

THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians deals with problems among the brethren. At the writing of 2 Corinthians, Paul had not yet been to Corinth after the first epistle; however, it is apparent that he had gained information regarding the Corinthians' response to the first epistle.

The apostle begins this second letter by letting the Corinthians know of the great suffering and comfort he and his fellow labourers in Christ were experiencing in Asia. Paul and the brethren's suffering was not due to teaching the precepts of men but those of God.

They have dealt with the man who was guilty of immorality, and he has repented. And they have even done something about the collection for the poor saints in Judea, according to his instructions, so that the outlook seems altogether more hopeful.

It seems that only one problem remains, and that is, the lingering influence of certain people in the church who are critical of Paul himself and who are questioning his authority as an apostle of Christ.

THE CITY OF CORINTH

The city of Corinth is located on an isthmus that connects southern Greece to the Peloponnese, Achaia, Acts 18:12. The connecting isthmus is five miles across. Sailors, coming from Athens or Asia Minor, often stopped in Corinth, walking the five miles rather than sailing around the Cape of Malea.

Sailing around was, to some extent, a treacherous trip due to the strong Mediterranean winds. Because of the geographic location of Corinth, it was perfect for trade and commerce. Ships, on their way westward, would stop here. Quick population and economic growth were the results.

The city of Corinth was a city of great wealth. Wealth and population explosion gave way to an entertainment industry. The Isthmian Games were a main source of entertainment for the Corinthians.

The games, similar in nature to the Olympic Games of neighbouring Olympia, occurred every other year. The apostle Paul referred to these games in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

A city with economic success, a vast population, and world-renowned Olympic-style games would naturally attract a variety of religious movements. Most cities of this day were devoted to a particular god or goddess. Ephesus was devoted to the goddess Diana. The principal deity worshipped in the city of Corinth was Venus, the goddess of love and licentiousness.

Just to the south of the city was a giant rock formation rising eighteen hundred feet above sea level known as the Acro-Corinth. A temple to Venus was erected on the northern side of this mountain. The temple employed one thousand female prostitutes for the worship of Venus.

The morality of Corinth was infamous. Every sin and vice known to mankind could be found there. It was a city with two seaports, one on either side of the narrow neck of land on which it was situated.

And because of this association with the sea and shipping and sailors, just like any major seaport today, it attracted a certain kind of women who were prepared to accommodate the seamen, and others, of course, who arrived at Corinth with money to spend after long periods at sea.

Drunkenness was commonplace, so that whenever a Corinthian was represented on the stage or in the theatre, it was as a drunkard. In fact, there was a well-known saying in those days which was used to describe a person living a wild, reckless life. ‘He lives as they live in Corinth’.

Barnes notes that many merchants lost everything they had in the city of Corinth, ‘worshipping Venus’. A common proverb of their day was: ‘It is not for everyone to go to Corinth.’ The city of Corinth reminds us of our modern-day Las Vegas, Nevada. It was the ‘sin city of their day.’

THE LETTER

2 Corinthians is generally regarded as a difficult book to analyse, with the result that we search in vain in many commentaries for anything that resembles a clear outline!

One highly regarded scholar, Plumtre, says, ‘An analysis is not an easy matter,’ and that is certainly an understatement! Theologians are generally agreed that the form of the letter is ‘not as systematic or orderly as other letters’.

The reason for this is not hard to find. 2 Corinthians is the most personal letter written by Paul, which has been left to us, because in it he reveals his innermost feelings and emotions in a way found nowhere else in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians is not an analytical exposition of Christian doctrine, such as we have, for example, in the Roman letter, nor is it a letter of instruction sent to a problem-beset congregation by one who speaks with the assurance and authority of an inspired apostle. Instead, it is the outpouring of his heart, as he waits to learn how the Corinthians have reacted to his earlier letter.

This letter is remarkable, one might even say unique, in the New Testament, for the number of words it contains relating to the trials and hardships which Paul endured in the course of his ministry.

Words used which reflect the ‘Sufferings of Christ’. Suffering. Affliction. Anguish of heart. Tears. Pain. Sorrow. Perplexity. Persecution. Hardships. Calamities. Beatings. Imprisonments. Tumults. Labours. Hunger. Thirst. Nakedness. Sleepless nights. Fears within. Foes without. Fightings. Grief. Stonings. Shipwreck. Anxiety. Insults. Danger.

These are only some of the words Paul uses in this letter, as he opens his heart and reveals the different ways in which he has personally experienced the suffering in which he has received the ‘strengthening of the God of all strength.’

He uses at least thirty adjectives to describe suffering of every kind, mental, emotional, physical, and even spiritual, in other words, suffering involves the entire Man, body, soul and spirit. And over against them all, he sets the words ‘comfort’ and ‘comforted’, words which occur about thirteen times in his letter.

The letter may be summarised in three words.

1. Explanation. 2 Corinthians 1-5
2. Exhortation. 2 Corinthians 6-9
3. Vindication. 2 Corinthians 10-13

THE DATE

It's possible that Paul wrote the letter in the fall of 57 A.D., making it but a few months after writing 1 Corinthians.

THE AUTHOR

There's no debate about who wrote the letter because Paul himself tells us that he, along with Timothy, penned it, 2 Corinthians 1:1. The letter was written whilst Paul was still in Macedonia, probably written from Philippi, 2 Corinthians 9:2-4 / 2 Corinthians 11:9. When we compare 2 Corinthians 11:9 with Philippians 4:15-16, we see him anxiously awaiting the result of Titus with news from Corinth.

OUTLINE

Reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16
The Collection. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15
Paul's Defence. 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10
Closing Exhortation and Blessing. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 1:1-2

Some in Corinth had falsely laid claim to the office of apostle, 2 Corinthians 11:13. Paul, however, was a true apostle of Jesus Christ, Acts 9:15-16. He was handpicked ‘by the will of God,’ 2 Corinthians 1:1. Timothy is mentioned here and thereby apparently present with Paul in Macedonia at the time of this writing.

Paul first met Timothy on his second tour of preaching and found him to be a faithful worker in the Kingdom of God, Acts 16:1-5. Paul later referred to Timothy, saying, ‘because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel,’ Philippians 2:22.

Though this letter is addressed to the ‘church of God in Corinth,’ Paul included ‘all the holy people throughout Achaia’ as those who greet the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 1:1.

Once again, this solidifies the idea that the early saints communicated with each other from church to church without violating anyone's autonomy, Romans 1:8 / Romans 16:19 / 1 Corinthians 16:19. The saints in Achaia would have included the brethren from Athens, Acts 17:34 and Cenchreae, the home of Phoebe, Romans 16:1.

Paul's salutary remarks typically include the wish for 'grace and peace' to be with the brethren from 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,' [2 Corinthians 1:2](#). This verse implies the deity of Jesus Christ. He is, along with God the Father, the source of grace and peace.

One who has God's grace has been forgiven of sins, [Romans 5:1-11](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#), through the initial act of baptism, [Acts 2:38](#), and thereafter through a process of humbly asking forgiveness, [Isaiah 57:15](#) / [Isaiah 66:2](#) / [1 John 1:9](#) / [1 John 3:3](#).

The 'peace' of God is experienced by walking by the authority of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 4:9](#). Clearly, grace and peace belong to those who truly and humbly love the Lord.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort." [2 Corinthians 1:3-7](#)

The word 'praise', [2 Corinthians 1:3](#), in Greek is 'eulogetos', and it is defined as to bless, ascribe praise and glorification. 'Eulogetos' is found in other passages of Scripture, [Ephesians 1:3](#) / [1 Peter 1:3](#).

The meaning, in this context, is that of giving praise and honour to the name of God. The reason Paul gave God praise and honour was that He is merciful, 'compassionate' to mankind, [Jeremiah 9:23-24](#).

Paul later would say to the Romans that the 'wages of sin are death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord', [Romans 6:23](#). Through Christ, we may escape the condemnation of sin, and thereby we see the love and mercy of God, [John 3:16](#) / [1 John 3:16](#) / [1 John 4:10](#).

Not only is the Lord the God of mercy but also of all 'comfort,' [2 Corinthians 1:3](#). The word 'comfort' in Greek is 'paraklesis', and it means a calling to one's aid, to strengthen; it's used ten times in the first seven verses. The God who strengthens us.

Ironside, in his commentary, says the following.

'There are two things of which God is said to have the monopoly: He is 'the God of all grace', and He is 'the God of all comfort.' All grace comes from Him, all lasting comfort comes from Him.'

Consider the use of 'paraklesis' in [Romans 15:4](#) / [2 Corinthians 7:4](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:16](#), etc. Interestingly, the apostle John used the Greek word 'parakletos', which is transliterated 'advocate' to describe the merciful work of Jesus in the forgiveness of our sins, [1 John 2:1](#).

In what way then does the Lord 'comfort us in our troubles'? [2 Corinthians 1:4](#) / [2 Corinthians 12:9](#). The word 'trouble', in Greek, is 'thlipsis', and it is defined as metaphorically to oppress, afflict, or distress.

1. The saints of God may appeal to God for the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ and thereby be comforted in the idea that we shall be with the Lord in paradise forever, [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#).

2. With such marvellous blessings available to us, we can help others who are distressed to receive comfort through the blood of Jesus Christ.

3. We may suffer physical afflictions as well, and the God of comfort will help as He wills, [James 5:14](#).

Herein is the two-fold nature of God exposed and summed up in the word love. God is merciful to those who would live lawfully, and He cares for our sick and distressed physical wellbeing, [1 John 3:16-17](#).

There is a connection between the sufferings of Jesus Christ and the comfort and forgiveness of sins, offered by Christ. Jewish flogging consisted of thirty-nine strokes; they used a strap with thirteen strips on it, and you were struck three times, 2 Corinthians 11:24.

Roman flogging had no restrictions and had animal bones on the straps. One will not receive the end product of comfort if one has not suffered with Christ. When we suffer, as did Christ for righteousness, we are assured of His comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:5 / 2 Timothy 2:12 / 2 Timothy 3:12 / 1 Peter 2:20-21.

2 Corinthians 1:6 means that Paul wants to make them whole again. The church in Corinth needed healing, needed all their problems solved.

The distress and mental anguish that Paul, Timothy, and the other servants of Christ went through were due to their stand in truth. Truth reveals instructions whereby a man may be saved.

As the apostles and evangelists such as Timothy, Erastus, and Titus went about preaching the Gospel and suffering the consequences, through the preaching of the forgiveness of sins, to all who heard.

Paul, Timothy, and all the faithful of Achaia had a steadfast hope in the Corinthian brethren due to their being ‘partakers’, sharing in the fellowship of Christ’s suffering, 2 Corinthians 2:7 / Philippians 3:10 / 1 Peter 4:13. Those who so suffered would also receive the comfort of knowing that their sins had been forgiven.

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.” 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Here is an informative statement. Preaching should inform rather than leave brethren ‘uninformed!’ Paul informed the brethren of the ‘troubles we experienced in the province of Asia,’ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

As we follow our timeline of events discussed in the introduction of this study, we find that between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Paul suffered at the hands of Demetrius in Asia as recorded in Acts 19:23-41.

So intense were the persecutions that the timing of Paul’s stay in Ephesus was most likely cut short, though there were still many doors of opportunity, 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 / Acts 20:1-6.

The words ‘under great pressure’, 2 Corinthians 1:8, are the Greek word ‘kata’, and it has the idea of pressing the grapes with your feet, pressure. Paul felt he was being crushed. This danger was so great that Paul said, ‘We despaired of life itself,’ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

Death was certain in times of Paul’s ministering to the saints and the lost. That which kept Paul and others with him pressing forward was their faith in the fact that God would one day raise them from the dead, never to die again.

‘God who raises the dead’, 2 Corinthians 1:9, means God is not only the God of the living but also the dead. God takes care of both, Matthew 22:32. The Lord had delivered Paul from danger in the past, 2 Corinthians 1:10, and He would surely continue to be with Paul.

Paul put his trust in God rather than the arm of flesh. Here were brethren in Christ, i.e., Paul, Timothy, Titus and others who preached truth who suffered for the cause of Christ at the hands of wicked men.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and His eye on the thermometer, 1 Corinthians 10:13 / 1 Peter 1:6-7.’

Paul now thanked the Corinthians who prayed passionately on behalf of these men and the sufferings that they underwent for the cause of Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:11.

The Corinthians were informed of the dangers Paul and others in Asia faced due to the apostle's statements in 1 Corinthians 16:9. Christians today ought to pray for each other in times of affliction as well. 'Prayers of many' means many faces, a sea of upturned faces.

Ironside, in his commentary, says the following.

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

PAUL'S CHANGE OF PLANS

"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus." 2 Corinthians 1:12-14

The word 'Now' connects this thought with what he has said up to this point, i.e., 2 Corinthians 1:1-11. Paul had suffered for the cause of Christ even to the point of nearly losing his life that others may hear and share in his comfort, i.e., the comfort offered by God, spiritually first, and physically second.

The word 'boast' in Greek is 'kauchesis', translated 'boasting' as 'reason to boast', 2 Corinthians 1:12. There is, therefore, one thing that the Christian may be proud of, boast, and that is in our salvation. Let us brag about our spiritual state and put all else in its proper place.

The apostle Paul could boast or brag boldly and confidently because his conscience had been trained by the word of God, 2 Corinthians 1:12. The word of God promised salvation to those who obey, Acts 2:38.

Faith in God will give one confidence in the promises of God. The premise of this verse is that the conscience is to be trained through God's word as opposed to 'worldly wisdom.' This confidence of the conscience is a product of 'integrity and godly sincerity' in relation to truth, 1 Corinthians 1:12. 'Conscience' is defined as 'with, knowledge.' The conscience is the faculty of recognising the distinction between right and wrong regarding one's conduct, coupled with a sense that one should act accordingly.

Paul's conscience, his distinction between right and wrong, was based on 'I too was convinced that I ought to' Acts 26:9-23, rather than in 'the grace of God', 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 4:2.

The word 'honest', in Greek, is 'haplotes', and it means simplicity. Simplicity means purity of mind, Romans 12:8 / 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 11:3 / Ephesians 6:5 / Colossians 3:22.

2 Corinthians 11:3 may give us some help here with understanding this word. Paul said, 'But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.'

The same Greek word is translated as 'sincere' in 2 Corinthians 11:3, and 'sincerity' in 2 Corinthians 1:12. The idea is that the mind of man is to be trained in one, single, divine truth alone, as opposed to 'worldly wisdom' if the comfort is to follow. 'Worldly wisdom' will only conclude in defeat and servitude to Satan.

The word 'sincerity', in Greek, is 'heilikrineia', and it is defined as unmixed, pure, and absolutely. Far too many times, we hear our brethren justify their erroneous living by statements such as, 'he is honest and sincere in his beliefs.' My genuine and confident mind will not be the judge of my eternal soul.

Just because one's conscience has been misled by another's genuine and confident position does not qualify him for salvation. The word of God clearly reveals the truth of the words honesty and sincerity. One may be honest and sincere in error, i.e., personal convictions or opinions, or honest and sincere in truth.

Paul claimed sincerity not in human reasoning but through the 'grace of God', 2 Corinthians 1:12 / Titus 2:11-12. Sincerity and honesty are, therefore, states of man's conscience that have been determined by either truth or human reason.

