime and to have given it your all. And it must be remembered that the degree of fulfillment that any work brings usually increases as the stress increases.

11:29 who is weak without me being weak? Who is lead into sin without my intense concern?

The one who is truly serving Christ cannot divorce themselves from the problems of Christ's individual children. They will feel the trouble of his family. The word for "weak" is also the word for "sick." It can refer to actual physical sickness, but likely here refers to spiritual weakness and vulnerability.

When anyone's relationship to the Lord gets off track they will develop symptoms. Some examples are bitterness, grumbling, self-pity, a period of self-indulgence, emotional fatigue, depression, and a host of other things all with examples in Scripture. All such things can come about when one's relationship to the Lord deteriorates and when one's perspective on truth gets distorted. These symptoms are often voiced in a negative way, as if the church or an individual spiritual leader was at fault. The sick person misdiagnosis the problem.

When this happens, the leader feels sick himself and can indeed get sick if he takes the matter too personally. Often the sickness of those in the church leads them into sinful acts. They stumble and fall in their holy walk, which is what Paul describes in the second phrase of the verse. When this happens the leader who is serving Christ feels intense concern. The word for intense concern is used by Paul in 7:9 to describe sexual passion. The word from the same root is the term for fever, and is used in other places for the color red. The root itself is the word for fire so this is a word that describes very intense emotion that one feels in their body. This is the nature of leading, this inner preoccupation with the welfare of the flock. It was modeled by Christ and prompted in us by the Holy Spirit.

We can become fleshly when it becomes personal and we believe the perspective of the sick one and think our own value and worth is questionable. In most cases the leader is not the problem. Rather, such people are simply weak or sick and their own perspective and outlook is distorted. Their relationship with the Lord is unhealthy. That is the primary thing that needs fixing. In a moment of vulnerability that sweeps over the leader at such a time, when he examines himself to see if this is his fault, when he or she asks themselves if this would have happened had they been who they needed to be, there might be a word from the Lord as to a legitimate weakness in them that needs to be addressed. There may indeed be something in a ministry that needs to be strengthened. Such self-examination is essential. But the sickness in the one being led is the thing. It is certain that one strong in the Lord does not demonstrate bitterness, and an ungrateful spirit, grumbling, self-absorption, or the like. One does not catch such sickness from being close to the Lord nor do they catch it from those who are healthy in the church. We can be certain of that.

We can also be certain through this testimony of Paul, that even leaders who are Christ-like and leading in a spiritual way will not escape such anxiousness when such people issues arise. If they are devoid of such an ache in their soul, they are likely sick themselves and have lost their capacity to lead rightly. We must manage such an emotional load very carefully and prayerfully. We must share it with the right people who can provide a healthy perspective. We must be able to find the kernels of truth in the criticism the thing or things of value. Such nuggets are present somewhere in the mess of caring for the sick and are thoughts which will sharpen the ministry.

Leaders must care for the sick and identify with their pain. They must humbly and very carefully minister grace and truth. At the same timing they must not allow the sick person to set their agenda or distort their vision or sense of calling. The spiritual

person is a rock to the weak and leads them up to higher ground. They feel their pain and something goes out of them as they do it. Especially painful to the leader are the terminally weak who stick stubbornly to their own diagnosis and set out on their own to repeat their mistakes. There is usually a painful parting of ways in such situations, a low point in ministry.

11:30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.

There are low points in the ministry. Amid all the triumph there are sometimes when we walk the brink of disaster and grave personal danger. At those times we become very aware of our weakness and how dependent we are on the power of God. Paul describes such an incident in the verses that follow. Though there is not an incident in most of our lives that is the exact equivalent, there are for all of us those times where we escape disaster of some sort by the narrowest of margins.

In terms of being proud Paul was proud that his faith in the Lord and his obedience to him had taken him beyond the end of his own resources on many occasions. Knowing how important faith is to God, we must say that this is the ultimate boast that any man can have. It is to be one whose faith is such that they constantly tackled obstacles that required more than they could possibly muster on their own. And this is Paul's point in this statement. A legitimate boast in things pertaining to God comes only when we have gone beyond what is humanly possible and experienced Yahweh's hand intervening and allowing our endeavor to succeed. Paul boasted in that point where he realized how short he was about to fall of the goal before God intervened. It is a boast in our weakness and His strength.

11:31 the God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I'm not lying.

Amid these statements that could be misinterpreted as self-serving, Paul, with great reverence, calls God Himself as his witness that his statements are true. Not only are they true in terms of detail. They are true in terms of the spirit Paul is showing in stating them. He really has sacrificed more than most others and he really is uncomfortable bringing up the whole matter of his sacrifices.

Paul makes this statement here as well because he is about to move into more specific details about some incidences. He knew that these experienced were so unique that they will raise doubts in the readers. He is preparing them with these words for the incredulous.

11:32 In Damascus the Ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me.

Paul refers here to the incident reported in Acts 9:24-25. That incident happened early in Paul's ministry within perhaps weeks of his initial conversion. It was Satan's attempt to silence this new "star witness" whom the Lord had prepared. We know that Damascus was under the rule of the Romans. But the Romans custom was to award kingdoms under their watchful eyes to individuals who had done favors for Roman and shown loyalty to them. This seems to have been the case with this man Aretas. Aretas was then the king of an area associated with Damascus and he was the Ethnarch, which was a governor or precept who ruled in Rome's name. Likely because Paul was causing some civil unrest and perhaps because he had come up from Jerusalem and

was somewhat distrusted due to political commotion surrounding the Herods, Paul was an undesirable to this ruler. He was targeted for arrest. A blockade of the city's gates was ordered to prevent Paul's escape. The story as told in Acts reveals that the Jews brought this all about. The two accounts together show that as was often the case, they orchestrated it through local authorities.

11:33 and I was let down in the basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

Through the resourcefulness and innovation of Christians in Damascus Paul escaped the evil intentions of the Jews. But the incident was a harbinger of all that was to come. Their ill will followed him right to the very end. He could have reversed it all had he been willing to compromise the gospel. Through it all Paul was a faithful servant of Christ. From this incident at the wall in Damascus to the hands of the executioner in Rome Paul never wavered. And so followers of Christ in his day and in our day around the world have a witness we can trust as we trust Christ.

2 Corinthians 12

12:1 boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Paul for a fifth time articulates his discomfort when having to recite his credentials for ministry. The agenda of the imposters had made this boasting necessary. It was not something that otherwise would be of any value. This is a restatement of the awkward feeling he articulated in 11:1, 17, 21 and 23. Now he announces that he is moving on from ministry experiences to mystical experiences.