Those whose conscience is trained by absolute truth are pure, honest, and sincere in an approved way, Luke 8:15 / 1 John 2:4 / 1 John 3:7-8. When one preaches error, it is a lie, no matter what his motive or ignorance of a subject may be, 1 John 2:21.

Erroneous information, no matter one's state of honesty and sincerity, 'leads astray', 1 John 2:26 / 1 John 3:7. Note that the word 'sincere', that is 'heilikrineia' in Greek, is used only three times in the New Testament. Once here, 2 Corinthians 1:12, and two other times, 1 Corinthians 5:8 / 2 Corinthians 2:17.

All three of these passages connect sincerity with the purity of truth. Therefore, nowhere in the Word of God do we find sincerely erroneous teachers who are approved by God.

Such does not exist and is a concoction of human reasoning. The truth of the matter is that when one practices error, it is termed 'understand' and such 'understanding' is to be repented of, 2 Corinthians 1:13-14 / Acts 3:15-19. We all understand that one can be honestly or sincerely mistaken, as the word is used in the English language; however, truth and untruths remain what they are. Our honesty and sincerity change no truth.

We now read the last clause of 2 Corinthians 1:12, 'we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you.' How did they 'behave'? It was in the simplicity of truth that they conducted themselves and taught.

Truth alone will see a man to his heavenly abode and 'no other thing.' Paul admonished the Corinthians to therefore cling to this truth and place their hope in it alone, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 / Philippians 2:16.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning 2 Corinthians 1:14.

'Even though Paul's correspondence with them had been straightforward, they had not grasped the greatness of his love for them and how proud he was of them, 1 Corinthians 4:14 / 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. They had a legitimate right to be proud of Paul as their spiritual father, as he had a right to be proud of them as his spiritual children, 1 Corinthians 4:15.'

"Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?" 2 Corinthians 1:15-17

In 2 Corinthians 1:15-22, we read that Paul prepared the Corinthians for his impending visit. The 'confidence' that Paul had was in the faith, Gospel truths, 2 Corinthians 1:15.

Due to Paul's assurance of the resurrection of the dead and eternity with God, he could come to the Corinthians knowing that all the stern words of 1 Corinthians were not empty. Souls were at stake. The only way to receive true comfort was for the Corinthians to repent and ask for forgiveness.

The 'benefit twice' can only mean that the Corinthians would receive more teaching in truth and divine revelation, 2 Corinthians 1:15. They, therefore, should look forward to his visit.

2 Corinthians 1:15 is now explained geographically. Paul had intended to leave Ephesus and come straight to Corinth, first, 1 Corinthians 16:5 indicates a change in plans.

Paul said, ‘I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia’. 2 Corinthians 1:16 gives Paul’s original intention, i.e., to go directly to Corinth from Ephesus and then travel north through Macedonia and once again return to Corinth.

Through some unrecorded correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians, he had apparently told them that he planned on going to Corinth directly from Ephesus.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he made the statement about going to Macedonia first instead of Corinth again, 1 Corinthians 16:5. Titus had apparently told Paul that some in Corinth were accusing him of ‘fickleness’ due to changing his plans.

The word ‘fickle’, 2 Corinthians 1:17, is the Greek word ‘elaphria’, and it means lightness of mind or levity. The word ‘levity’ is defined as a light manner or attitude.

There must have been some disgruntled in Corinth who were saying that the apostle Paul was inconsistent in his words and plans, and thereby men should discontinue listening to him, 2 Corinthians 1:17.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

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

“But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him, the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Again, Paul asked, ‘Do you believe that I make statements according to worldly wisdom as does the world, so that when I speak, no one really knows what I mean? Do I say yes when I really mean no?’ 2 Corinthians 2:18.

Paul answered, ‘but as God is faithful, our message to you is not yes and no’ at the same time, 2 Corinthians 1:19.

Here is where the confidence that Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 1:15 lay. The preaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not a matter of confusing language that makes no consistent sense, 2 Corinthians 1:19 / 1 Corinthians 14:33.

The word of God is perfect, clear, and understandable. These words will lead souls to heaven and are, therefore, confidently affirmed as ‘yes’ alone and not ‘yes and no’, 2 Corinthians 1:19.

Silas and Timothy, 2 Corinthians 1:19, joined Paul in Corinth shortly after his arrival there and helped him found the church along with Priscilla and Aquila, Acts 17:14-15 / Acts 18:1-2 / Acts 18:5.

God has promised salvation to those who hear His clear truths, Acts 2:38. There was no uncertainty in God’s promises or Paul’s preaching. So certain were God’s promises that Paul said, ‘through him (God) is the Amen,’ 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The promises referred to here are evidently the ones that have found their fulfilment in Christ. God was completely trustworthy, not 90 per cent or 95 per cent reliable in fulfilling these promises. Therefore, the promises of God, 2 Corinthians 1:18, as well as the Son of God, 2 Corinthians 1:19, demonstrate consistency.’

The word ‘Amen’ is defined as affirmation, so be it, 1 Corinthians 14:16. There is truth and certainty with God’s word as opposed to confusion and uncertainty. How is one ‘standing firm in Christ’ through God? 2 Corinthians 1:21.

The word ‘stand’ in Greek is ‘bebaioo’, and it means to make firm or confirm. Colossians 2:6-7 uses the same word.

The context of 2 Corinthians 1 is in agreement with Colossians 2:6-7, that is, it is the word of God that ‘makes firm’ our confidence in God’s promises. One is made to be ‘secure’ in the promises of God through divine revelation.

Secondly, how has God ‘anointed us’? 2 Corinthians 1:21. Clearly, the anointing is connected to Christians being established and secure in God’s promises. This same word ‘chrisma’ is used in 1 John 2:20.

The antecedent to the pronoun ‘yes’ is the faithful Christians holding and abiding in the teachings of Jesus. The faithful have an ‘anointing from the Holy One.’

The word ‘anointing’, in Greek, is ‘chrisma’, and it means anything smeared on. In the Old Testament, Kings, 1 Samuel 10:10, priests, Exodus 29:7, and prophets, Isaiah 61:1, were anointed with oil to signify the validity and acceptance of God to their office. The word ‘chrisma’ is a noun. The ‘chrisma’ is the object, not the action. Clearly, the anointing here is figurative and represents the validity of the disciple as he abides in all truth. The saint that abides in the teachings of Christ has God and continues in God, having God’s anointing.

The words ‘anointing from the Holy One,’ 1 John 2:20, are used figuratively by metonymy to illustrate the effects of the Gospel’s call. One who answers the call of the Gospel is recognised as a Christian.

Like the priest who was anointed with oil into the official office, so the Christian is figuratively anointed with the Gospel call to be baptised for the forgiveness of sins and is now a qualified saint, John 6:44-45 / Acts 2:38. 1 John 2:27 indicates the fact that the anointing has to do with the Gospel, truth or Word of God.

How does God ‘seal us’ and against what are we sealed? 2 Corinthians 1:22. The word ‘sealed’, in Greek, is ‘sphragizo’, and it means to set a seal on, confirm, or stamp with approval. The same word is found in Ephesians 1:13-14, and appears to be a parallel passage to 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.

When one hears the Gospel and complies with the conditions of salvation through baptism, Romans 10:17 / Acts 2:38, that person is now assured and confirmed, sealed as a Christian and all blessings that appertain to the one who would remain faithful. The Christian is to be confident in his salvation and the promises of God.

Secondly, this assured, confident, confirmed Christian has a ‘deposit of our inheritance that is of heaven’ by being ‘sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,’ 2 Corinthians 1:22 / John 6:27 / Ephesians 1:13 / Ephesians 4:30.

The word ‘deposit’ in Greek is ‘arrhabon’, and it means earnest-money, caution-money, deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase is not completed.

God’s ‘earnest money’ or way of assuring us as Christians that we will receive the promises revealed in the word of God is His word, ‘the word of the truth’, 2 Timothy 2:15. Rather than doubting the validity of Paul’s words, the Corinthians needed to look back to the revealed revelation and keep their hope, confidence, and trust there.

Broomall, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We should not overlook the references to the Trinity in 2 Corinthians 1:18-22: 1. the certainty given by God, 2 Corinthians 1:18; 2. the centrality found in Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:18-20; 3. the certification established by the Spirit, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.’

A LESSON ON LONG-SUFFERING

“I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

The word ‘spare’ is key to understanding this verse. The word ‘spare’, in Greek, is ‘pheidomai’, and it means to spare persons and things in war, i.e. not destroy them, and be merciful.

We must remember that Paul had written in 1 Corinthians 4:21. Paul desired to ‘spare’ the Corinthian brethren from the verbal rod of correction. If he had come directly to Corinth from Ephesus, he may have had to use said rod, 2 Corinthians 1:15.

This is why his plans changed; he wanted to give them time to repent. This verse indicates the willingness on Paul’s part to wage battle with anyone who may have the deposit of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, it illustrates that Paul had the betterment of brethren in mind by making these statements. When erring brethren see this attitude in the admonishing saint, they will be left without excuse for saying that the person is arrogant or ‘hard.’ Sinners must be led to repentance through divine instructions. Divine instructions demand exposure, Ephesians 5:11.

The words ‘lord it’, 2 Corinthians 1:24, in Greek is ‘kurieuo’, and it means over one’s faith would be to have dominion or authority over one’s faith. Paul would not claim such a state; each man gives an answer to God only. Rather than dictating one’s faith, Paul desired to help the Corinthians experience joy through their confidence and assurance of salvation.

The word ‘joy’ in Greek is ‘chara’, and Paul uses it five times throughout this letter: 2 Corinthians 1:24 / 2 Corinthians 2:3 / 2 Corinthians 7:4 / 2 Corinthians 7:13 / 2 Corinthians 8:2. Salvation belonged to them, ‘by faith you stand firm,’ 2 Corinthians 1:24.

SUMMARY

Confidence, hope, trust and patience. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians approximately one year after he wrote the first epistle to the brethren in Corinth. These brethren were guilty of many things, one of which was brought out in 2 Corinthians 1. Some of the Corinthian brethren had apparently demoted Paul from a truthful apostle to one who was guilty of being ‘fickle’, 2 Corinthians 1:17.

Paul had written in his first epistle that the conduct of the Corinthians would determine whether he came ‘to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness’, 1 Corinthians 4:21. Here is an example of patience and long-suffering. One year had passed from his scorching, yet loving, rebuke to the Corinthians.

Paul was not ‘fickle,’ but he purposefully changed his travel plans to give them an allotted time to repent, 1 Corinthians 16:5 / 2 Corinthians 1:15-18. As the Lord commands us to be patient and long-suffering today, let it not be ever-patient and ever-long-suffering, 1 Thessalonians 5:14 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

2 Corinthians 1 set the tone for the letter. We must remember that Paul had given a rebuke of their unlawful practices in the first epistle. One year had passed, and it was now a matter of days before he would see them face-to-face. Paul’s earnest desire was that the Corinthian brethren understand his true love in faith for them. He began by painting a picture of his and other Gospel preachers’ work on behalf of the souls of men. These preachers of righteousness suffered much that the Gospel message may be heard and learned by the Corinthians and those in Asia, 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

The message of comfort was not dreamed up by human reason, and worldly wisdom, but by divine revelation, 2 Corinthians 1:12-14. 2 Corinthians 1:15-22, reveal the confidence, hope and trust that the Corinthians and all other Christians are to have in Christ Jesus. Our salvation is real! Heaven is real! God’s promises are real and true! Paul concluded by telling the Corinthians that his true desire was that they repent of their errors. He revealed to them the fact that he purposely travelled through Macedonia before coming to them first, so that they may have time to repent. Said repentance would come of Paul’s help, the first epistle and this second, and would give him and the Corinthians much joy.

We learn from this first chapter that there is a time when long-suffering and patience with a sinner must end. We learn that God's promises, revealed in His word, are true and real. We learn confidence and assurance through this chapter. Lastly, we learn that God wants us to be happy in our faith and long for that happiness in others.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

“So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.” 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

Paul now expresses the reason why he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 2:1 essentially summarises 2 Corinthians 1. Paul had purposed to delay his arrival in Corinth so that the brethren would have time to repent, 2 Corinthians 1:23. 2 Corinthians 2:1 exposes the apostle's true desire and hope for the Corinthian Christians. If Paul had to be with them in grief, 2 Corinthians 2:2, it would be due to their lack of repentance; however, he was confident that they would repent, and thus he determined to delay his travels so that they may have the needed time to do so.

The inferential subject is the first epistle that Paul wrote to the Corinthians due to their sinful practices. If this epistle's contents made some 'grieve,' the same people would bring joy to the apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 2:3. The word 'grieve,' in Greek, is 'lupeo', and it means to give pain.

Paul had literally 'pained, grieved, and caused distress in the Corinthians due to their sin with his first epistle. These same distressed brethren had a choice to make in relation to their pain.

They were to repent and rejoice or be offended by Paul's letter and grumble. Paul was confident that the letter would cause joy rather than grumbling, 2 Corinthians 2:3.

Hodge, in his commentary, says the following.

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

Paul's first epistle was written with his 'own hand' in great anguish of heart, 1 Corinthians 16:21. It caused Paul great pain to write what he did to the Corinthians in the first epistle. The pain was so great that it caused him to cry 'many tears,' 2 Corinthians 2:4.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Clearly, Paul claimed that love for the Corinthians moved him to write the severe letter. He wanted to make them repentant and consequently joyful, not oppressed and sorrowful. He wept over them. Doubtless, he wept again when he learned that his readers had misunderstood his best intentions.’

No one wants to think of beloved brethren walking in sin. Paul was a man who truly 'loved' brethren. No matter where they worshipped, if he had the opportunity to bring them out of their error, we did everything within his power to do so.

Shortly after his three-month stay in Corinth, he met up with the Ephesian elders. Paul told them, ‘Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you,’ Acts 20:26. Because Paul loved, he watched and warned brethren in sin with many tears, 2 Corinthians 2:4.

DISCIPLINE AND TREATMENT OF THE OFFENDER

“If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Before we get into the text, I believe it would be useful to have a review of the background to the text. After the introduction, Paul raises the matter that was causing him great concern, the division in the Corinthian church, which called for immediate attention.

Disunity in the congregation prevents the exercise of discipline and allows problems to go unchallenged and unchecked. In 1 Corinthians 5, he mentions his shock and dismay on hearing that immorality is being committed by someone in the congregation, and no action has been taken to deal with the offender.

Bearing in mind that the Corinthian letters were written early in Paul’s ministry, it is probable that the Corinthian church was without scriptural oversight at this time.

Contrast his opening greeting in the Corinthian letters with the greeting in the much later letter to the Philippian congregation, which he knew well and with whom he had an excellent relationship. Notice the absence of any reference to ‘Bishops’ in both Corinthian letters.

LESSON

The exercise of discipline is virtually impossible, and, at best, extremely difficult, in a congregation that lacks a scripturally appointed eldership. Elders have both the duty and the responsibility to maintain the purity of the church, and their appointment should be a priority in the programme of any young congregation.

NOTICE

1. The offender is known to everyone in the congregation but is unnamed in Paul’s letter, 1 Corinthians 5:1.
2. The immoral relationship is described as being with ‘his father’s wife’, his stepmother, 1 Corinthians 5:1.
3. The church has done nothing about the offensive situation.

Paul’s implication seems to be that, because of their divided state, they lack either the will or the desire. Or the ability to deal with it. The remedy is clearly stated, ‘the guilty man should be excommunicated,’ 1 Corinthians 5:2.

4. This verdict is not primarily intended to be punitive, i.e. a punishment, but is meant to be corrective, 1 Corinthians 5:5.

THE SEQUEL

Titus, who has carried a second letter, the ‘painful’ letter to Corinth, has found Paul in Macedonia, probably in Philippi and reported that the situation in Corinth has greatly improved and the guilty person has been confronted, dealt with, and has repented, 2 Corinthians 2:5.

How the church had acted is seen in 2 Corinthians 2:6, where he uses the word ‘punishment’. The word Paul uses here, in Greek, is ‘epitomic’, and it is different from the word for ‘punishment’ found in Matthew 25:46. The word in Matthew is the Greek word ‘kolasin’, and it relates to suffering a penalty.

In 2 Corinthians 2:6, the word would be better understood to mean ‘rebuke’ or ‘censure’. The church has, at last, brought the offence out into the open and has confronted the guilty man with his sin and then excommunicated him, denying him fellowship.

This action has been effective. He has suffered the grief of repentance, 2 Corinthians 2:7, and has been made to understand that to be excommunicated means to be placed outside of the fellowship of God’s people and in the realm of Satan, where, if he remains, he will lose his salvation, 1 Corinthians 5:5. In that state, neither religious nor social contact with members of the church is permitted.

But since Excommunication is not amputation, which is permanent, but is a condition that can be reversed, and since, in this case, the guilty man has shown evidence of repentance, 2 Corinthians 2:7, Paul urges that the church to show him comfort, lest he becomes so depressed that he becomes completely crushed by his grief, or, as Paul puts it, ‘reaffirm your love,’ 2 Corinthians 2:8.

The previous verse, 2 Corinthians 2:6, may be understood in two different ways. Paul speaks of ‘the punishment which was inflicted by the majority’, which implies that the decision was not unanimous!

1. Does this mean that the congregation was not unanimous in the decision to ‘punish’ the guilty man? Or
2. Does it mean they were not unanimous in determining the manner or severity of the ‘punishment’?

It may seem to be unconceivable that anyone in the congregation would object to the man being faced with his immorality, but, bearing in mind the composition of the congregation Greeks, Jews and probably other races, and the immaturity of most of them, it is possible that there was a minority, as Paul’s words imply, that felt that excommunication was too severe a punishment.

It may be that among the Jewish members, some had belonged to the stricter sect of Judaism, and these people believed that when a Gentile submitted to the ceremonies which admitted him into Judaism, his conversion cancelled all previous relationships, and this meant that he was free to form new relationships.

It is possible that they constituted the ‘minority’ that did not agree with the course of action taken by the majority, and it is clear to this group that Paul directed his illustration based on the Passover and the leaven, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

Obviously, there is much we do not know about the situation at Corinth. Paul does not give details. No names are mentioned. Neither the man nor his father is named, and the woman involved is described only as the man’s stepmother.

The phrase ‘his father’s wife’, 1 Corinthians 5:1, is the Hebrew form of ‘step-mother’. It is probable that no charge was made against the woman because she was not a member of the church and therefore she was outside the church’s jurisdiction.

Again, the man’s father may have taken a younger woman as his second wife, and this may have resulted in her affair with the younger man. Or, as some commentators suggest, the wife had been divorced by the father, and this immoral affair had developed with her stepson after the divorce, or may even have caused it.

We may speculate about the details of the case, but we cannot be certain! What we may say with certainty is that between this man and the woman, an immoral relationship developed which could not be tolerated because it defiled the Lord’s church, and discipline had to be enforced.

But the man’s excommunication must not be the last act in the matter because, as Paul points out, if the church cuts itself off from the man completely and permanently, ‘Satan gains a victory’, 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Imagine what would happen if a local congregation found it necessary to disfellowship a man and treated him as ‘dead’, and the neighbourhood learned about this? How quickly would it be said, ‘That’s Christians for you! That’s how they behave in that church!’ The effect on the public’s opinion of the church would be devastating.

CONCLUSION

1. The frequent failure to exercise Scriptural discipline has often resulted in damage to our congregations, weakening their internal spiritual strength and their external witness.
2. Elders or ‘leaders’ often lack the courage to act when an offence should be dealt with, and one of the sad reasons for this may be that, on earlier occasions, problems that should have been confronted have been deliberately ignored, or ‘swept under the carpet’.
3. In dealing with occurrences that require the application of scriptural discipline, Galatians 6:1-5, should never be overlooked.

The inferential subject of these verses appears to be the fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5:1. Apparently, the church in Corinth had followed Paul’s admonition by delivering the sinner to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the soul may be saved. This individual had caused sorrow among the brethren by his lawless deeds. Titus has obviously informed Paul of this news when meeting him in Macedonia.

Church ‘punishment’ or discipline had its desired effects, and the man repented. The church was now instructed to receive the repenting one back into its fellowship. Apparently, at this point, he had not been received back among them.

If the Corinthians delayed much longer in their forgiving and accepting the repenting back, such a one would be in danger of being consumed with ‘excessive sorrow’ and again fall away, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. Paul was careful not to stress the man’s guilt or the congregation’s sorrow above that which would cause undue pain in the case.

This series of verses teaches us much about church autonomy. Notice that Paul was not dictating or exercising ‘lordship’ over the Corinthian church, but rather he was guiding them by divine principles; i.e., he was ‘helping’ them, 2 Corinthians 1:24.

Paul would have violated the autonomy of the church in Corinth if he had demanded that they discipline the erring one on said day and accept the erring back on said day, thus dictating every move in matters of judgment.

Only the Corinthians knew where the sinner stood among local brethren and God. Paul could only thereby give divine principles to their questions and allow the Corinthians to decide as to when the discipline and reinstatement of the church should occur.

Notice that Paul tactfully abstained from naming the sinner by name. It was not Paul's desire to embarrass or shame the man by revealing his name. This should cause us all to raise a brow of inquisitiveness in relation to when one's name should be put forth.

Though Paul had refrained from naming the sinner of 1 Corinthians 5, he did not refrain from naming 'Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered unto Satan, that they might be taught not to Blaspheme', 1 Timothy 1:20. Both cases, i.e., 1 Corinthians 5, and 1 Timothy 1:20, involved discipline.

Why call one by name and not the other? Paul named Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus as a means of warning. Here were men who were teaching false doctrines and seducing the minds of other faithful Christians, 2 Timothy 2:17-19.

The sinner of Corinth was affecting brethren with the sorrow of his sin; however, he was not intent upon faction and divisiveness, so that others would be led away with his teaching. The brethren knew whom Paul spoke of and thereby left it at that.

Here is the purpose statement of 1 Corinthians. Paul was putting the brethren to the test to see whether they would obey truth or human reasoning, 2 Corinthians 2:8. The apostle John spoke of this test, 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 4:1 / 1 John 4:6.

The Corinthians apparently passed the test and put the guilty fornicator away. Now Paul called upon them to forgive the repenting one, 2 Corinthians 2:10 / Matthew 16:19 / Matthew 18:18 / Luke 17:3 / John 20:23.

Being 'obedient in all things' includes forgiving people for sins they have committed and asking forgiveness of them. Some brethren are so bothered by certain sins that they cannot possibly forgive another for their deed.

Let us note that sin has no degrees of error in the eyes of God. James said that if we violate one part of the law, we violate it all, James 2:10. The Christian today is to set aside personal prejudice and exercise a consistent view of all sin.

Paul would now forgive those repenting sinners that the Corinthians forgave because they were acting under his inspired directions, 2 Corinthians 2:10 / Matthew 6:12 / Matthew 6:14-15 / Matthew 18:23-35 / Colossians 3:13 / Ephesians 4:32. Herein we see an authorised design of the church. The church is to remain pure, Ephesians 5:27.

God's divine principles must be adhered to. One who would sin without repentance must therefore be addressed. If tolerance of said sins occurs on the part of the church, then Satan has gained an advantage over us, 2 Corinthians 2:11.

a. Satan's advantage is over the unrepentant sinner.

b. Satan's advantage would be over the tolerant church, 2 John 9-11.

To tolerate sin is to participate in sin and, thereby, the devil has an 'advantage' over the church. With one man's sins, Satan has conquered the many. Brethren need to be careful with whom they sympathise and whom they fellowship. You may be otherwise doctrinally sound; however, a faulty view of another sinner will cause you to lose your fellowship with God, 1 John 1:5-7.

c. Satan may gain an advantage over us by using our prejudices and deep-seated convictions against us.

Those whose sins are grotesque may be more difficult for one to forgive, yet God says to forgive, or else be guilty of sin yourself.

MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

“Now, when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia”. 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

While Paul gave the Corinthians time to repent, he busied himself with preaching truth to others. Acts 20:1-6 is the background to these verses. Notice Titus is not mentioned in Acts 20:4. Paul’s great ‘anguish’, 2 Corinthians 2:4, would have to continue until he met up with Titus in Macedonia, 2 Corinthians 7:5-6.

Apparently, Paul was simply relaying to the Corinthians his true love for their souls to the point of causing him great anxiety over whether they would repent of their sinfulness, 2 Corinthians 11:28.

Secondly, he indicated to them that while he delayed coming directly to them, he travelled northward to Troas from Ephesus that he might meet Titus and hear news from the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 2:12. Titus was not there, however, Paul found many ‘open doors’ of opportunity.

Paul was always looking for opportunities to preach to the lost, and God providentially provided those opportunities, but this time he failed. He was upset and had no rest because he was concerned about Titus, 2 Corinthians 1:13. He didn’t use the ‘open door’ that God supplied and left to go to Macedonia. Paul was distressed about Titus, ‘BUT’.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one, we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Think about a Roman procession. A general would return victorious after a war campaign; he would be wearing a purple robe, which signified he was nearly royalty or a deity, and it would be covered in golden embroidery.

He would ride into Rome on a white horse. Now, the general couldn’t just go ahead and do this; he had to meet certain criteria and get permission from the Roman Senate. These are the conditions.

1. The general had to have personally led the campaign and personally fought on the battlefield.
2. He had to have won the war, not just the battle.
3. The enemy he defeated had to have been outside of the Roman Empire.
4. He has to bring back his soldiers.
5. His army must have killed at least five thousand of the enemy.

Now that was the criteria, and so the general and his army would camp outside the city whilst the Senate decided as to whether or not he was worthy of a Roman procession through the streets of Rome. If he were granted permission and met the criteria, the senate would send a white horse with the purple robe.

The general would then lead his army to the centre of Rome, where he would display all the spoils of his war campaign and any slaves he captured, especially any leaders of the enemy. Along the route, there would be burning incense pots.

The general would reach the temple, sacrifice to their god and burn incense. After the burning of the incense, he would decide which captured slave he would set free and which slaves he would put to death.

Now, Paul never witnessed one of these because he hadn't been to Rome at this point, but being a Roman citizen, he would be very aware of the practice, and if you read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, again, you will get the bigger picture of the mind of Paul.

Harris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Christ undertook a battle not rightly his; we share in a triumph not rightly ours.’

Victory over the devil and his devices occurs through the Gospel message, divine revelation and truth, 2 Corinthians 2:14 / 1 John 4:4 / 1 John 5:4. When a proper perspective of good, evil, heaven, hell, and the resurrection of the just and unjust is delivered to the lost, souls will have the opportunity to be saved. Paul found such an opportunity in Troas.

Not only is the Gospel message an ‘aroma’ unto the Lord, but the preacher of the Gospel message is, too, 2 Corinthians 2:15. The word ‘aroma’, in Greek, is ‘euodia’, and it means ‘a sweet smell’.

This word is only used two other times in the New Testament, i.e., Ephesians 5:2 / Philippians 4:18, and indicates those activities that please God. Clearly, one who preaches the true Gospel of salvation to the lost is pleasing to the Lord.

Secondly, notice carefully that it is not only the lost, those that perish, but for them that are saved as well, 2 Corinthians 2:15. Here is authority for edification among members of the body of Christ. The ‘we’ here would represent not only the apostles but preachers of the Gospel as well, 1 Corinthians 1:1 / 2 Corinthians 1:1.

The ‘aroma’ of this verse is ‘osme’ in Greek. A different word than the one used in 1 Corinthians 2:15, however, it has a similar meaning, i.e., ‘a smell, scent, odour, good or bad’. Whether the odour is sweet, 2 Corinthians 2:15, or sour to the Lord is dependent upon the reaction one has to the Gospel message.

The truth serves to push those who would reject the Gospel message further from the truth in the hardness of their hearts, Matthew 13:12, i.e., ‘death unto death,’ 2 Corinthians 2:16. Those who accept the truth are saved by that truth and thereby the truth serves as a sweet aroma to them leading ‘from life unto life,’ 2 Corinthians 2:16.

Here is the character defined. One character is hardened by truth, and the other grows stronger and stronger by truth. Even those who have obeyed the Gospel can be hardened by the instructions of truth, and thereby the truth moves them from death unto death; they are hardened in their sin. Life unto life occurs in the hearts of those who hear the truth, obey, and live out its instructions.

Paul asks, ‘and who is equal to such a task?’ 2 Corinthians 2:16. The word ‘equal’, or ‘sufficient’, in Greek is ‘hikanos’, and it means of persons, sufficient, competent, sufficient to prove a point, adequate.

The ‘such a task’ must be the idea of presenting such a message, truth, which has the power to save some and harden others in sin. Eternity is at stake with mankind, and so Paul concluded, ‘Who is truly qualified to teach these things?’ Paul did not see his own qualifications; however, he knew that the duty to preach was his and others’, Romans 1:14-17.

Furthermore, Paul stated that such qualifications come from God, and thereby he is qualified, 2 Corinthians 3:4-5. In fact, as we examine 2 Corinthians 3:4-5, it is apparent that anyone who would study and present divine revelation alone is not only qualified to preach but obligated to do so.

‘Many’ false teachers had corrupted the word of God in Corinth and the world, 2 Corinthians 2:17 / 1 Corinthians 15:12. The word ‘peddle’ in Greek is ‘kapeleuo’, and it means to be a retail dealer, drive a trade. It can also mean ‘anaesthetic’, which means soothing, all nicely, nicely.

It seems apparent that some false teachers were ‘peddling’ the word of God in a paltry and unserious way. When the message fit or benefited his life, he used it. When the message condemned a part of his life, he rejected it, 2 Corinthians 2:17.

Barnett, in his commentary, says the following.

‘How is Paul able confidently to attribute such negative motives to these men, while expecting his own claim ‘of sincerity’ to be accepted? It appears that he is appealing to the known fact that these men have received some material benefit from the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 11:20, whereas Paul deliberately refused payment from them, 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 / 2 Corinthians 12:13-16.’

The Gospel was a mere piece of merchandise that was sold for self-profit and benefit. These brethren ‘adulterated’ the word of God! To adulterate is to mix two things that do not belong, i.e., a married man with another woman other than his wife.