There are very personal, subjective experiences that happen during any Christian's communion with Yahweh. Paul describes one unique one, likely different than any man had ever experienced outside of the circle of the twelve apostles. He will also describe a related season of His normal spiritual routine, the resolution of an ongoing struggle he had with the Lord about a personal issue.

12:2 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.

Paul is so hesitant to speak of this experience that he uses a third person to keep from the wrong kind of boasting. He does not know if what he experienced happened to him physically or not. He simply knows that he had been caught up to what he describes as "the third heaven." It seems that what he is describing is the very abode of God. It was beyond the immediate atmosphere of the earth, described as the "heavens" elsewhere, where the birds fly. It was beyond the abode of the spirit beings such as evil and good angels.

Whether this is to be taken by us in the literal sense, that there really are three heavens or where heaven is, is open to conjecture. Knowing a little bit more about space and the universe (certainly not much), we think differently today than the ancient mind would have. None of this minimizes the authority of the words or takes away from their inspiration. It seems true that the human authors of Scripture expressed their thoughts as they normally were understood by humans at the time they wrote. On His part, the Holy Spirit in making revelation clear would use such terms as human can understand. The primary point here is that Paul, either in spirit or in spirit and body, had consciously visited the very abode of God. His words reflect the reverence and awe that we would expect from one who had done so. Those who describe such an experience as Paul's and who do so without such "fear" have likely not had such an experience at all. Is the consistent testimony of the biblical record that all who so encounter God or even one of His angels are forever struck by an emotion we can only describe as something beyond awe.

12:3 I know how such a man – whether in body or part from the body I do not know, God knows –

Paul continues his experience in the third person, almost wanting to separate himself from who he is in Christ to make sure that in his "boasting" Christ is the one glorified. He repeats the fact that he does not know if his body took this journey, or if only his spirit did. This uncertainty is likely important in distinguishing a vision from a dream.

Biblically the term vision is not used as we use it, of someone's grand goal for an organization. In the Bible a vision is not a dream. All humans have dreams, disjointed journeys and thoughts about an experience involving different times and different places. A vision is different. In the Bible a vision is an experience of one's spirit in which more normal thought processes are engaged. There seems to be the ability to converse, to process data and ask questions (See Acts 10:1-23).

Such visions are not everyday occurrences even in Scripture. In fact, it appears to be the norm at times in Bible history for there not to have been such visions. The kind of vision Paul had was most certainly a rarity. He certainly believes this vision makes him unique among men. A vision leaves one with the sense that they have been in the place in some sense. There is a vividness to the place and the persons, and the conversations involved in a vision. One having a dream knows better.

12:4 Such a one was caught up into paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Having said he had been caught up into the third heaven, Paul now describes that place as paradise. The Greek word is *παράδεισον*, borrowed from the Persian language. It occurs here, in Luke 23:43, and in Revelation 2:7. The original meaning was an enclosed park or pleasure ground. It was used in the Septuagint for the garden of Eden, and in the inter-testamental period for a super-terrestrial place of blessedness. Paul is using it to refer to that place where Christ is and so where God is physically present and His glory visible.

Paul's next statement is intriguing because it suggests that Paul learned more from this experience than he was allowed to pass on to us. It is common to believe that biblical writers may not have understood all about that which they wrote. It is quite possible however that at least in the case of Paul the opposite is true. There were apparently things that he needed to understand to articulate the faith in a systematic way as he did in his various writings or in order to endure the pain and sacrifice his mission would require. He was given these but not allowed to pass them along for general knowledge in the church.

12:5 on behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.

Paul restates here personal rules that govern his statements about those things he has experienced or accomplished. He will speak of those things that Christ in His grace and mercy did for him, such as this vision. Here he puts these things Christ did through him in a context. He did these things after he had clearly reached the end of his own resources. He will not speak of such things as if they were somehow innate in him and in his character, or as if he had developed such abilities over the years. And so, we read nothing here of the various languages he was fluent in, nor of his education, nor of his comfort in the intellectual circles of his day, nor of his knowledge of culture, commerce, or literature of the day. We simply read of him and the magnitude of grace he experienced.

12:6 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.

Secular management consultants have observed that it is an awful thing for all concerned when a leader rises above his level of competency. It is a biblical observation that they make, most without knowing it. The astute spiritual leader realizes this as well. He creates pain for himself, for people around him, and for the organization or church he leads if he creates expectations of himself that he cannot deliver. Almost without exception people in the early stages of their exposure to a leader think more of him or her than they should. It is human nature to believe in heroes who always win and always have what it takes to deliver what is wanted, needed and expected by those being led. It was true in Paul's day, it is true to a greater degree today with the propensity of images presented to us by the media, the cinema and the athletic world. The mythical hero who always produces the desired outcome is alive and well.

It is a wise leader whose ego is in check and so does not feed on such accolades. It is a good leader who knows well his own limitations and does not over-state his strengths. The short-term gratification of the heroes' parade will quickly give way to the complex realities of the spiritual objectives that our ministry involves. Empty boasting will leave the followers disappointed in the leader and disillusioned. Given the hunger of people for heroes and their tendency to initially exaggerate what they see and hear in a good leader, it is a wise leader who understates himself.

Paul is describing this habit in himself. He realizes that he has legitimate strengths that he could boast of. They could be stated in a very truthful way and not exaggerated the least. This can be done without sin—without becoming fleshly. But because of the fleshliness of people the outcome of such statements could be bad, meaning harmful to all concerned. The result is that Paul steered clear of exchanges that involved him in speaking of all he brought to the table.

This likely does not mean that Paul never discussed with anyone his own strengths and weaknesses. Such discussions are an important part of both personal growth and leadership strategy. What Paul refrained from was the public statements that could raise unrealistic expectations in the mind of those who did not know him well. With these he freely discussed his weaknesses, those areas in which he had to lean on others. He steered clear of those things that might cause people to exaggerate and credit him with more than he could deliver.

12:7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me – to keep me from exalting myself! I

There was a uniqueness to the revelations Paul received. He knew more. It seems he knew more than others. There are substantial grounds for boasting of both the right and wrong sort.

It is a mistake to think such revelations as Paul received our normative to the Christian experience, or even to those charged with leading. There are many great men and women of the faith in Paul's day and since who were appointed to have immense impact for Christ who had no such privileges Paul had in meeting with Christ.