Preachers of truth were rather characterised by preaching in ‘sincerity,’ 2 Corinthians 2:17. We defined the word ‘sincerity’, ‘heilikrineia’ in 2 Corinthians 1:12, as unmixed, without alloy, pure.

Now we have a complete picture of what preaching truth is all about. Preaching is to be done in ‘sincerity’, without mixture, pure, open and above board, as opposed to adulterating and mixing things in the Gospel that do not belong.

God has spoken divine truths, Isaiah 55:10-11 / 2 Timothy 3:16. Let all be satisfied with these divine truths and never place our human reasoning within and thereby adulterate, contaminate, defile, corrupt and make vulgar the word of God.

Truthful preaching is, therefore, to be ‘of God, in the sight of God’ as preaching men ‘speak in Christ,’ 2 Corinthians 2:17. This is authoritative preaching, 1 Peter 4:11.

The phrase ‘in Christ’ helps us understand better the instructions regarding the widow mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:39. She is to marry ‘in the Lord’, and so the command is to marry by the authority of Christ.

SUMMARY

2 Corinthians 7:7 reveals that Titus had given Paul good news regarding the spiritual state of the Corinthian brethren. Titus also gave Paul the bad news. Some brethren were charging Paul with inconsistency, ‘fickleness’, 2 Corinthians 1:17, and self-approval, commendation, 2 Corinthians 3:1. Due to this information, Paul wrote the first epistle, the inferential subject of 2 Corinthians 2:1-4.

The first two chapters of 2 Corinthians served to give the Corinthian brethren Paul’s mode, method, purpose and expected product of the first epistle written to them in AD 57. When one examines 2 Corinthians 1-2, he has a true understanding of what ‘preaching truth in love’ is all about, Ephesians 6:15.

The mode of 1 Corinthians was love, 2 Corinthians 2:4. Love should be the model for all Christians’ actions. We expose sin and care for the physically needy because we love as God loves, 1 John 3:16-17 / 1 John 4:10 / 1 John 4:17.

The method of writing the epistle of 1 Corinthians was the authority of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:17. It would only be through truth that the product of salvation would be achieved. Therefore, Paul was sufficient to deliver such a divine message because it was from God and not man, 2 Corinthians 2:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

Every move on the part of Paul had a purpose. Paul revealed the deliberate act of sparing and delaying his coming unto the Corinthian brethren that they may have time to repent, 2 Corinthians 1:23.

1 Corinthians 2 reveals another purpose behind the writing of 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 2:9. Paul was putting the brethren to the test as we are commanded to likewise do, 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 4:1 / 1 John 4:6. The desired result of the first epistle to the Corinthians was that sorrow leading to repentance would occur, 2 Corinthians 2:2 / 2 Corinthians 7:8-10.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It did not bring joy to Paul to write such things as covered in the first epistle; however, it was necessary, 2 Corinthians 2:11. Paul eventually met with Titus in Macedonia.

Titus relieves Paul's anxiety by fully informing him of the Corinthians' response to his first epistle. Apparently, Titus had brought a favourable report to Paul in Macedonia.

The Corinthians had exercised the discipline upon the erring of 1 Corinthians 5, and thereby brought Paul joy, 2 Corinthians 2:5-7. Paul now 'requests' the Corinthians to forgive this one as he had repented, 2 Corinthians 2:8-11. Herein is the consequence of preaching truth in love. Souls are saved, and brethren edified, only when truth, in all of its purity and authority, is preached, 2 Corinthians 2:17.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

The word 'commend', 2 Corinthians 3:1, in Greek is 'sunistao', and it means to recommend favourable attention. The exact word was used in Romans 16:1. Paul was recommending or commending Phoebe to the Romans.

In what way would Paul and other preachers be commending themselves to the Corinthians 'again'? 2 Corinthians 3:1. The word 'again' suggests that some self-accolades had been attempted beforehand, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. It seems apparent that Paul was answering a charge that had been levied against him previously.

Not only had some in Corinth charged Paul with 'fickleness', 2 Corinthians 1:17, but self-aggrandisement or self 'commendation.' This charge was taken seriously by Paul 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:18 / 2 Corinthians 12:11 / 2 Corinthians 13:6. Titus may have very well told Paul this when in Macedonia.

Letters of 'commendation', 2 Corinthians 3:1, were common in the early church. Paul wrote such of Phoebe, Romans 16:1, as did Priscilla and Aquila for Apollos, Acts 18:27. Due to false teachers deceiving brethren with their doctrines, such letters were important, Acts 15.

The Persians invented the postal system. A letter of commendation may even be advised today, especially since so many Christians jump from one congregation to another without asking any questions. The letter signifies the importance and privilege of membership within the local church, a member of the body of Christ.

Paul was no stranger to the Corinthians. He was considered their 'father in the faith', 1 Corinthians 4:14-15. Such an intimate relationship would not necessitate a letter from them or to them regarding Paul's faithfulness.

Paul used the word 'some' in the second clause of 2 Corinthians 3:1, indicating the necessity for some unknown travelling brethren to have such a letter with them. Whether the visitor has a letter or no letter, all are to be tested, 2 Corinthians 2:9 / 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 4:1 / 1 John 4:6.

The Corinthians had many miraculous gifts given to them by the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 12-13. Corinth was a very large city in those days, and one that many travelled to. As the world saw the Corinthians performing their gifts and hearing the truth spoken, they were reading a way of commendation for Paul and his companions. Not only were they reading a commendation of Paul, but more importantly, of Christ and His soul-saving work. Like a book, the world was to read the Corinthians that they, too, might be saved, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.

“Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Jesus Christ had given Paul confidence that the changes that the gospel had produced in the Corinthians validated his apostolic credentials. That confidence was not merely the product of Paul’s imagination.’

Paul had received the divine revelation of God’s word from the Lord himself, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 / Galatians 1:11-12. This being so, the apostles and preachers of truth were ‘competent’ to minister in divine revelation, 2 Corinthians 3:4-5. The word ‘competent’, in Greek, is ‘hikanos’ and was discussed in 2 Corinthians 2:16, where it was defined as sufficient to prove a point, or adequate.

There in 2 Corinthians 2:16, Paul had in mind the source of divine revelation, and here in 2 Corinthians 3:5, he has in mind the deliverer, not the source, of divine revelation. The one delivering truth could sufficiently do so, but such revelation would never have its source in man.

This divine revelation was entrusted to Paul as a steward, and he, in turn, ministered to others in this word, 1 Corinthians 4:1. Paul was not a preacher of the first covenant, Mosaic Law, but of a new covenant, the Law of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:6 / Galatians 6:2.

Paul made clear to the Corinthians that he was unlike the false Judaizing teachers who preached the Mosaic Law with the Law of Christ, Acts 15. To preach the Mosaic Law is to preach death, Romans 7:9-11.

The Law of Moses identified sin and thereby condemned man with no hope of life, 2 Corinthians 3:6 / Romans 7:7 / Galatians 3:10. The Mosaic Law was written on tablets of stone rather than on man’s heart. They were simple ordinances that could in no way be perfectly kept. The violator was left with no hope of remission.

To preach the Law of Christ alone is to preach ‘life’, 2 Corinthians 3:6 / John 6:63. The life that comes from the Spirit is spiritual life now, John 1:4, and eternal life later, John 3:16. The Mosaic Law left man desiring the Messiah and forgiveness of sins, Galatians 3:19-22.

THE GREATER GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

“Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!”
2 Corinthians 3:7-11

Inferentially, we see another problem that had existed in Corinth. It is possible that Titus had brought to Paul’s attention the fact that false teachers were spreading Judaism in Corinth as they had in Judea and Galatia, Acts 15. Moses was the divine lawgiver who delivered divine revelation to the people.

Moses had been on Mount Sinai receiving the law directly from God, [2 Corinthians 3:7](#) / [Exodus 34:29-35](#). When he came to the people, his face shone bright due to his being in the presence of God. This fact illustrates the glory of that law and its divine origin.

The glory of the Mosaic Law, the first covenant, however, was ‘transitory’, [2 Corinthians 3:7](#) / [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) / [Hebrews 8:13](#). Paul uses the word ‘glory’ eight times in [2 Corinthians 3](#), but uses the word fourteen times throughout 2 Corinthians.

The first covenant, Mosaic Law, had its glory due to being of a divine origin and serving a divine purpose, identifying sin, i.e., ‘brought condemnation’, [2 Corinthians 3:7-9](#).

The Law of Christ, the second covenant, laid upon the hearts of man, exceeds the Mosaic Law in glory due to the fact that it gives provisions for the remission of sins, [Acts 2:38](#).

The supremacy of the ‘ministry that brings righteousness’, [2 Corinthians 3:9](#), the Law of Christ, over the Law of Moses is further seen in that it is designed to be eternal, [2 Corinthians 3:10-11](#) / [2 Samuel 7:12-16](#) / [Isaiah 51:6](#) / [Daniel 2:44-45](#) / [Ephesians 3:11](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The New Covenant is also more glorious than the Old in that it manifests the character and purposes of God more fully and finally. Similarly, the dawning of the sun transcends and supersedes the illumination of the moon. Greater glory attends the proclamation of the gospel than was true when God gave the Mosaic Law.’

Constable, in his commentary, has the following table to highlight the contrast between the old and the new.

Contrast Between The Old And New Covenants			
1. Summary:	Old	New	2 Corinthians 3:6
2. Type	Letter	Spirit	2 Corinthians 3:6
3. Results (Inward)	Death	Life	2 Corinthians 3:6
4. Vehicle	Stone	Holy Spirit	2 Corinthians 3:7
5. Results (Outward)	Same Glory	Greater Glory	2 Corinthians 3:7-8 / 2 Corinthians 3:10
6. Purpose	Condemnation	Righteousness	2 Corinthians 3:9
7. Duration	Temporary	Permanent	2 Corinthians 3:11

A CONTRAST OF THE LAW LEADING TO LIFE AND THE LAW LEADING TO DEATH

For what purpose was the law introduced? Was the Mosaic Law promulgated solely to produce a sense of guilt in the people? Certainly not! It served several very important purposes.

1. The giving of the law served to educate the Israelites morally.

Sin did not ‘come into existence’ when the Law was declared at Sinai, [Romans 7:7](#). It had existed since the days of Adam, but it was not defined and recognised as sin until God made His Covenant with Israel.

The Covenant declared what was right and what was wrong. Hence, he explains that it was when the Law was announced that sin was exposed as sin and the Israelites were made aware that they were guilty of conduct that offended the holiness and righteousness of God.

2. The Law revealed at Sinai was provisional and preparatory, [Galatians 3:24](#).

In his letter to the Galatian churches, Galatians 4:4, Paul reveals that the Covenant made at Sinai, and the Mosaic Law of which it was a part, was designed to last until ‘the right moment come’ when ‘God sent forth His son, to redeem those who were under Law.’

It is important to understand that his use of the term ‘Law’, in Galatians 4:4, does not relate to the Mosaic Law alone. If it did, non-Jews, who had no part in the Sinai Covenant, would be excluded from the blessings of the coming of Christ.

In the letter to the Romans, Romans 2, Paul reveals that, although the Gentiles were not subject to the Mosaic Law, they were, nevertheless, ‘under law’, but failed to obey the Law of their conscience, and consequently, were also guilty before God.

3. The Old Covenant was exceeded in both duration and glory by the new Covenant.

Paul draws attention to the fact that when Moses descended the mountain with the two tablets of stone, after spending forty days and nights there, he was unaware that his face shone with the reflected glory of God, 2 Corinthians 3:7 / Exodus 34:29, and the people could not bear to look at him so he placed a veil over his face, Exodus 34:34, which, tells us, he took it off when he went up into the presence of God.

It is interesting to notice the number of times Moses ascended Sinai to speak with God. It is sometimes mistakenly thought that he made the ascent only once, but the following references, Exodus 19:3 / Exodus 19:20 / Exodus 24:1-2 / Exodus 14:12-13, reveal that there must have been at least four visits afterwards, and so, because he had become aware that his face shone, whenever he spoke to the people, he replaced the veil.

Paul uses the account of the shining face of Moses in a parabolic sense. He says that Moses covered his face because he was aware that the glory of the Covenant and all it contained was ‘passing away’, 2 Corinthians 3:7 / 2 Corinthians 3:11, since it was never meant to be permanent but was always intended to be preparatory, Galatians 4:4. He describes it as passing away in 2 Corinthians 3:11.

THE NEW EXCEEDS THE OLD IN GLORY

He also emphasises this contrast with the ‘Old’ when he uses the term ‘New Covenant’, which he calls ‘the ministry of the Spirit’, 2 Corinthians 3:8-9, and ‘the ministry of righteousness’, which he says is ‘much more glorious.’ It excels in glory.

Why does Paul describe the New Covenant as ‘the ministry of righteousness’? With this phrase, he points to the significant and radical contrast between the two Covenants.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, he says, ‘the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’. The letter, here, is the law ‘written and engraved on stones’, and then in 2 Corinthians 3:7, he describes the Old Covenant as ‘the ministry of death.’

Note, the so-called ‘charismatic’ and Pentecostal groups misuse and misapply the phrase, ‘the letter kills’, claiming that it refers to the written word, which they say they do not need because they ‘have’ the inner witness of the Spirit of God, that is, they claim to have the direct, personal leading of the Holy Spirit, which makes the Bible useful, but unnecessary.

But he tells us to what the phrase refers, and there can be no misunderstanding of what he says. He explains that ‘the letter’ that ‘kills’ is that law which was written and ‘engraved on stones’, at the giving of which the face of Moses shone, 2 Corinthians 3:7. To interpret his words in any other way requires either sheer ignorance or flagrant dishonesty!

The question is, why did the 'letter' kill? It 'killed', it 'ministered death', because, as we have stated, it exposed and condemned sin, it offered no means of cleansing from sin. The Law declared guilt, but could not pronounce forgiveness!

The most that the ceremonies and sacrifices of the old covenant could do was to 'cover up' the guilt of sin until the Lamb of God should come to take away sin completely.

The word 'atonement' is significant here. The Old Testament words for 'atonement' are 'kippurim' and 'kophar', and both mean 'to cover'. We must always recognise the distinction between atonement in the Old Testament Scriptures and atonement in the New Testament.

In fact, there is no word for the Hebrew idea of atonement in the Greek New Testament. Instead, in Romans 5:11, where some versions read, 'through whom we have received the atonement', the Greek text has the word 'katallage' which means 'reconciliation.'

The sacrifices offered under the old Covenant merely offered a covering up, whilst foreshadowing the real forgiveness and reconciliation that would be made possible through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Was the Mosaic Law defective? Was it imperfect? We must be very careful not to suggest that the 'old' Sinaiatic covenant failed and needed to be replaced by a 'new' covenant. The fact that no one was saved or could be saved, by the Mosaic Law does not mean that it was because the Law was defective or faulty.

The weakness was not in the Law, but in the people themselves, who failed to keep the Law. If they had kept the Law and had remained faithful to God's Covenant of Sovereignty, they would not have sinned, and the matter of forgiveness would not have been an issue!

"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Knowing the supremacy of the Law of Christ gives the teacher of said Law confidence and hope while preaching.

The 'hope' rests in the supremacy of the law of Christ over the Law of Moses, 2 Corinthians 3:12.

Both are of divine origin; however, only the Law of Christ offers the remission of sins and life. With knowledge of said things, the preacher may boldly and confidently preach that others may have 'life.'

Who is 'not like Moses'? 2 Corinthians 3:13. Obviously, it is the sufficient divinely qualified preachers such as Paul, Timothy, and Titus. That which was 'passing away' was the Mosaic Law, the very Law that Moses had received on Mount Sinai, 2 Corinthians 3:13.

Apparently, the children of Israel hid from the presence of Moses because he represented the very law that condemned them to death, Exodus 34 / John 1:17. Shame prevented them from looking upon Moses.

Paul is saying that this is not the method of the apostles, prophets, and preachers of his day. Their purpose was to make known the manifold wisdom of God, Ephesians 3:3-6.

Herein is the nature of the Gospel message that endures forever. To some, it hardens, and to others, it is an aroma unto life, 2 Corinthians 2:15-16. The subject at hand is the false teachers in Corinth who were preaching Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ together.

The veil of ignorance remained upon their hard-hearted minds because they rejected the very doctrine that Jesus represented, [2 Corinthians 3:14](#) / [John 1:17](#). Though the Mosaic Law's design was to bring men to Christ, that end was veiled to the hard-hearted Judaizing teachers of Paul's day, [Galatians 3:24](#).

The Jews are still not able to see the glory of God, [2 Corinthians 3:15](#). Instead of pointing out their sin and driving them to seek forgiveness through Jesus, they placed a voluntary veil of ignorance upon their hearts against Christ. Simply put, they rejected the Lord of glory. They missed the point and purpose of the Mosaic Law altogether, [Galatians 3:19](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Israelites’ inability to see the glory shining from Moses’ face, fading though that glory was, is treated as a parable of their descendants’ present inability to realise the transitory character of the Mosaic order and to recognise the unfading glory of the gospel dispensation.’

The veil that kept the end or fulfilment of the Mosaic Law known, would be removed by those who wanted the truth, [2 Corinthians 3:16](#). When a man seeks and knocks, he will surely find, [Matthew 7:7](#). Those who do not want the veil of Moses removed will voluntarily remain ignorant of Jesus and the New Covenant, [Isaiah 6:10](#) / [Matthew 13:15](#).

[2 Corinthians 3:17](#) is the statement that helps us understand more fully the Godhead. The Father's work was carried out by Jesus, [John 5:30](#) / [John 13:3](#), and Jesus' work was carried out by the Holy Spirit, [John 14:26](#) / [Galatians 4:6](#), so that all three are one in purpose, [John 17:21-26](#).

Paul asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals truth and is thereby called ‘the Lord’ or ‘the Spirit of truth’, [John 14:17](#) / [John 15:26](#) / [John 16:13](#). Freedom is the result of one accepting the revealed truth, [2 Corinthians 3:17](#).

Freedom exists over the bondage of sin and death for the faithful servant of God, [John 8:32](#). Those who would knock and seek after Jesus would remove the veil of confusion.

Those who accept the truth of the Gospel and live by divine revelation are ‘in’ Christ as Christ is ‘in’ the Father, [John 14:20-21](#). Therefore, to see Jesus is to see the Father because the two were ‘in’ each other, [John 14:7-9](#). Likewise, to see the Christian who is living by Christ's divine standards, the Law of Freedom is to see Christ and the Father, [2 Corinthians 3:18](#).

We see Christ in our own lives as though we are looking in a mirror and seeing the Lord. Herein, we see the high expectation of God for His people. God expects man to be Christ-like or as God in this life, [2 Corinthians 3:18](#) / [Matthew 5:48](#) / [2 Peter 1:3-4](#) / [1 John 4:10](#).

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE LAW OF CHRIST

1. The Law of Christ is superior to the Law of Moses in that it liberates man from his sins, [John 8:32](#). The Mosaic Law had no provisions for the remission of sins, [Hebrews 10:1-18](#).

2. The superiority of the Law of Christ is that it is designed to be eternal, and the Mosaic Law was only ‘transitory’, [2 Corinthians 3:11](#) / [Colossians 2:14](#).

3. The superiority of the law of Christ is seen in the fact that it was designed to take away the ‘veil’ of ignorance, [Isaiah 25:6-12](#) / [2 Corinthians 3:16](#).

Mankind is drawn to God's light through the Gospel message, [John 6:44-45](#). The Gospel enlightens man that he may know and understand the will of the Lord, [Ephesians 5:17](#).

SUMMARY

The function of 2 Corinthians 3 is to reveal the superiority of the Law of Christ over the Law of Moses. One may ask why Paul inserted this chapter in his epistle to the Corinthians. The answer is obvious: false teachers had wandered over land and sea and spread like a disease throughout the church.

They began in Judea, Acts 15:24, moved north toward Antioch of Pisidia, Acts 15:1 / Acts 15:30, and continued west and northwest to Galatia and beyond, Acts 16:4.

Paul referred to the Mosaic Law as the ‘letter that kills’, 2 Corinthians 3:6, ‘ministry that brought death’, 2 Corinthians 3:7, and ‘ministry that brought condemnation’, 2 Corinthians 3:9. The Mosaic Law ‘kills’ because it rewarded death for unlawful living, Romans 6:23.

No man could live lawfully perfect and expect to have life through Mosaic Law-keeping, Galatians 3:10. Therefore, the Mosaic Law was a ‘ministry of death.’ The Law ‘condemned’ its adherence and gave them no hope. There was, however, a ‘glory’ of the Mosaic Law, 2 Corinthians 3:9.

1. The glory of the Mosaic Law was that it had a divine origin, 2 Peter 1:21.

2. The ‘glory’ of the Mosaic Law was that it was designed by God to lead man to see their need for Jesus, Acts 3:22 / Galatians 3:24.

The false teachers accepted the first glory; however, they fatally rejected the function of the Mosaic Law as revealed in Galatians 3:24, a tutor to bring men to Christ, the guardian looked after a child until they were old enough to be taught. To such men, the veil of confusion remained, 2 Corinthians 3:14.

The new covenant, the law of life, Spirit, righteousness, and freedom. The Mosaic Law was designed to point up man’s sins, Romans 7:7, and motivate the sinner to seek forgiveness through Jesus, Galatians 3:24.

Jesus offers life to those who would seek after Him and His Law, John 1:4 / Galatians 6:2. The law of ‘life’, 2 Corinthians 3:6, offers an eternal heavenly existence, John 3:36. The Law through Christ is Spirit, rather than physically engraved words, 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Those who accept Christ’s words do so happily with no grumbling or complaining, 1 John 5:3. The law of Christ is ‘righteous’, 2 Corinthians 3:9, and filled with eternal ‘glory’, 2 Corinthians 3:11, because it has divine origins as did the Mosaic Law.

The Law of Christ is also referred to as the law of ‘freedom’, 2 Corinthians 3:17. The Law of Christ liberates man from the bondage of sin, John 8:32 / Galatians 5:1. This is the ‘new covenant’ prophesied by the prophets, Jeremiah 31:31-34, and is now in effect through the blood of Jesus, 2 Corinthians 3:6.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of

darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

PRESENT WEAKNESS AND RESURRECTION LIFE

The word ‘therefore’, 2 Corinthians 4:1, always refers to something already written and should prompt us to ask wherefore? I.e. Why? In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul explained that the fading ‘glow’ of the face of Moses symbolically predicted that the glory of the old covenant would pass away, and was destined to be replaced by a new covenant, the glory of which would never pass away.

He adds that Moses was away from this and covered his face so that the people might not see it. But to whom does he refer in 2 Corinthians 4:2-18? We’ll answer this question later, but for now, notice the frequent use of the words ‘we’, ‘our’, ‘us’, and ‘ourselves’.

These words are personal pronouns. Grammatically, they are ‘first person, singular-number, present tense’ and they occur twenty-three times in the eighteen verses of this chapter.

Notice now, 2 Corinthians 4:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:12 / 2 Corinthians 4:14, ‘your’, ‘you’. These are also personal pronouns. Notice the expressions in 2 Corinthians 4:5, ‘ourselves your servants’; 2 Corinthians 4:12, ‘death in us but life in you’; 2 Corinthians 4:14, ‘Jesus will present us with you.’

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN HUMAN REASONING AND DIVINE REVELATION

The ‘ministry’ or service that Paul, Timothy, Titus, Sosthenes and other preachers of truth had was in the new covenant, the law of life, spirit, righteousness, and liberty, 2 Corinthians 3:6 / 2 Corinthians 3:17.

The very law of liberty that Paul preached poured grace and mercy upon the deliverers of said law. Paul had persecuted the church earlier in his life, Acts 8:1-24. However, he had now obtained mercy through Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:1 / 1 Corinthians 15:9.

Paul was now a debtor to preach this message of liberty and life, Romans 1:14. Paul was entrusted with the Gospel message of liberty and would not ‘lose heart’ or fail in his delivering this message of mercy to mankind, 2 Corinthians 4:1 / Acts 26:13-19. Paul would endure all hardships in life so that others may be saved.

Here is where Paul’s teaching separated itself from the doctrines of the false teachers in Corinth. Paul was not ‘commending’ himself to the Corinthians with opinions, personal convictions, or human reason to gain a personal following as he was being charged, 2 Corinthians 4:2 / 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 4:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:7. The Corinthians obviously had a problem with placing levels of importance upon men and following them; however, Paul never sanctioned such events, 1 Corinthians 1:10-12 / 1 Corinthians 3:3-7.

Paul, Timothy, and Titus were commending themselves to ‘every man’s conscience’ through truth, 2 Corinthians 4:2. When talking to people about the Gospel message, we need to give book, chapter, and verse for all that we teach. We are not teachers of self-opinion, personal conviction or reason. We are to represent the name of Christ alone and through Christ alone, man will be saved from the consequences of their sins, Acts 4:11-12.

Paul, Timothy, Titus, and Sosthenes had ‘we have renounced secret and shameful ways,’ 2 Corinthians 4:2. The word ‘renounce’, in Greek, is ‘apeipomen’, and it means to refuse, forbid. At some point in the past, Paul and his preaching companions, ‘we’ had renounced all religious thinking that is not in accordance with ‘truth.’

Inferentially, religious reasoning apart from ‘truth’ is referred to as the ‘hidden things of shame,’ 2 Corinthians 4:2. Such reasoning is found shameful when brought out into the open eye of the public.

Note that religious ideas that do not have their bases or foundation in truth are shameful. no matter how or who delivers it. Paul now enumerated the shameful acts, ‘we do not use deception’, 2 Corinthians 4:2. The word ‘deception’ is Greek ‘panourgia’, which is defined as roguery, ready to do anything, hence, crafty, cunning, artful. Another shameful act is ‘distorting the word of God,’ 2 Corinthians 4:2. The idea is that some would take the word of God and use it in a ‘deceitful’, manner, to beguile, to disguise. The word ‘deceitful’ in Greek is ‘doloo’. The idea of motive comes into the discussion.

Many today are claiming that a false teacher is one whose motives are corrupt. They turn to such passages under consideration and say, ‘a false teacher is one who purposely deceives through crafty means.’

Other passages are held dear to these individuals, such as 2 Peter 2:1-22. One must remember, however, that Paul is not discussing motives. Paul never had the motive to deceive by craftiness anyone with his false ways, Acts 26:9, yet here in 2 Corinthians 4:2, he used the aorist tense, indicating that he and others had renounced craft and deceit! What did Paul and his preaching companions renounce? They renounced human reasoning that was contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Therefore, any human reasoning that does not have Christ’s doctrine as its source is deceptive and crafty.

It matters not whether one is sincere and honest. Why? Because ‘deception’ and ‘distortion’ are the doctrines of the devil, 2 Corinthians 11:3. Deception and distortion are the ‘devices’ of Satan, 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Thereby, Satan deceives many to think that they are preaching truth when in reality they are doing the crafty and deceitful work of the devil, Matthew 7:15-23. Distortion and deceit are the real occurrences when a person teaches error even though he ‘sincerely and honestly’ doesn’t know it is an error.

Rather than doing the distorting and deceptive work of Satan by teaching things other than the doctrine of Christ, Paul said that he and his companions made manifest the ‘truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God,’ 2 Corinthians 4:2. The jealous seek to stir up a faction against preachers of truth in every generation. Truth must not be mingled with error, 2 Corinthians 2:17.

Truth will make man’s conscience clean in the sight of God, and thereby Paul ‘commends’ himself, his truthful teaching of Christ’s laws and his companions to the Corinthians. Those who follow the apostle Paul’s teaching are doing so by divine revelation. Those who follow deception and distortion follow the devil’s doctrines.

While the Judaizers preached an adulterated, mingled message of circumcision and the Gospel, Acts 15:1-5, Paul preached the true Gospel. Apparently, those who would represent the ‘unbelieving’ would be the deceived false teachers and those deceived by the false teaching.

Notice Paul calls the devil, ‘the god of this age’, 2 Corinthians 4:4. Paul is not saying that Satan is a god in terms of deity. The words ‘god of this age’ are simply a figure of speech which Paul uses to emphasise Satan’s influence and power in the world.

Elsewhere, he is referred to as the ‘prince of this world’ or ‘ruler of the darkness’, John 12:31 / Ephesians 6:12. These phrases are used to underline the fact that Satan has significant influence over the affairs of this world.

Harris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The god of this age is not God the Father but Satan, Matthew 4:8-9 / John 12:31 / John 16:11 / Galatians 1:4. He is the one whom this world has made its god. Jesus Christ is the image (Gr. eikon) of God in the sense that He visibly

and accurately represents the invisible God, John 1:18 / Colossians 1:15. The personality and distinctiveness of God are especially in view when this Greek word describes Jesus in relation to God.’

These ‘unbelievers’ will indeed ‘perish’ in their sins, John 8:24. The two-fold explanation of the ‘unbelievers’ demise is given in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

1. When the whole unadulterated truth is not received and practised by individuals, it is the work of Satan! 2 Corinthians 4:4.

A ‘veil’ exists over the ‘minds of the unbelieving’ that ‘blinds’ them. If one were to blindfold me, twist me round and round, and then ask me which way North was, I would not be able to tell him.

Likewise, the devil works by means of distortion and deception to blind the minds of men in spiritual matters so that they may lose their souls with him eternally.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

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

2. The Gospel is represented by ‘light,’ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Light makes manifest the things that would otherwise be hidden in darkness. This verse helps us understand that the veil of darkness and ignorance placed upon an individual’s mind is voluntarily accepted. Satan works to that end, but does not make anyone evil. Man becomes a servant of the devil by his own lust, James 1:13-15. God is the God of light, 1 John 1:5-7.

Man can understand truth and live it; however, those actions are purposeful in the mind. One who would claim that he does not understand all truth, and neither can anyone else, has had his mind veiled by Satan to his own perishing. Such teaching is generally at the heart of ecumenical and unity and diversity movements.

A LESSON ON AUTHORITY

Paul clearly proclaimed that the message he and his companions preached was not their own. They preached divine revelation as it was revealed to them, Galatians 1:11. Paul had earlier said that no man is ‘sufficient’ to preach a message of divine origin, 2 Corinthians 2:16.