There has been much speculation on this verse regarding Paul's thorn in the flesh. What we know is that it was present by the will of God, though Satan was its source. Its purpose in God's plan was to counteract any fleshly impulse that might cause Paul to think more highly of himself than was proper. In that it was called a thorn in the flesh, it was a bothersome or nagging condition that was present in Paul's body.

Many theories as to what this condition could have been advanced based on statements made elsewhere by Paul. He speaks of his reputation of being "unimpressive in appearance" (2 Corinthians 10:10). Some suggest that in this statement it is revealed to us that the thorn was simply poor health and the resulting sickly look. Paul also speaks of problems with his eyesight, and of this being a potential bother to others (Galatians 4:13-15). This condition could have been the thorn. Others have suggested that the term flesh is used here in the ethical sense and that this, combined with the phrase "a messenger of Satan," indicates that the thorn was an area of his personal life that Paul struggled to maintain the Spirit's control of. Still others suggest he suffered from a speech impediment that hindered his ability to speak well publicly and refer to the numerous passages that seem to indicate some weakness in this area (1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:3; 2 Corinthians 11:6). All of these are possibilities.

Those possibilities that suggest a physical limitation fit best with the actual data we have put forth by Paul about himself. The idea of him struggling with an issue of character weakness works against our image of Paul but we know such struggles are the reality of the human experience. Any truthful man, save one, would need to speak of issues that are lifelong struggles to be authentic. So this theory of the thorn is plausible though there is no other biblical reference that would lend support to it. There are such biblical references for the theories that have to do with physical difficulties. It seems best to focus less on what the exact nature of this trial was and to simply draw the conclusions that are plain from what is said in this verse.

We can say that Satan, as in the case of Job, is allowed to trouble Christians and is clearly the source of such trouble. We can also say that as in the case of Job, Satan is only allowed to do so with God's permission. God grants that permission when it pleases Him to work through evil to bring about an objective in His plan. This has been God's pattern from eternity past. He allowed evil to come into existence, perhaps to reveal the full scope of his love, mercy, grace, long-suffering, righteousness and goodness. His power and might are such that He can easily act against evil to bring good through it. The Cross is the most outstanding example of this.

So in this case of Paul, something that was the work of Satan was allowed to afflict Paul so he would be kept from the sin of arrogance, the forfeiture of earthly ministry, eternal reward. It would protect him against his greatest fear that of becoming a castaway after having preached to others (1 Corinthians 9:27). Though such a thing buffeted him, and the imagery of that graphically depicts Paul's feeling toward the trial, Paul was at peace with its role and purpose and necessity in his life. It served to protect the continued progress of the divine mission that was being achieved by God through him. In this sense evil was being used by God to bring about great good.

12:8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

Paul viewed the thorn as a liability for a time. Perhaps if it was something clearly visible to others he felt he could have greater impact and a larger audience if it was eliminated. If it limited Paul physically so that he lacked strength and energy, we know it would have frustrated him and he would have felt he could accomplish so much more without it. Because of factors such as these on three occasions Paul asked the Lord to remove the thorn. These occasions may have been intense, prolonged periods of prayer even involving others praying for Paul's healing. We don't know what the three entreaties consisted of, but it is likely that Paul is referring to more than just three mentions of it during his normal prayer life. There were probably three different seasons when he pursued the Lord very intensely in the matter.

12:9 and he said to me, "my strength is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Paul's seeking of the Lord's heart in the matter of his thorn yielded this great gem of truth which was transformed the outlook of millions, "my grace is sufficient for you." Such messages of wisdom and grace come to those who do the work of prayer. We must remember that it is not Paul's thorn which yielded this wisdom, but his prayer concerning it and his prayerful reflection on it. The thorn was the messenger of Satan. Prayer yielded the message of God on it that can be applied to everyone's thorn everywhere in place and time. God's grace is always sufficient. There is not an inadequacy of any sort but what His power to compensate for it in some way is not made freely available to us. And that is what His grace does. Even amid evil and evil intent, it enables God's people to advance God's agenda and the mission to surge ahead.

The second half of Christ's statement explains why God's grace is sufficient for us, namely that power is perfected in weakness. We seldom need more of us. We need more of God's great power. It is supplied in full measure as Peter learned as he was walking on the water when there is trust in Christ.

There is greater trust in Christ where there is firm awareness of our own incapacity. Therefore, it is not profitable to boast, to rehearse our strengths (verse one). It is profitable to boast in our weaknesses. When we, due to our faith and obedience to God, have stood in territory that is beyond the scope of our natural abilities and when we have witnessed God's enabling power transforming us in the event so that His purposes are served, then we have lived in a way that is worth bragging about. At that point what is significant to boast about is not our abilities that we were clearly beyond, but His power which supplied what we clearly lacked so that from all outward appearances we were adequate! What we know is how much of the power was His. Our little power was augmented by His great power so that our power could be made complete or brought to the perfect level in terms of what the situation required. And that is what is meant by "power is perfected in weakness."

What makes the work of God so spectacular is the inability of those He does it through. We lose the joy, the awe and the wonder of it by not boasting in our weaknesses at least to ourselves, so that we marvel at the miracle we were just a part of and in the middle of. And most tragically we lose out on the lesson of faith. So the next time we are just as fearful and just as likely to avoid getting into territory that lies beyond the range of our own abilities.

During the past 40 years as the truth of spiritual gifts has been rediscovered, it has become common to encourage people along the lines of doing a particular ministry for which they are "wired." This is good advice for the most part, but it can easily confine them to the ground when they are meant to fly. By that I mean that we can unintentionally convey that one's giftedness will be such that they will always feel adequate for the task and if they don't feel adequate for a particular work it is because they lack the gift. This completely negates all that Paul is describing here of his own experience.

We must remember that when Paul spoke of spiritual gifting in 1 Corinthians 12, he spoke of diverse gifts, diverse ministries, and diverse empowerments. In other words, finding one's gift is one series of lessons. Learning the ins and outs of the ministry to which one is called is another series of lessons. An understanding of the empowerment of God and drawing on it is another whole series of lessons.

So understanding one's giftedness places one at the start of the journey. Experiencing your weakness even when using that gift and traveling beyond those weaknesses in Christ's power is the nature of the journey which is a journey of obedience and faith. The fact remains that regardless of our level of gifting we will feel weak and inadequate and beyond our comfort zone if we are being at all obedient. And it is in that territory where we have gone beyond what is natural to us that we will sense His power come to bear on the situation. It will make something of what we're doing and bring about His purpose. Our power has been brought to perfection by Him at that point. He has supplied what we lack. We have lived as Paul lived and it is this life that should be continually repeated.