Paul proclaimed his and others’ sufficiency to be only ‘from God’ and not their own ideas, 2 Corinthians 3:5. So again, Paul proclaimed that his sufficiency came not from his own reasoning but from divine revelation. Paul was not trying to gain a following by means of deceptive and crafty teachings, 2 Corinthians 4:5.

Apparently, some in Corinth were being factious. They gained a following against Paul and his companions with a host of accusations. Paul was meticulously exposing said individuals to be workers of Satan.

God said in Genesis 1:3, ‘Let there be light: and there was light.’ Apparently, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:6, was using Genesis 1:3, by means of metonymy, to illustrate the manifesting nature of God.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Like the earth of Genesis 1:2, the lost sinner is formless and empty; but when he trusts Christ, he becomes a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17. God then begins to form and fill the life of the person who trusts Christ, and he begins to be fruitful for the Lord. God’s, ‘Let there be light!’ makes everything new.’

Darkness represents ignorance and a lack of understanding in the Scriptures, Ephesians 4:18. Light represents the manifestation of truth. As a darkroom holds many secrets, so light exposes all the hidden things in the room. Likewise, a dark creation would hold many secrets; however, the light of God's Gospel message exposed all truth that ignorance and a lack of understanding would be done away with.

Satan is the ruler of the world of darkness and thereby seeks to keep it dark. Those who remain in the dark do so with their father, the devil, John 8:44. Since the glorious Gospel is light and of divine origin, it is certainly worth dying for!

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN DIVINE REVELATION AND HUMAN REASON

2 Corinthians 4:1-7. Paul established the divine origin of the Gospel message and its superiority over the Mosaic Law in 2 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 3:9. Paul's approach toward the Gospel message in 2 Corinthians 4 was that it indeed is true and offers real hope.

Revelation is a divine message that is certainly pure with absolutely no corruption, 2 Corinthians 2:17. One who would therefore preach a message that did not represent the entire purity of the divine Gospel message is a representative of Satan. Satan's 'devices', 2 Corinthians 2:11, are 'distortion and deceit', 2 Corinthians 4:2.

The pure Gospel is viewed as 'treasure', 2 Corinthians 4:7, as opposed to preaching worthless human reasoning, 2 Corinthians 4:5. One's true being is revealed in the message he preaches.

At one time in the past, Paul preached a message of 'distortion' and 'deceit,' though it was not his intention to do so, the word 'renounced' in 2 Corinthians 4:2. Having now renounced the 'hidden things of shame,' 2 Corinthians 4:2, he preached the 'light of the Gospel,' 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Two ways to preach are therefore revealed in these first seven verses.

1. One may preach the 'light of the Gospel' in all its purity, 2 Corinthians 2:17 / 2 Corinthians 4:4.
2. One may preach a message of 'distortion' and deceit' associated with human reason, 2 Corinthians 4:2. Nothing is said about 'honestly mistaken preaching.'

Real hope rests in the pure 'light of the Gospel'. 2 Corinthians 4:8-18. Those who preach the purity of the gospel are armed with the 'exceeding greatness of the power of God', 2 Corinthians 4:7.

This fact being firmly established, gives way to Christian confidence that we may endure all of Satan's workings in good faith. Paul and his preaching companions were 'pressed,' 'perplexed,' 'persecuted,' 'struck down,' and 'always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus', 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; however, they never gave up the fight.

What motivated them to continue, and what shall motivate us today? Paul answered, 'knowing that he that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus.' 2 Corinthians 4:14. Knowing these things, let us continue to give diligence and never grow weary of our labour in the Lord.

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Who are the 'us' and 'you'? And, why does he make this distinction? A correct answer to this question will reveal to whom Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 4:7, which is a frequently misunderstood verse.

What is the ‘treasure’ to which he refers? 2 Corinthians 4:7. 2 Corinthians 4:1 takes us back again to the discussion of his personal ministry. The words ‘ministry’, ‘minister’ and ‘ministrations’ occur six times in 2 Corinthians 3:3-10, and in 2 Corinthians 3:6, we have the definitive phrase ‘ministers of the new covenant’.

We recall that the subject of Paul’s apostleship and his apostolic authority was raised and dealt with in his first letter to Corinth, but the returning Titus must have informed him that there were still those who questioned his right to claim apostleship and were apparently attempting to undermine his authority. Initially, these people had complained about that.

1. He was not one of the ‘twelve’ originally chosen by the Lord during His earthly life.
2. He was a ‘late-comer’ on the scene and therefore did not possess the same authority as the other apostles.
3. He refused to honour tradition because he refused to accept payment for his teaching

It was considered important that a teacher should be paid for his teaching, and, if he did not accept payment, the people took the view that it was because his teaching was worthless or unsound. Paul insisted on using his trade to support himself and rarely accepted money for his work.

In 2 Corinthians 3, he reveals that his critics have complained that he did not bring with him a ‘letter of commendation’ when he arrived in Corinth! In 2 Corinthians 3:1, he records his incredulous reaction to this complaint! But he feels it necessary to return again to the subject of his apostolic authority.

He insists that he has been divinely appointed to become the apostle to the Gentiles, and in 2 Corinthians 3:6, he states that ‘God, made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant’.

Notice the plural ‘us’. It reveals that Paul identifies himself with the other apostles of the Lord. He is not boasting or parading his apostleship when he writes these things. On the contrary, in 2 Corinthians 4, he makes two important points.

1. He recognises his own unworthiness.

He says he has ‘received mercy’. How could he ever forget that he had been a fierce persecutor of the Christians and was responsible for the sufferings and deaths of many? Because he believes himself to be ‘the chief of sinners’, 1 Timothy 1:12-15.

2. He is aware of the difficulties and the hardship he must face in the fulfilment of this ministry.

Nevertheless, he declares that it is God who shone into the hearts of His ministers, ‘to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ’, 2 Corinthians 4:6.

The word ‘knowledge’ has special significance here. This inspiring message is the ‘treasure’ of 2 Corinthians 4:7, which ‘we’ have in what he describes as ‘jars of clay’.

The references given earlier stress that the ‘we’ and ‘ourselves’ and ‘our’, etc., refer to the Apostles. God’s inspired messengers, whilst the ‘you’ and ‘your’ refer to the Corinthians themselves.

This was brought out quite clearly when, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he said, referring to his fellow apostles, ‘WE are God’s fellow-workers, YOU are God’s field,’ 1 Corinthians 3:9.

Many sermons have been preached in which the ‘treasure’ has, in some way, been made to represent either salvation or the presence of the Holy Spirit, but this is not taught by this passage!

Paul is affirming the divine inspiration of the men whom He has called to be His special servants, the Apostles, and the ‘call’ brings both authority and accountability beyond that which was borne by the members of the congregation.

The ‘treasure’ is divine revelation, and the ‘jars of clay’ are the human frail body. Paul and his companions possessed the divine message of truth that represented the ‘all-surpassing power from God,’ 2 Corinthians 4:7. That power had a

divine origin and was not of any man, Galatians 1:11. Therefore, when Paul preached the truth, he did not seek to gain a following on his own behalf but on behalf of Jehovah God and the souls of men.

THE SUFFERING DUE TO PREACHING TRUTH IS WELL WORTH THE REWARD

Paul and his preaching companions were ‘pressed on every side,’ 2 Corinthians 4:8. The word ‘pressed’, in Greek, is ‘thlibo’, and it means to squeeze, metaphorically to oppress, afflict, or distress.

Though Paul and his companions were distressed on every side, they were not ‘crushed.’ The word ‘crushed’, in Greek, is ‘stenochoreo’, and it means to hem in closely, to be crowded together.

So it appears that Paul was saying that though they found themselves in distressing situations, they did not allow themselves to become distressed due to the glorious message they were armed with.

Paul said that he and his companions were ‘perplexed, but not in despair’, 2 Corinthians 4:8. The word ‘perplexed’, in Greek, is ‘aporeo’, and it means to be at a loss, be in doubt, or be puzzled.

It may have been that Paul and his companions found themselves in distressful situations at times and did not know how to handle the situation. These men were never in ‘despair’, without hope, because the hope of the Gospel kept them pressing forward.

Paul and his companions were ‘persecuted’, 2 Corinthians 4:9, the Greek word is ‘dioko’, and it means to chase across the plain, to be a follower of a person, to attach oneself to him.

On more than one occasion, Paul was pursued by his enemies, as he once pursued Christians, yet he was not so pursued that he believed himself ‘abandoned,’ 2 Corinthians 4:9.

Barnett, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Verses 8-9 represent the first of the ‘tribulation lists’ (peristaseis) found within 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 / 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 / 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 / 2 Corinthians 1:5-11 / 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.’

God was always with Paul, Acts 27:23-24. On occasions, these men found themselves ‘struck down, but not destroyed,’ 2 Corinthians 4:9. Paul was beaten at Lystra to the point of near-death, yet he was not destroyed, Acts 14:19 / 2 Timothy 3:12.

When Jesus went about compassionately performing miracles, Matthew 14:14, He preached words of repentance, Luke 13:3, exposed man’s sins, Matthew 12:33-35, proclaimed His deity, John 8:58, and was thereby persecuted even to the point of death, John 8:59. The world hated Jesus because He exposed their sinfulness, John 7:7, and the world hates all those who follow Jesus, John 17:14.

Therefore, as we do our duty of love as did Jesus, compassionate and preaching truth, we will be ill-treated. This is our fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, Philippians 3:10. We do not despair, however, because there will always be souls that want to hear the purity of the truth.

As Paul and his companions preached, they were persecuted physically and mentally, 2 Corinthians 4:10-12 / 1 Corinthians 15:30-31; however, the message was preached. The message preached was the ‘light of the gospel’, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and this light brings ‘life’ to all who obey its words.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘While Christ’s ministers suffer because of their testimony for the Saviour, those to whom they minister experience new and greater spiritual life because of those ministers’ faithfulness, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. The more faithful Paul and his companions remained to God’s will, the more they suffered and the more the Corinthians prospered spiritually.’

“It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:13-15

In 2 Corinthians 4:13, Paul was reminded of Psalms 116, where the Psalmist praised God for His mercy and kindness during distressful days in his life. The Psalmist proclaimed, ‘Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants,’ Psalms 16:15.

The body man may kill; however, the soul belongs to God! Though the eye of scorn awaits the child of God who would boldly proclaim the message of the cross, let us speak and hold not our peace.

Paul’s motivation and all of ours is that we will be raised from the dead as was Jesus, 2 Corinthians 4:14. Those found faithful will live with the Lord in paradise forever, Revelation 2:10.

The distress that Paul and his companions went through was for the sake of the Corinthians and all others who would hear and obey the words of Jesus. God’s gracious offer of salvation is to be preached to the many and received, 2 Corinthians 4:15. Through the work of preachers of truth, the name of Jehovah God will be praised.

“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘So far, Paul gave three reasons for his refusal to become discouraged as he served the Lord. In the past, he had received a divine commission to proclaim a new and better covenant, 2 Corinthians 4:1. In the future, he looked forward to sharing Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead, 2 Corinthians 4:14. And in the present, he had the opportunity to promote the Corinthians’ spiritual welfare and the glory of God, 2 Corinthians 4:16.’

Though the outward and inward trials of stress did cause the messenger of the Gospel to decay outwardly, as with years of life, so the inward man of faith grew stronger and stronger, 2 Corinthians 4:16.

As the years go by, we grow feebler outwardly, yet, inwardly, we are gaining in strength according to wisdom. The divisive and jealous will do their best to tear us down yet, let us press onward knowing that there are souls to save and eternity to greet.

Though the struggles against Satan’s devices leave us outwardly battle-weary, it is not to be compared with the eternal glory we shall have if we continue to give diligence, 2 Corinthians 4:17 / 2 Peter 1:10-11.

Paul and his preaching companions had suffered to the point of death for the sake of the Gospel message, 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, but he knew that the ultimate victory rested in Jesus, 2 Corinthians 2:14.

Paul had his priorities straight, as one would say, 2 Corinthians 4:18. He viewed the present stress as lasting only momentarily in relationship to eternity, Revelation 2:10.

The physical things that we see now appear to be permanent, but really the spiritual things that we cannot see are permanent, Hebrews 11:1. What we can see now is only temporary, 2 Corinthians 4:18.

SUMMARY

2 Corinthians 1-3 reveals much about preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its purity. When the authoritative Gospel, 2 Corinthians 2:17, is preached with an attitude of love, 2 Corinthians 2:4, individuals will be moved to sorrow and repentance, 2 Corinthians 1:23 / 2 Corinthians 2:2, and thereby experience hope in this life, 2 Corinthians 1:1-7. Authoritative teaching is designed to test individuals, 2 Corinthians 2:9.

The Gospel has divine origins and is a superior message to that of Mosaic Law and human reason, 2 Corinthians 3:9. 2 Corinthians 4 continues the distinction between human reason and divine revelation. Also, 2 Corinthians 4 reveals a struggle between good and evil and the rewards for the faithful who would overcome Satan and his devices.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.’ 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

THE SPIRITUAL BODY AND ETERNAL LIFE TO THE FAITHFUL

2 Corinthians 4 discusses the worth of suffering for the cause of Christ’s doctrine. Paul and his preaching companions had feared death in some situations, 2 Corinthians 1:8. No matter how dangerous the situation, Paul was determined to preach the truth to others that they may be saved, 2 Corinthians 4:15.

The things which he suffered could in no way compare to the eternal glory that awaited him and all others who take such a stand, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul knew, by faith, that in the resurrection, men would be clothed with an eternal abode for the spirit, Psalms 132:9 / 1 Corinthians 15:38.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following concerning 2 Corinthians 5:1.

‘As a tentmaker, Paul compared the human body to a tent. Jesus referred to His body as a temple, and He predicted that God would raise it up, Mark 14:58 / John 2:19-22. Since God had raised up Jesus’ ‘temple,’ Paul believed that He would also raise our ‘tents.’ In ancient times, a tent was a familiar symbol of what was transitory.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Our physical bodies are only temporary structures, but God is preparing new bodies for us that are superior to anything that human hands can produce and maintain.’

We suffer sickness, disease, fatigue, pain, sorrow, anguish, distress, over life, false brethren, etc., and hunger in the flesh. Such living causes the faithful to ‘long to be clothed’ with the heavenly ‘spiritual body’, 1 Corinthians 15:44.

The word ‘clothed’, 2 Corinthians 5:2, indicates the past action of obedience to the Gospel without the completion of the rewards that come along with that.

Paul had a divine way of saying, ‘if we die without proper preparation for our eternal abode, it is as being naked because we will not be ‘clothed’ with our eternal spiritual body,’ 2 Corinthians 5:1-2.

Therefore, Paul hoped that no one would die unprepared to meet the judgment of God. If the said event happens, we will be ‘naked,’ 2 Corinthians 5:3, that is, without our spiritually clothed body fit for eternal existence with God in heaven.

Again, Paul mentioned the current ‘groan’, 2 Corinthians 5:2, of our present state in the flesh. This state is a state of ‘burden.’ The word ‘groan’, in Greek, is ‘stenazo’, and it means to sigh often, sigh deeply, or moan. We often sigh due to exhaustion, frustration, pain, and mental anguish that accompany earthly life.

The sighing and mental anguish are not directed at the unclothed body, a state not prepared to meet God in judgment, but we sigh deeply due to our earthly pain that looks vigorously at the end when we shall be clothed with a spiritual body, 2 Corinthians 5:4.

The immortal state ‘swallows’, ‘consumes’ up the body of mortal flesh by the victory offered in Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:54. The physical earthly body, which is mortal and subject to death, is consumed and no longer exists in the heavenly realm.

The word ‘fashioned’, 2 Corinthians 5:5, in Greek is ‘katergazomai’, and it means to effect by labour, to achieve, accomplish. God ‘achieved or accomplished’ our eternal salvation through the work of His Son, Jesus, Luke 4:18-22. This salvation and eternal spiritual body are sure to be accomplished that man may know for sure that God ‘gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee,’ 2 Corinthians 5:5.

The Spirit as a guarantee, 2 Corinthians 5:5. Paul uses the Greek word ‘arrabon’ for ‘guarantee’, and it’s a word that has an interesting significance, the meaning of which becomes plain when we think about how farm labourers would have been hired when the A.V. was translated.

In farming communities throughout the land, there was a special time in the farming calendar when farmers went out to hire workers for the new season. The men who were seeking work would gather in the village marketplace or some similar place, waiting for the farmers to come looking for farmhands.

A farmer would look at those who had gathered, and, if he saw a man whom he thought would be a good worker, he would question him about his experience, his family circumstances, and the degree of enthusiasm he had for the job, and, if he was satisfied with the man’s replies, he ‘would tell him what he was prepared to offer him’. ‘I can offer you a cottage and so much a week!’

If the man accepted the offer, the farmer would take a penny out of his pocket, place it in the palm of his right hand, and shake hands with his new worker, so that the penny passed from one hand to the other! That was called ‘the fee penny’. It was the farmer’s pledge and guarantee that the man was employed, and the farmer would keep his part of the agreement.

Paul states that God’s promise to redeem the whole man is guaranteed by the ‘arrabon’, ‘the free penny’ of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit assures us of God’s intention to complete the salvation which entered when we obeyed the Gospel.

Hence, John could write, ‘We are NOW the children of God, but what we shall become has not yet been revealed,’ 1 John 3:2. God has promised the faithful a heavenly, eternal body and gave as ‘earnest-money’, the Holy Spirit, to assure us of His pledge, 2 Corinthians 1:22.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Making known the mind of the Father to man, 2 Peter 1:21 / John 16:13-14.
2. Convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, John 16:8.
3. Converting souls, Romans 1:16.
4. Sanctification, 1 John 1:1-6.

‘Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.’ 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

The faithful Christian is ‘confident’ because while we live in these earthly bodies that groan in pain, we are not without hope, 2 Corinthians 5:6. We will be resurrected from the dead one day, stand before the Lord in judgment, and live with the Lord forever if we have lived faithfully.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Since we have the promise that we will obtain a glorified body, 2 Corinthians 5:1, and since we have a pledge of that promise in our present transformation, 2 Corinthians 5:5, we can feel consistently confident.’

Such hope motivates us to ‘walk by faith, not by sight,’ 2 Corinthians 5:7. The word ‘sight’, in Greek, is ‘eidos’, and it means that which is seen, form, shape, figure. It is used in other passages of the New Testament, 1 John 5:21.

Due to God’s promise of eternal salvation and an eternal spiritual body, Paul and his preaching companions, as well as all of us, made it their ‘aim’, that is, ‘philotimeomai’ in Greek, in life to live by the divine standard of truth and thereby be well-pleasing to the Father, 2 Corinthians 5:9 / 2 John 9.

These words indicate a set goal to achieve. Reaching said goal is the aspiration of an individual’s life. The life of such a one is filled with ambition to achieve this goal as though one were competing with others to be the victor. Here is a word that indicates an individual is consumed with interest and passion to achieve the goal of life.

In Greek, it says, ‘we are Ambitious to be well-pleasing to Him, whether away or at home.’ Paul’s consciousness of being a ‘citizen of heaven’, Philippians 3:20-21, is so deep that, as long as he is in his ‘physical body’, he is ‘away from home’! And he speaks about dying as ‘coming home’ to the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:9.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

The theology of the translators in 1611 when the A.V. was produced, was responsible for the rather frightening and ominous-sounding translation of 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Many Christians believe that the Day is coming when Christ will return to ‘judge the world in righteousness’, Acts 20:31. For those who are ‘in Christ’, i.e., those who have obeyed the Gospel, Mark 16:16 / Acts 2:38, this is not a Day to fear because they have already been judged.

Having already been judged and acquitted in the person of the Lord Jesus as righteous, John 3:18, they will not again stand trial for their life, Romans 8:1. This verse quite literally says, ‘There is no sentence or condemnation to be served’, ‘katakrima’, for those who are in Christ Jesus.’

As long as Christians continue to walk in the light and confess their sins to God, 1 John 1:5-7, and as long as they remain faithful to death, Revelation 2:10, Christians have nothing to fear on Judgment Day, Psalm 103:10-12 / Micah 7:19.

A DIFFERENT 'DAY'

Near the end of Paul's life, He says that Jesus, the righteous Judge, will award him with the crown of righteousness on that day, 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Is he speaking about judgment day or another day?

When we consider the 'Day' mentioned in Acts 17:31, 'Judgment Day' and contrast it with the 'day' that Paul mentions in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, we soon discover that the word 'day' is used in two very different contexts.

There is a difference between the two days which is important to understand. The 'day' mentioned in Acts 17:31 relates to sin and salvation, and therefore, concerns 'those who are not in Christ'. The 'day' mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 specifically concerns the saints, and only the saints, believers, and the relationship they have with their Lord.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT

There was a 'bema', that is, a judgment seat, in every Roman city, and it would be a place where the Roman authority in charge would judge the day-to-day matters brought before him.

Pilate sat on the judgment seat when Jesus was on trial, Matthew 27:19 / John 19:13. The apostle Paul was taken to the judgment seat of Gallio when the Jews complained against him, Acts 18:12 / Acts 25:6 / Acts 25:10 / Acts 25:17.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

There are two times in the Scriptures where we read about the 'judgment seat of Christ', Romans 14:10 / 2 Corinthians 5:10, and as we shall see, on both occasions, when taken in their context, they are not dealing with non-Christians or salvation.

I'm sure you would have noticed that the context of Romans 14 is all about Christians judging other Christians. They were judging people because of what they ate, and because some kept special days, Romans 14:1-9. The reason we cannot judge our brethren in such matters and are encouraged to stop doing so is that Christ Himself is the judge, Romans 14:10-13.

Notice that Paul is not addressing non-Christians but Christians. This cannot be applied to all matters of judging, and it cannot refer to sinful practices or doctrinal differences, for it would contradict Jesus, John, and Paul himself, John 7:24 / 2 John 9-11 / 1 Corinthians 5:10-13.

It will be Christians who will stand before God's judgment seat. Note that some translations have 'Christ's judgment seat'. The judgment will be conducted by the Lord Jesus, Matthew 25:31-46 / Acts 17:31. All judgment is committed to the Son, John 5:22 / John 5:27.

It is true to say that we will give an account to God, since Jesus is God, **John 1:1 / John 1:14. Romans 14:11** is a quote from **Isaiah 45:23**. Christians, in some sense, have already bowed down to the Lordship of Christ and declared Him Lord of their lives, **Romans 10:9-10 / Philippians 2:9-11**.

Only Christians will stand at the judgment seat of God. Non-Christians will stand before an entirely different judgment, the judgment where all non-believers will be judged for rejecting Jesus as their Saviour, **Revelation 20:11-15**.

Remember, Christians have already been judged; the text doesn't say we must all be 'judged' before the judgment seat of Christ. It says we will stand before God's judgment seat, and we will give an 'account' of ourselves to God, **Hebrews 4:13**.

In the context of **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**, Paul says that the faithful Christian is 'confident' because while we live in these earthly bodies, we groan in pain, but we are not without hope, **2 Corinthians 5:1-5**.

We will be resurrected from the dead one day, stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and live with the Lord forever if we have lived faithfully. Such hope motivates us to 'walk by faith, not by sight,' **2 Corinthians 5:6-7**.

The Holy Spirit is given to us as a free gift at our baptism, **Acts 2:38**, and stands as God's promise of eternal salvation and an eternal spiritual body, **2 Corinthians 5:5**. Paul and his preaching companions made it their 'aim' in life to live by the divine standard of truth and thereby be well-pleasing to the Father, **2 John 9**.

Paul's consciousness of being a 'citizen of heaven', **Philippians 3:20**, is so deep that, as long as he is in his 'physical body', he is 'away from home'! And he speaks about dying as 'coming home' to the Lord, **2 Corinthians 5:6-9**.

2 Corinthians 5:10 is very often mistakenly applied to the life of the ordinary Christian, when, in fact, a correct understanding of the problem with which Paul was dealing was one which was affecting the church in Corinth at that time.

The words 'good or bad' convey a mistaken impression. The word good is 'agathos', which means 'benefit', and the word for bad is 'kakos', which is more accurately translated as 'worthless'.

The contrast isn't between actions that are morally 'good or evil' but between that which abides in time of testing, i.e. 'of benefit', and that which perishes, i.e. 'is worthless'. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he referred to work as being 'tested', **1 Corinthians 3:9-13**.

Paul says that there will come a time when the work of every teacher and preacher will be tested. Here, the truth that is brought out primarily relates to the teachers and preachers. On that Day, the effectiveness of their work, i.e., the work of the preachers and teachers, will be tested 'as by fire'.

If a teacher's work has been effective and has produced lasting results, it will be as though it has survived the fire, and he will receive the Lord's 'Well done', **Matthew 25:23**. But, if his work is shown to have been ineffective, he will receive no commendation. God will not be able to commend him.

This testing time will not affect a teacher's salvation, because 'works' have nothing to do with salvation, since salvation does not depend on works of any kind, but on faith in the grace of God. Therefore, regardless of what happens to the work that has been done, those who serve God will still be saved, **1 Corinthians 3:15**.

It's very important to remember that Paul isn't discussing the salvation of Christians or the destiny of the non-Christian, but service. And it's equally important to remember that in this section of his letter, he's dealing particularly with the responsibility and accountability of those who, along with himself, share the office of 'apostle'.

Notice how in **1 Corinthians 3**, he makes use of the personal pronouns 'you' and 'your' when referring to the Corinthians themselves, and 'we' and 'us' when referring to the apostles and other preachers. He also reveals this distinction when he says, 'You' are God's Field', 'We' are His co-workers', **1 Corinthians 3:9**, etc.

Paul is saying that it's the work of these servants of God that will be tested. The passage isn't discussing the service of the ordinary Christian but preachers and teachers. In the context of **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**, he uses the word 'we' again, and he uses the word to speak about himself and the other apostles.

So, he's speaking about those who have the responsibility of preaching and teaching; however, as all Christians are commanded to teach others and preach the good news to others, **Matthew 28:19-20 / 2 Timothy 2:2**, the overall application applies to Christians.

Again, we must note that **2 Corinthians 5:10** doesn't say we must all be 'judged' before the judgment seat of Christ. It says, 'for we must all 'appear' before the judgment seat of Christ'. The word 'appear' in Greek is 'phaneroo', and it means to show, declare, manifest. This means that the Lord will make us see our lives as He sees them.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Romans 14:10-12 clearly implies that the judgment seat of Christ will be an occasion of accounting. **2 Corinthians 5:10** provides even more insight into this future accounting.

Standing and appearing before the judgment seat of Christ in both passages has nothing to do with being judged for salvation; it has nothing to do with non-Christians being judged. They both speak about Christians and Christians only giving an account.

The judgment seat of Christ will be an occasion where the Lord Jesus Christ will hold all Christians accountable for the things we have done in the body, whether good (beneficial) or bad (worthless).

Different Christians have different gifts and different opportunities to serve others, but each one of us is expected to be faithful, **1 Corinthians 4:2**. Good works are works of righteousness, and bad works are works of unrighteousness, **Matthew 6:1-2 / James 2:17-26 / 1 John 2:29 / 1 John 3:7**.

When we do our work here on earth, people can see what we have done, but they may not know why we did these works. Our heart, which is the source of our motive and attitude, is hidden from them.

At the judgment seat of Christ, the 'motives of the heart' will be brought to light. That which might have been hidden before men will then be fully seen and known, **1 Corinthians 4:5**.

REWARDS

If Christians are already saved, then why are Christians to give an account to God? The fire of Christ's judgment will determine the quality and durability of each Christian's service, not for the purpose of punishing sin but for the purpose of determining the reward to be given. The judgment seat of Christ does not determine whether we are saved or not, but rewards believers based on their service for the Lord, **1 Corinthians 3:13-15**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The idea is not that God will reward us for the good things we did and punish us for the bad things we did. He will rather reward us for the worthwhile things we did and not reward us for the worthless things we did, **Matthew 6:19-21 / 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**. The worthwhile things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. Worthless deeds are those that make no contribution to the fulfilment of God's good purposes, **Matthew 25:14-30 / Luke 19:11-27**.'

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ on that day, the work we have done will become clear i.e., evident, known. God will test each one's work and reveal, i.e., uncover, unveil, every aspect of the work to determine what sort it is.

Any work that endures will be rewarded. Any work that is burned up will not be rewarded, and thus the person will 'suffer loss' of that reward; he would suffer the loss of joy and glory, 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 / Galatians 4:11, but the person himself will be saved.

Jesus Himself in the Sermon on the Mount tells us over and over again that Christians will be rewarded, Matthew 5:11-12 / Matthew 6:1-6 / Matthew 6:16-18 / Matthew 6:20.

Jesus also tells us that He will reward each person according to what He has done, i.e., based upon what Christians did while they were still alive, Matthew 16:27.

In Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the Tenants, Jesus clearly tells His followers that the Kingdom of Heaven would be a place where individual saved believers would be rewarded according to their deeds.

If Christians do a lot with what God has given them, then they will get a greater reward in Heaven. If Christians don't do anything with what God has given them, then they shouldn't be surprised if what they have is taken from them, Matthew 25:29.

Paul knew his work here on earth was important because it produced believers who would then someday join him in Heaven, 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. Paul understood what Daniel taught hundreds of years before: the more people you bring to Christ, the greater your reward in heaven will be.

Jackson says the following concerning Daniel 12:3.

'Note the term 'many,' as compared to fewer. There is clearly implied a level of reward commensurate with one's evangelistic labours.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The suggestion is that the righteous will 'be honoured in proportion to their toils, their sacrifices, and their success.'

H. C. Leupold says the following.

'The glorious reward of the righteous 'is in proportion to the works that are done.'

RESPONSIBILITY

When we take everything we've looked at into consideration, it's clear that God loves to reward His children for their faithfulness and the rewards which He gives appear to be different roles of responsibility.

Jesus told His disciples that their reward would be increased, and they would have more responsibilities. He told them they would be rewarded with roles as the 'judges' over the twelve tribes of Israel, Luke 22:28-30.

In the parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus says the rest of us Christians will also earn greater responsibilities as a result of our efforts here on earth, along with the 'well done'. Since we have been faithful with a few things, we will be put in charge of many things, Matthew 24:21 / Matthew 25:23.