Care must be taken in teaching this to also teach obedience and giftedness. Though theoretically God can use anybody to do anything, this is not how He works. He chooses certain ones to do certain things through. The individual who recklessly pursues objectives for which he is not called or gifted is a fool. Such a person will continually suffer disaster because they are functioning in the flesh and not in the Spirit. They are presumptuous and arrogant, headed for spiritual calamity.

12:10 therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I'm weak, then I am strong.

How does one man impact history as dramatically as did Paul? A portion of the explanation is alluded to here. It is a lofty perspective that Paul speaks of, which every Christian should seek to develop. It is developed and pursued when we understand properly God's faithfulness in augmenting with His great power our efforts to bring about that which is His heart. It is a perspective that all Christians would embrace as true and proper, but that few have mastered.

It is the testimony of God that He always increases power to the weary (Isaiah 40:28 - 30). Once we have determined the course of action that God wants us to pursue, we should be content. We have only to pour ourselves into the effort at that point. The stress of the trouble and difficulty should not rob us of our contentment. We should not slip into thinking that trouble of any sort can thwart us from achieving His objective. Where we are weak and so encounter insurmountable obstacles, He is strong.

Trouble is always in the way of ministry and God's plan is to travel with us and take us over, under, or through those obstacles. To this degree trouble should please us. It cannot thwart us; it can only eventually be reversed to achieve His purpose. In this contest we have a front row 50-yard line seat! Christians like Paul master trouble by admitting it and embracing it. They do not have illusions of adequacy. They admit as Paul has throughout 2 Corinthians their shortcomings. They embrace trouble by being bold and attacking it head on, while leaning on Him. Prayer comes quickly and regularly.

Paul list five things that have accounted for the "burn out" of millions, that he himself was content with. The five things cover the gamut of troubles that come to Christians. That which brings the worst of stress to the most, Paul was content with. It is not an over statement to say that such trouble was the spice of his life. Such a perspective is perfectly logical and is impossible to refute given the revelation of God. It is a perspective that is easy to say "Amen!" to. It is nothing short of remarkable to live this way.

There is a godly form of adventurism that Christians should pursue. It is healthy for the human soul. Without it contentment will elude us. Natural man satisfies this by traveling the world seeking the thrill of being at risk and being stretched beyond their limit. The rest read of their ventures, silently. Then they vicariously traveled with them and covet their achievements. Then they pursue a normal life choosing what is safe to remove the stress of the unpredictable and the fear of the unknown and the tension of the unresolved. It is a pedestrian way to live and it is presumed to be stress free.

This same timidity engulfs Christians. They pursue the faith as a means of achieving normalcy, a trouble-free life. Christianity has always been a life lived on the ragged edge. And so Christians leave the risk-taking to the high-rollers of Vegas. They lead the pushing of the envelope to those in the extreme sports or the engineers at NASA and JPL.

Being at risk should be routine we have become comfortable with if we have walked with the Lord. It is not the fleshly quest of the compulsive gambler that Paul is identifying here, but the logical perspective of all who walk by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). Paul was comfortable and had chosen to live in the arena of the weary among those stretched beyond their limits knowing that it was to these that God increases power (Isaiah 40:28-31). This is an important key to understanding this extra-ordinary life.

12:11 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.

Paul blames this whole diversion he has had to engage to restate his qualifications on the Corinthians. To him what he has had to do was foolish. He has stated this several times. The immaturity of the Corinthians and it appears their accompanying lack of basic wisdom in sorting through data, had forced him to become quite remedial and to do what we would call "paint the picture." They should have stood with him and that is what is conveyed by the word for commended (συνιστάσθαι). They should have known from firsthand experience that Paul had the same message and qualifications as the other apostles.

Paul includes the phrase "even though I am a nobody," because it all sounds so crazy to him, like young children bragging of their strength or of the relative strength of their dad's. Paul is bringing to them a proper sense of shame for having gotten taken in by the whole suggestion that Paul was an inferior leader. Paul's statement that he is a nobody reflects the irony of the previous verses and of God's grace. In Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit we achieve a certain significance, accomplishing work that others should respect and admire. We are still in a sense "nobodies." In comparison to our Master, Jesus, we are incompetent servants. In ourselves we are incapable of the very thing we have accomplished by His grace. It is a wise leader who stays in touch with his "nobody-ness."

12:12 the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

The events that accompanied only the apostles were present in and around Paul and the Corinthians had witnessed them. These had been performed by Paul persistently not just on occasion. When we read Scripture, it is easy to think that miraculous signs were always a part of an authentic experience with God, that they were the normal fare. They can be seen by us to be a simple consequence of being a part of His family. In our thinking we can arrive at the point where we think that if they are not present something is amiss. Many Christians have fallen into this error.

It seems apparent from Paul's line of reasoning here that such a conclusion by us is wrong. Signs and wonders in the mind of Paul and the early Christians were a sign of an extraordinary and unique authority, specifically apostleship. The presence confirmed this unique authority. Paul's statement that he had done such things with "perseverance" indicates that such signs done through him were persistently done. There had been a history of the Corinthians seeing these things in Paul.

It seems that this use of the word "perseverance" in referring to this pattern of signs and wonders that accompanied Paul's ministry indicates that they were not simply "called out" by him. In other words, they came about though some spiritual work he persistently engaged on a personal level and persevered in. Perhaps it was an investment of emotional energy in prayer and contemplation of the mind of God. Perhaps it was this, combined with an extra investment in caring for people and bearing their burdens. There seems to be a hint of this hard labor in the life of Christ as we see the hours spent by Him in prayer (Luke 6:1-2), His intense compassion when others simply wanted to send the multitudes away (Mark 6:35 - 37), and His testimony on one occasion of feeling something when healing happens through Him (Luke 8:45).

This is not to suggest that we can work our way into doing such things. The final explanation of the occurrence of signs and wonders rests in the sovereignty and power of God. The pursuit of such things should be engaged. But this should be undertaken with the humble understanding that they are not the norm intended in the experience of the rank-and-file Christian. We should engage the personal laborious work Christ engaged and persevere in it. We should not expect that by that we have somehow earned the right for Yahweh to do such things in us or for us.

All of this thought on us doing signs and wonders is speculative. It is in a way foolish in that the way Paul is presenting it is that the presence of these in His ministry indicated he was part of a unique company. He does not present these simply as proof that he was a mature Christian. Paul's point here is that he had persistently done among the Corinthians the special and unique work that was clearly confirmation of his

apostleship. Therefore, the Corinthians should obey his instructions and unquestionably follow his direction.

12:13 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!

There was in Corinth an idea being circulated that Paul was not an apostle and those who become Christians to him had an inferior experience of Christ and Christianity. Here Paul asked them, "in what sense?" It is a rhetorical question. There is no answer so absurd is the idea and the Corinthian should have written realized its absurdity. Paul uses sarcasm to strengthen his point. The only way their experience different from other churches was that they had not had to pay him! Could they find it in their hearts to forgive him for withholding this experience from them?

12:14 Here for this third time I'm ready to come to you and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but they for their children.

Paul has made much of the issue of not asking for financial support. This is significant because he felt very awkward and spoke with hesitancy about his achievements in ministry and even his sacrifices. However, the issue of supporting himself he has spoken of freely and with considerable passion. He reiterates here his commitment to this principle at Corinth. Again, we do not know why it was so important to Paul in that city when it seems he apparently accepted pay in other places. We know that he had no problem in principle with legitimate ministers accepting money. In fact, he taught that this was the norm both spiritually and culturally.

Here Paul reveals the thoughts that led him to persist in this practice in Corinth. First, he did not wish to be a burden, meaning to add financial weight to them. Secondly, he wanted it clear that he sought their hearts and souls. He meant that he sought relationship with them so that he could join them in the deeper relationship to Christ. This he longed for. He did not want to take what was in their hand he wanted to take their hand and place it in Christ's as a father would give his daughter in marriage to a man. Third, Paul viewed himself as their spiritual parent who was planning for their welfare and needs as well as seeking to give them a financial blessing. He wanted to be a financial blessing to them not another obligation. He wanted to behave as a normal parent would in passing on the inheritance to their family.

12:15 I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?

This is the attitude of a loving parent who thinks nothing of pouring all into their children. In this way Paul was distinctly different from the false apostles. The Corinthians were behaving like children before the wisdom of years had made its mark, who cannot comprehend the degree of sacrifice and investment their parents have made. They understand once they start doing it themselves and so often returned to express gratitude for the depth of their parents' love. For the moment, however, the Corinthians had behaved like adolescents, embracing their peers and various spiritual fads while neglecting the person to whom they were really indebted. It seemed to Paul as it does to parents of the young, that he was being loved less who had given the most.

This is a common characteristic of those who like the Corinthians are babes in Christ. The critical thing in the minister's thinking is to realize such babes are not to be loved less. So Paul continues to pour himself out and extends himself to his adolescent spiritual children. Like a loving, well-adjusted parent he did so with great joy.

12:16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I take you in my deceit.

The behavior the Corinthians were exhibiting toward Paul is normal in spiritual babes. That does not mean it is acceptable. But it is normal. Paul, knowing this could be their response to him, knowing that the practice of ministering to people free can and frequently does "backfire", chose to do it anyway because he was led to do it by God Himself. That is what he is expressing in the first part of this verse.

The second part of the verse is a sarcastic statement likely made in response to his accusers. These accusers were discrediting Paul and saying he was not properly credentialed for the work of ministry. We do not know how much of their position they verbalized and how much they simply inferred. But there is every reason to believe that in some sense the words in this second statement are their words or the logical conclusion of them.

If Paul was not an apostle, then he was the worst of deceivers. He was a con-artist, pure and simple. He had manipulated his way into the hearts of thousands for some ulterior motive. The only other option would be that he was a lunatic, believing false things about himself. But his life reflected an order, an uncommon power that does not reside in the deluded ones. His emotions reflected in inner confidence and control and his perspective even in the matter of defending his credibility exuded optimism instead of panic.

12:17 Certainly I'm not sitting advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?

Paul continues to scrutinize his ministry for the sake of his readers who are apparently incapable of processing the data on their own. His point is that not only has there been no financial advantage for him personally, but there has been no one connected with him who has in any way sought to leverage the relationship to gain some personal advantage. Not only was Paul's record clean, but all who represented him were clean, of this he was confident.

Often in ministry we feel under compulsion to attain to a certain impossible standard. Through the misinterpretation of a very important verse we wrongly believe that we can "abstain from all appearance of evil." We think this verse is talking about steering clear of anything that would be construed to be evil, or anything that can be twisted into that which would discredit us. This is a complete impossibility and a standard that Jesus Himself could not and more importantly would not subject himself to. There are those with evil hearts who will simply see evil were none is. They must be answered and refuted, not allowed to set the agenda or affect the course. Paul had supreme confidence in his own course and that of his company, but that did not stop the frequent attacks on his leadership and methodology.

12:18 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 in the same steps?

Titus and "the brother," probably the same individual as mentioned in 8:18, had conducted themselves honorably among the Corinthians in the same way as Paul. They had in fact walked "in the same steps." There is significant imagery in this statement. Paul followed Jesus placing his feet in his footprints as if in the snow or sand. Then Titus followed placing his feet in the same footprints. There was no duplicity and no difference in the way truth was lived. The faith was fleshed out and ministry was carried out like be Christ by both Paul and Titus. This was especially true in the matters of material profit and of gaining advantage over those being led. There was no basis for the claim that some were apparently making of duplicity in Paul in these matters.

12:19 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.

What Paul has written could be seen as a defense of himself and it is. But it is more than that. A defensive of oneself is made to restore confidence and to rebuild what has been shaken down. It is a defense to build oneself up to restore reputation and influence.

However, Paul says that something else is happening through his words, a much more important activity than rebuilding his own reputation. He is speaking words that are pleasing to God and express God's heart and are sourced in Christ Himself to strengthen the imperfect and undeveloped faith of the Corinthians. His words are purposeful and put forth by God to build them up not to build Paul up. Their intended result is not simply to restore Paul's reputation, but to build up the Corinthians.

There are times when leaders are attacked in such a way that their entire credibility is unjustly and inaccurately brought into question. When that occurs this verse provides them with wise counsel. In those moments they must be careful. They must gather themselves and rule over their emotions to speak "in the sight of God," saying those things that please Him, that He will nod His head yes to and say "amen" to. It is imperative that they speak under the influence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Then their message will be crafted in a way that is effective for the building up of the hearers. If they lead rightly there is a better chance all will respond rightly. Then all will move ahead in their faith. All will profit and the matter will be forever resolved.

12:20 For I am afraid if 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, slanderous, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

Fleshliness is what Paul suspects is going on among the people of Corinth. It is always at the bottom of the kinds of things that Paul is having to deal with in this letter. This is especially true when godly leaders begin to be suspected and murmured against. When such fleshliness begins to take root, a bad experience usually develops both for the godly and the fleshly. Paul aches inside as he thinks about the direction this has taken in his absence and where it could wind up going. It has become a tangled web of half-truths that spring from wrong motives. When Paul arrives, it could signal the

end of the relationship. They, due to their fleshliness, may be disappointed in Paul and have a bad experience with him. He, if they were to remain fleshly, would have a bad experience with them. A few bad things will be brought to light and the exact nature of all that has been going on in Corinth will become obvious. Humanly speaking this is a church headed for a split.

12:21 I am afraid 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.

There are patterns of thinking that develop in our minds, both good and bad. Living as Christ lives is essentially a matter of changing these thinking patterns. Self-centeredness must be replaced by God-centeredness. Self-centeredness leads to sin. Double-minded thinking, where hidden agendas and concealed motives are at work, leads to immoral behavior and sensual behavior. The actions themselves are often recognized, confessed and repented of. But the thinking that led to them is not. What has been embraced as true must be refuted as false and replaced with what is true. It is this that will deal with the essence of the entire matter. That process is painful and can cause our pride to rear its head.

Paul suspected that the Corinthians had some strongholds of their old truth system still in place in their minds and hearts. When a godly person faces such people, they are often the one who looks strange and out of place. The brokenness of such a person's spirit is no match for the arrogant self-sufficiency of the flesh. And so it is often the godly who are humiliated when there is such a confrontation and left to mourn alone as the fleshly voice carries the day in and among the crowd. This is the profound implication of the route the Corinthians thus far had chosen to take.

The Corinthians had repented of many past deeds, but not rooted out the deeper sins and in particular the wrong thinking occupying the place of truth in their minds. There were impure, immoral and sensual roots in their thinking processes that had persisted through their experiences of regeneration and sanctification. This is true for all Christians. The practice of Christianity and the living of the faith involves renouncing these hidden things so that God's work can run its course.

2 Corinthians 13

13:1 every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Paul is anticipating a confrontational visit. In the first few verses of this chapter as he moved toward the close of his letter, his tone is very grave. The news he has received from Corinth has been such that he foresees a very intense exchange on the horizon between himself and his detractors. In this verse he is led to lay out the rules for such an exchange. Paul knows that dealing with the truth of what has been said and done rather than thirdhand accounts, or exaggeration, or perceptions is essential. He cites from Moses' law the Israelite tradition in such matters. It is a wise way in which to govern such dealings in the church. He is saying, "we will establish the truth of what has been said and who has said it. That will be step one and we will do that by the statements of actual witnesses. No more speculating!" This principle of laying aside all the peripheral commentary that has transpired and dealing with the heart of the matter is critical when sifting through the rubble of a church's difficulties.

13:2 I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say it in advance to those who sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone,

The spiritual leader can play no favorites. If a thing is evil, it must be dealt with as evil regardless of who has done it. Evil has a bad effect no matter who it comes from. It is never mitigated because it was a mistake or because it came from a person who was "sincere," or "good," or "well-thought-of."

As Paul thinks back over all the issues his letter has touched on, and particularly on what had to be said to defend his ministry, he perhaps realizes anew the extent of the fleshly ideas that have taken root in the church in Corinth. This was particularly true in the case of their arrogance to his own apostolic authority; Paul realizes that there may be no one that can be assumed to be pure in the matter. He is aware that some specific individuals had sinned in the past and were by all accounts guilty. But others should not assume themselves immune in this matter. Yes, there were some with history in these matters. That does not mean that they are the problem in this latest round and so Paul's plan was to scrutinize the whole situation and deal with all guilty parties.

13:3 since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

Some in Corinth were questioning Paul's authority. Some were saying his directives did not need to be followed and the faith could be broadened to include practices that Paul had taught against. To these who are questioning the idea of him having divine authority Paul throws down the gauntlet. He will deal with those attitudes and they will all be reminded and be humbled by the truth in this matter.

What exactly was Paul threatening here? We know that it was not a matter of physical violence, of intending to come in with muscle and rough them up. It could have been that he knew that God would confirm his authority by sending judgments of calamity on those who disobeyed. There's a hint of this throughout the book. The words he specifically uses here remind them of Christ speaking through him mightily and of

Christ being mighty in them. This is likely referring to a powerful element of conviction that will arise within them and confirm once again the source of Paul's words and the foolishness of their own thinking. Their foolishness and outright waywardness would haunt them, and they would experience that awful feeling of the sound rebuke of the Holy Spirit. That rebuke comes from the Lord through the words of someone else to us, passes through our senses into our minds, is confirmed by His Spirit from within us. At that point the light comes on and we clearly see the truth. But there is often great pain involved as the light makes plain the fact that we've been had, deceived, and taken in by darkness when the light was all the time available to us. It is a painful but necessary part of the Christian experience.

13:4 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.

It was the spiritual weakness or sickness of humanity that crucified Christ. Paul is not speaking here of any innate weakness in Christ. He is speaking of the weakness of those who rejected Him and the weakness of the fallen race that was placed on Him as the sin bearer. This led to His crucifixion. But nothing is a match for this power of God and so Christ is alive.

Our experience is similar because of Him. We are spiritually weak and we are spiritually dead because of our own sin. Though He has made us alive, and we are forgiven, we still live in fallen bodies in a fallen world. In this sense we are weak in Him. But Jesus has a plan. That plan involves the rescue and transformation of all who will believe. They will be brought into a family, kept until the day when they are given new bodies to live in the new world.

This plan has been set in motion. Through it, beginning with Christ, successive individuals beginning with the Apostles have led others into His kingdom. This chain of individuals has been unbroken through successive generations. This happens through His power working through us who are in that chain. Through Him the process continues because that power is directed through us towards others repeatedly. Therefore, Paul says we shall live because of the power of God directed toward you. This switch from the first person to the second person reflects the mission of God being carried out through us toward others. We will experience life with Him not only because of His love for us, but his compelling love for those He is reaching out to through us. The life and the mission thus blend and are inseparable.

13:5 Test yourself 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?

In the Greek text the word "yourselves" occurs first in the first sentence to give it emphasis. Instead of testing Paul, or Christ, the Corinthians were to test themselves. This is a command; the first of two Paul gives in this verse. Paul sees that the real problem that was leading to all the other issues between himself and the Corinthians was their relationship to what he calls here "the faith."

The meaning we assigned to this short phrase, "in the faith," is critical. There are two ways it can be taken. Some have understood it to be speaking of "in the family of those who have faith." They understand Paul to be telling the Corinthians to test

themselves to determine if they are really Christians. They support this position by pointing to Paul's next statement, "Christ is in you unless you fail the test." There is nothing wrong with asking people to examine whether they are Christians. Many need to deal with that issue, and some are in the Church. But is the person who knows they are a Christ follower free then to ignore this command?

That question leads us to speak to the way others have understood the phrase "in the faith". They see it as referring to "operating within the specific boundaries of the faith I taught you." They understand Paul to be telling the Corinthians to test their doctrine and their conduct by the standard of the words he had delivered to them, to see if they are in harmony with that standard. The support for this meaning lies in the broader context of the letter, where Paul affirms them as believers and caused calls them back to a lifestyle within the boundaries of the faith he had taught.

The interpretation of this verse that one adopts is a watershed issue. It reveals how they generally understand sanctification, that is, a person's personal growth and progress in the Christian life. Some believe that our success in living the Christian life is unavoidable if we are truly born again. They believe that in the sovereignty of God and through the presence of the Holy Spirit, true Christians will always make the right choices, always overcome temptation, and always persist in the Christian life except for occasional, short-termed lapses. In effect, they believe our sanctification is predestined.

If one's view of sanctification is that it is guaranteed to come about, then it is right to question the salvation of those like many of the Corinthians who were failing. In fact, it would seem to be a logical starting point for a letter that addresses their considerable shortcomings.

However, if our degree of progress in the Christian life depends on our obedience, our willingness to trust God in deeper ways, our understanding of truth and other factors which the Holy Spirit can capitalize on to do His work, then the "Corinthian problems" would be addressed differently. In this case it would be logical to affirm their faith then direct the light of truth on specific life-related decisions they were making. Then it would be right to ask them to decide if they were making those decisions correctly as the one who had been their teacher had taught them.

If there is even a small measure of our will involve in the sanctification process, then it is logical to ask Christians if they are making decisions in accordance with "the faith," or if they are making them independent of God and His truth. I believe this latter view of the sanctification process is what is taught in Scripture. Paul in these words is asking the Corinthians to evaluate their thinking and their course of action to determine if they are in harmony with the faith that he had received from the Lord and entrusted to them. Again, there is nothing wrong with asking people if they are Christians. Many are not and some are in Church. Paul's words here could certainly be used by the Holy Spirit to convict a person who was not born again. But to ferret out such people is not Paul's primary point here. His point is to call Christians back to conformity to the truth he had taught them.

Contrary to what might be one's initial view of the meaning of the words in this verse, a careful examination of the Greek words used will support this view just as well as it does the former view. Again, Paul gives two commands in this verse. The Corinthians are first to test themselves. The word used for test is *πειραζετε*. It can mean a test of temptation meant to discredit someone (one Peter 4:12). But it can also mean a test given that results in the approval of someone, a test that reveals them and their true

nature (Hebrews 4:15). In the usage of this verse it is a self-administered test. Just as we might impose a physical test on ourselves to "test our limits," so the Corinthians were to impose a test on themselves to test their allegiances and motives.

The second command Paul gives them further clarifies that this is what he has in mind this self-test. He says, "examine yourselves!" The word he uses here is δοκιμάζετε. It represents the procedure whereby something is attested to be true according to an agreed-upon standard. We might understand it as it sounds, to document. We could convey its meaning through the word "certify." Paul is saying to them "document yourselves, make your way of life conform to the standard of the one who lives in you!" Just as the only proof a person has of being a citizen is some form of certification, so the only way of proofing one's faith is that it shapes their thoughts and deeds.

The test Paul was commanding was not concerned primarily with IF Christ was in them. This would hopefully happen if an unbeliever examined themselves as Paul was commanding. But he is directing this command at those he knew to be believers. Paul's primary aim was for them to ask themselves whether they were living through Him and responding to His presence. The Corinthians are challenged by Paul to "document" their submission to the faith as Paul had entrusted it to them. In fact, it is not too much to say that they are being asked to produce proof by their thinking and actions of their submission to him as an apostle.

To conclude, the presence of this command that they are to test themselves to see if they are in the faith, does not mean that Paul suspects the reason for the Christian's problems in Corinth was that many were unregenerate, and thus needed to be saved in the American sense of that term. Rather it is a means of expressing the utter absurdity of them not rising to the occasion. If they were fellowshiping with God, they would recognize the truth of Paul's words.

What we should take away from this text is this. We should test ourselves often, many times each day. We should do so to see if our ideas conform to the truth to which we have been called. It is Christ who lives in us that enables us to want to take such a test and helps us to rightly carry it out. Paul is not suggesting that Christ is not in us. He is suggesting that we may not be allowing Him to rule over us in the practical matters of life. Can we certify that our thinking and our actions are done at His command, or are these shaped by our own desire? That is always the question for a believer.

13:6 but I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

A better rendering of this verse would be, "but I trust that you are knowing that we ourselves are not undocumented." The Corinthians were to test themselves and prove that the faith, as it had been delivered to them by Paul, was governing their thoughts and actions. Paul hopes that they are not taken in by some who were suggesting that Paul was "undocumented." This would be important. If they had arrived at such a conclusion or were even entertaining, it as a possibility they would not pass the test because they would be judging themselves by a standard other than what Paul had taught. Such a standard would be something other than "the faith." Paul and his words represented Christ's mind and heart for them. If they allowed Paul to be discredited in their minds, then they would naturally leave the standard of sound words he had set forth. They were then certain to fail the test.

13:7 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.

The Corinthians were looking down the road that would lead to much wrongdoing. It was a road that would take them away from the faith as God commanded it to be taught and practiced. They would be led by false apostles if they took such a turn.

Knowing the self-inflicted pain, they would endure in such a case, Paul prays they will do no wrong. This concern and prayer were not so that by them making a right choice he would "win" or be vindicated. It was simply that they do what was right for their own sakes. Paul is praying unselfishly for an action on their part simply because it was the right thing for them to do. He is willing to be misunderstood if only they might do what is right. This shows that Paul had not allowed the problem to generate into a contest between leaders. He was willing to exchange his reputation for their maturity and obedience. He was single-minded in the whole matter.

13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.

That he should be vindicated was irrelevant to Paul. It has not entered the advice he was giving or the action on the Corinthian's part that he was calling for. His words and deeds were being motivated and shaped by the truth. Anything else he could not bring himself to do. So his own vindication was not his focus.

Defining thoughts and actions by means of the truth remains the central calling of any spiritual leader. Their job is not to bring a mystical element into the process of decision-making but to bring the truth to bear on the process. Paul's position on all matters was to be on the side of truth, not to be manipulating for his own or anyone else's advantage. Like a true spiritual leader Paul led and pointed the way toward the light truth. Leadership in any other direction or toward any other destination is pseudo-spiritual and will be manifested as such over time. This simple statement of motive by Paul describes the exact place spiritual leaders must strive to occupy in any exchange.

13:9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.

Earlier in his letter (4:7-12), Paul talked about dying always and that as he died to himself Christ was created in others. It is an axiom of true spirituality that it takes root and grows in us and in others as we die to ourselves. The weaker our self-will becomes; the more Christ's life can come about in everyone. This is the experience Paul is describing here. When he sets aside normal self-concerns, such as the desire to be well thought of or to be vindicated and thus becomes weaker, Christ is formed to a greater degree in himself and others. They are made stronger in the faith by being given this example. They are made more complete. Each death that Paul died he found that it produced a little more of the fruit of truth in others.

13:10 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 not for tearing down.

There is a God-given authority present in those God has raised up to oversee the affairs of His church. It is given by Him to build up, to provide to those who would walk with the Lord the things they need to experience that walk. This involves laying things out very truthfully, painfully so if necessary. It is declaring how things must be. There are seldom several viable options in shaping our lives by the truth. It is usually a matter of obeying or disobeying.

Disobedience and deviance is to some degree expected in people yet cannot be accepted. In the event people respond in this way the spiritual leader must respond by setting forth truth, clearly delineating the course the truth demands. When this direction is responded to rightly then there is no further need for corrective action to be taken by the leader. If it is denied and defied, then steps of greater severity must be taken. Disobedience cannot be ignored.

Paul has set before the Corinthians in this letter a clear statement of direction that the truth demands they take in some specific situations. Now he must await their choice in the matter. If they follow his directions, then the matter will be done. It will all have been a normal occurrence in the process of building up the faith of God's people. If they do not respond obediently to Paul, then a different tone will be dictated for his next visit to Corinth. His actions will take on the tone of a crisis.

It is normal to stumble in the walk and to wander. Sheep do that. It is not normal to rebel and persist in it. That indicates something far different, and it must be handled with greater severity. A parent handles the normal immaturities of children in a matter of course and expects them. Parents must handle stubborn rebellion differently.

God is the same within His family. This is what Paul is alluding to in these verses. It is instructive to note that he lays out where the matter could go if they do not respond. There is no failure on his part to warn of consequences. He views this as a deterrent to the situation deteriorating to that level.

13:11 finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, the like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

There is the legal aspect of our relationship to the Lord and then there is the relational aspect. The legal aspect has to do with believing the truth about our own inability and sinfulness and about the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. In believing those things we have access to God and we are adopted into His family. We gain certain rights through our belief and certain privileges are extended to us.

The relational aspect of our faith can then grow, and this dimension is subject to some factors that we control. The things Paul commands here are attitudes we must embrace regarding life circumstances, each other, and our God to experience all that He wants to give us of Himself. These produce a vibrancy in our experience of God in everyday life.

It is a human way of understanding it, but these things produce a spirit in His house that is kindred to His Spirit, and he likes being around it! it is in harmony with who He is. We are joining Him rather than resisting Him when we do these things. Being in harmony with Him translates into a greater experience of His presence. In the

commands that follow Paul gives us tracks to run on to be made complete. The idea is to imitate Christ, to pursue the actions and attitudes of a spiritual grownup. It is to learn the lesson in the moment, to embrace the trait being sought for. We must seek to be made complete to be on the same page with God who seeks our peace.

We are to rejoice. When we rejoice, we are determining to view circumstances from His perspective. When in faith we praise Him believing he is good, it blesses Him. It is a choice we make to rejoice.

We are to be comforted. It is the Holy Spirit's nature to provide comfort. He cannot be present and not provide comfort. In moments of self-centeredness, we can refuse comfort. We can want to be heard and want to be grieved and want to hear something other than the truth that will bring us comfort. We must allow ourselves to be comforted and encouraged for the ministry the Holy Spirit to be experienced.

We are to be like-minded, to seek common ground aggressively and purposely with others. It is there, always. We must start with a reflecting on the common ground and right perspective will be given on what is uncommon.

We must live in peace, in the spirit of peace. This is a call to live by those thoughts and actions that tend to produce peace rather than that which stirs up conflict. It was Jesus who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Peacemaking is a critical activity because it fosters the emergence of other sorts of righteous acts (James 3:18). Where people work for peace, they experience the blessing of God though it is not a matter of achieving peace at all costs or of not being able to go to war. The ambition of all necessary conflict must be peace or it is ambition sourced in something other than God.

So there are things we do that deepen our friendship with God. We are adopted by Him with no strings attached. He is faithful to us regarding His promises. There are many other blessings we enter as we determined to love Him, to emulate Him, and to be about His business. This is what Paul wants the Corinthians to inherit this level of intimacy with their Father.

13:12 greet one another with a holy kiss.

To greet one another with a kiss would not have been uncommon in the times in which the Corinthians lived. The addition of the word "holy" probably has to do with the things Paul has just exhorted them to display. The terms "be like-minded" and "live in peace" show that the Christian relationship is to be approached with a certain sanctity. It was to be unique even in terms of friendships. The greeting among such people would be given sincerely. They were to view their Christian acquaintances as unique. Their greeting will be set apart from the normal greeting in terms of what was understood and even promised. It might look the same outwardly. But it would be sincere and distinct.

13:13 all the saints greet you.

Paul is passing along greetings from others who know of the Corinthian's faith. Paul kept the separate churches talking and built relationship and a certain mentality among them.

13:14 the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Three great possessions are ours as regenerate people. Paul lists them here and by doing so is saying that he wants these to be a continual part of our experience. This is his prayer and wish for us.

It is easy to go through the motions of the faith. But these are the essence of the experience of the faith each day. First, it is to be overwhelmed by a sense of God's favor on us through Christ. The unfading wonder at our salvation is what our fellowship with the Holy Spirit produces. We sense through Him that we are objects of love and grace. This wonder is to be continually restored, renewed and refreshed. Second, it is an experience of power. It can have a touch of the extra-ordinary, even if it starts out as a task on a list. Paul never wanted Christians to simply plod their way mindlessly along through their day. He wanted them to be "at the top of their game," ready at each instance to execute God's will for them in the moment. Third it is an awareness of being with the Holy Spirit. Through Him ministry is not something you roll up your sleeves and go and do as one would a task. Its life's tasks were done in company with responses to continuous inner leading. It all might involve very human effort and even work, but it flows out of our relationship with the Master, by His impulse, and with His enablement. This is what Paul lived and what he longed to pass on to us. It was a life lived with the Spirit.