If God has given us different gifts and responsibilities while we are still alive, Ephesians 4:11 / Romans 12:3-8, then it shouldn't surprise us if God wants to utilise those gifts in heaven to serve Him, Revelation 22:3.

CONCLUSION

‘Judgment Day’ will be the day when those who are not ‘in Christ’ will be condemned, but those who are ‘in Christ’ will appear before the judgment seat of Christ for commendation.

In **2 Timothy 4:7-8**, Paul wasn’t referring to Judgment Day, as he, like all Christians, had already been judged and saved in Christ, but the day when he would stand before the judgment seat of Christ at his death to give an account of his work and deeds.

As we have shown in this study, the judgment seat of Christ has nothing to do with salvation and nothing to do with non-Christians; it is the place where saved Christians will give an account to God for judging any other Christians inappropriately, and they will give an account concerning their good or bad acts of righteousness, **Matthew 6:1-2**.

Note that we will answer for what we have done, not for what others do.

We must learn to keep things in their context so that we don’t use these texts to mean something they don’t mean or to apply to people they weren’t meant to be applied to, that is, non-Christians, **1 Corinthians 4:6**.

Many Christians have built up a great reward in heaven, but we must ensure that we don’t forfeit those rewards, **2 John 4-10**. John does not want any of us to lose our ‘full reward’.

He doesn’t want anyone to get to heaven and receive only a portion of what could have been theirs. He wants us to get all the rewards God wants us to have, **2 John 4:8**.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

‘Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are allowing you to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.’ **2 Corinthians 5:11-15**

Paul asks, ‘What is it to FEAR the Lord?’ **2 Corinthians 5:11**. The word ‘fear’ is the rendering of the word ‘phobos’, and originally, it refers to ‘flight’, a flight caused by fear.

However, the kind of ‘fear’ to which Paul refers is not ‘terror’, nor the fear of suffering punishment, but the reverential respect for God, which every creature should feel. It does not refer to fearing God’s righteous judgment, but it is the healthy, wholesome fear of disappointing or displeasing Him.

Unfortunately, the theology of the church of Rome created a ‘Christendom’, in which God was a stern, hard being who looked down on mankind dispassionately, threatening punishment whenever a soul displeased or disobeyed him. It was in this way that the rulers of the so-called ‘church of Rome’ kept control over its flock.

But godly fear is very different from the fear experienced by a criminal who expects punishment because of his offences. It is the emotion felt by a son who fears nothing more than offending a loving Father. **Acts 9:31** shows the right kind of ‘fear’ in action in the church in Jerusalem.

Paul says, ‘what we are is plain to God’, **2 Corinthians 5:11**. This is a statement that is both awesome and inspiring, reminding us of the wonderful statement of the psalmist in **Psalms 139**, the opening verses of which are worth committing to memory!

Remember that Paul had defended himself and his preaching brethren in **2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 4:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:7**, regarding their having ‘commended’ themselves to the brethren.

The word 'commend', 2 Corinthians 5:12, in Greek is 'sunistao', and it means to recommend favourable attention. Paul had no desire for self-attention or glorification through a message he concocted of his own.

Paul's desire was for God to be given all glory for His message of salvation. To find 'glory in appearance' KJV, is to walk by sight rather than faith, 2 Corinthians 5:7. The Corinthians had been guilty of this, 1 Corinthians 1:12, yet now were to change.

Apparently, some in Corinth, those who sought to discredit Paul and his preaching brethren by accusing them of having personal agendas, were accusing Paul and his preaching brethren of being 'out of their mind', that is the Greek word 'existemi', 2 Corinthians 5:13.

The Greek word 'existemi' means to put out of its place, to change or alter utterly, metaphorically to drive one out of his senses. We recall that while Paul was giving his defence to Festus, the governor replied, 'You are out of your mind, Paul! he shouted. Your great learning is driving you insane,' Acts 26:24.

Paul's reply to the accusing brethren is that if we have been deranged or lost our senses, it is unto the glory of God, 2 Corinthians 5:13. Paul was happy to have his own senses driven out and the knowledge of Christ to replace them. If some wanted to refer to Paul as out of his senses, Paul wanted them to know what senses he had been driven to and by what means.

If the brethren in Corinth so chose to view Paul and his preaching companions as 'in our right mind' as opposed to 'out of our mind', then the same principle applied.

Paul's thinking was dictated by divine revelation. Whether one viewed him as sober or deranged, he would bring glory to God with his preaching. Paul says, 'the love of Christ compels us,' 2 Corinthians 5:14. The Greek text says, 'controls us'.

Barnett, in his commentary, says the following.

'Thus there emerge from 2 Corinthians 5:11, and 2 Corinthians 5:14, two motives for apostolic evangelism, the 'fear of the Lord' and the 'love of Christ.' The one relates to Jesus' role as Judge, the other to his role as Saviour.'

The question is, what motivates you? Because motivation is everything! Do I preach because I think I am 'good at it'? Do I preach because I want people to admire me?

Do I preach because it's a way of earning a living? Do I preach because the Love of Christ compels me? Some are driven by the desire for fame, wealth or power, by pride, or self-esteem. Paul said, Christ died for all, so that we may live longer for ourselves but for Christ who died for us and rose again, 2 Corinthians 5:15 / 1 Corinthians 9:16.

'So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

At one time in Paul's life, he let human reason dictate his thinking on the coming Messiah; however, now he views Christ through divine revelation, Galatians 1:11-24.

Though it hurt Paul deeply to think back on his past dealings with Christians and his sinfulness through human reasoning, 1 Corinthians 15:9 / Galatians 1:13-24 / Philippians 3:6, he realised that now Christ had forgiven him, 2 Corinthians 5:16.

To be 'in Christ', 2 Corinthians 5:17, is to be in fellowship with the Lord, abiding in His truths, 1 John 1:3 / 1 John 1:5-6 / 1 John 2:6 / 1 John 2:24 / Galatians 3:27. Christians today need not dwell on their past sins.

We must realise that the old man of sin has passed away and we are not to let that return. Baptised Christians are ‘new creations’ as opposed to those ‘after the flesh,’ 2 Corinthians 5:17. The ‘old man’ died when we obeyed the Gospel.

What do we do with dead bodies? We bury them. We do not repeatedly dig them up to inspect them! What we were is history! Past! Let the old man stay dead. Don’t carry the burden of a guilt that God has already forgiven and forgotten!

Because Christ died for all, it stands that ‘all things are of God’, 2 Corinthians 5:18, all things that lead to eternal life and a resurrected spiritual body. Through Christ are the blessings of remission of sins, Genesis 22:18 / Acts 3:25-26 and thereby reconciliation to God, i.e., fellowship, Colossians 1:20 / 1 John 1:9 / 1 John 3:3.

This message of ‘the ministry of reconciliation’, 2 Corinthians 5:18, was entrusted to the apostles so that all in the world may have the hope of reconciliation and fellowship with God.

This is a testimony of Bible unity. To be reconciled to God is to be one with God and one with brethren, John 17:20-26 / 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 / Ephesians 4:1-6 / 1 John 1:5-7.

Paul says, ‘He has committed US to the ministry of reconciliation’, 2 Corinthians 5:19 / Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16. This does not refer to believers in general, as a priesthood it does, Exodus 19:3-6 / 1 Peter 2:9, but in the context here it’s referring to this special ministry of the apostles, as is proved by the words, ‘Now then, WE as ambassadors for Christ, implore YOU, on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God’, 2 Corinthians 5:20.

The word ‘ambassador’, in Greek, is ‘presbeuomen’, and it is defined as a diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative in residence by one government to another. Who were the ambassadors represented by the plural pronoun ‘we’? The antecedent to the pronoun ‘we’ is Paul and the other apostles.

Why did Paul refer to himself and these other apostles as ‘ambassadors on behalf of Christ’? To truthfully answer this question, we must examine nothing but the context in which the statement is made. Much of 2 Corinthians is Paul’s proof of preaching a divine message with divine origins.

Paul was being accused by some brethren of preaching a message that would ‘commend’ himself to the brethren so that he could have personal gain, 2 Corinthians 3:1.

Some went so far as accusing Paul, and his preaching companions, of scamming the brotherhood for money under the guise of there being a need in Judea for the saints, 2 Corinthians 12:16-18. Paul, hearing that his motives and message preached were under attack, set out to prove the divine origin of his message.

The ambassadors’ objective was to reconcile the Corinthians to God, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. These men were divinely armed with revelation to accomplish this task. They had no personal agenda of gaining a following or getting rich. Their work involved the souls of men.

We do not have inspired men today to serve as ambassadors of Christ, yet we do have the command to use the power of the Gospel to save souls, Romans 1:16. Paul and his preaching companions did not have a monopoly on preaching, 2 Timothy 2:2.

God forbid that you or I would ever preach with an agenda to gain from brethren. Our preaching is to have its origins in divine revelation alone. Our motives are to love for man’s souls alone. When men preach their opinions or personal convictions, they have left the one true faith.

Reconciliation has been affected by God Himself. John reminds us that ‘it is not that we loved God, but that God loved us,’ 1 John 4:10. We could never reach up to Him. He reached down to us!

That is the meaning of the incarnation, God becoming man. ‘God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself’, 2 Corinthians 5:19. This is why salvation could only be by grace, Colossians 1:20 / Ephesians 2:16 / Romans 5:10.

Notice also that there are Christians who are to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:20. Aren't Christians already reconciled to God? Reconciled is the Greek word 'katallasso', and it means to change mutually or be at peace with. In other words, the Corinthians were at peace with God again.

Herein is the love of God made manifest. Notice 'God made him who had no sin to be sin', 2 Corinthians 5:21, but note the footnote because it says, 'Or be a sin offering'.

This is important because there's a huge difference between Jesus being sin and Him being a sin offering. He does not say Jesus was made to be a sinner; he says that Christ became a sin offering, Leviticus 4:1-5:13 / Leviticus 6:24-30 / John 1:29 / Hebrews 9:29 / Hebrews 10:10.

God gave both His only begotten Son to die for man's reconciliation and divine instructions for man to hear, learn, study, and apply that all may be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:21 / Isaiah 53:6 / 1 Peter 2:24. When one is in Christ, his sins are forgiven and God does not 'reckon', put to one's account, sin to that person any longer! Paul is not preaching any type of self-proclaimed message to cause glory to himself. Paul and his preaching brethren preached Christ crucified that the world may be reconciled unto God and have an eternal abode with the Father.

Paul's desire for people was God's desire, to become the righteousness of God, 1 Corinthians 1:30 / Philippians 3:9. Paul's desire for people was God's desire, and that is that no man perishes in sin, 2 Peter 3:9.

SUMMARY

Paul said, 'So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it', 2 Corinthians 5:9. The word 'goal' or 'ambition' indicates a passionate quest to achieve a set goal. The goal of every Christian has its roots in the resurrection of the body, 2 Corinthians 4:14.

Man's eternal body will be 'clothed' with a heavenly, immortal, existence, 2 Corinthians 4:2 / 1 Corinthians 15:42. Paul's aim, as ours ought to be, was directed at the eternal spiritual and immortal body that shall rest with God for eternity, 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

Paul aimed to be the aim of all. Paul was not only immersed in the idea of personal resurrection and eternal existence with the Lord but also in helping others make it to heaven, too, 2 Corinthians 4:15.

The reality of hell caused Paul to preach to others that they would escape these eternal torments, 2 Corinthians 5:11. A spiritual aim demands that we deny self-reason and trust divine revelation.

The theme of 2 Corinthians is found in this principle. Preachers and members of the body of Christ are to have no personal agendas as their motivation to preach, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:16 / 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 3:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:2-7 / 2 Corinthians 5:11 / 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Paul said, 'We walk by faith, not by sight', 2 Corinthians 5:7.

Furthermore, the apostle states that men's glorying is to be in the truth as opposed to 'appearance', 2 Corinthians 5:12. So Paul said, 'And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again', 2 Corinthians 5:15.

Such an aim takes into consideration Jesus. Paul's preaching was the 'ministry of reconciliation', 2 Corinthians 5:18. God's aim has ever been to reconcile mankind to Himself through the blood of His righteous Son, 2 Corinthians 5:19 / 2 Peter 3:9.

Such an aim demands that the forgiven sinner forget his past and move ever closer to the goal. Paul had done many sinful deeds in his past, just as you and I have, 1 Corinthians 15:9 / Galatians 1:13-24 / 1 John 1:8.

When he became a Christian, he was redirected in life through repentance and baptism, Acts 22:16. Each individual who now obeys the gospel must redirect their lives as well, Romans 12:1-2.

We could dwell on our past mistakes to the point of it causing lethargy, complacency, and pessimism in our service to God; however, this is not what the Lord wants.

Paul said, ‘Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!’ 2 Corinthians 5:17 / Philippians 3:13-14. To pine away in sin would be to falter in our aim!

The resurrection of the body and eternal judgment demand an act in life. Whether we choose to preach and or represent divine revelation alone, 2 Corinthians 1:12, or Satan’s doctrine, 1 Timothy 4:1 / 2 Corinthians 2:11, is our choice.

Those who make it their aim to serve God, as did Joshua and a host of Godly men and women in history, will not be disappointed, 1 Corinthians 15:58. Those who will not give up their personal agendas of opinions and personal convictions will forever suffer in hell.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

‘As God’s co-workers, we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.’ 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Paul and his preaching companions endured much to bring the truth to the world that some may be saved. 2 Corinthians 6:1 indicates that the Corinthians Paul is addressing had received the grace of God, the hope of salvation. Paul’s concern for the Corinthians was that they would receive the grace of God in ‘vain’, without profit. False teachers were teaching a mix of Judaism and Christianity, the law of Christ mingled with the Law of Moses, 2 Corinthians 3. There were also some in Corinth who seemed to be bent on exposing Paul and his preaching companions and bringing into disrepute their character.

Paul’s writing, in this second letter, is focused on answering his critics and the false charges made against him, i.e., Paul is inconsistent, 2 Corinthians 1:17, commending himself, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 and being ‘beside’ themselves, 2 Corinthians 5:13.

Paul had preached the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 5:18, as an ‘ambassador’ of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Paul and his companions preached divine revelation alone, 2 Corinthians 2:17.

Those Corinthians who would be swayed by another doctrine would only cause the grace of God in their lives to be made ‘vain,’ 2 Corinthians 6:1. Paul’s admonition is not to be fooled by false doctrine or the slander of men.

Paul’s parenthetical statement in 2 Corinthians 6:1 is taken from Isaiah 49:8, and indicates God’s ever-ready state to forgive sinners and provide salvation. The Gospel age is the ‘time of my favour’, and so Paul stated, ‘now is the acceptable time and day of salvation’, 2 Corinthians 6:1. It is God’s desire that all men be saved ‘now’, 2 Peter 3:9.

PAUL’S HARDSHIPS

‘We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything’. 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

Paul, Timothy, Sosthenes, Apollos, and Titus had preached nothing but divine revelation. It was the aim of this preaching to save souls. If Paul or his companions preached this message, yet lived just the opposite, they would have given an occasion of ‘stumbling’ and caused the message they preached to be ‘discredited,’ 2 Corinthians 6:3. Seeing that these men lived what they preached, they prove that no personal agendas are being met.

2 Corinthians 6:3 speaks volumes as to what our responsibilities are today as ministers of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. We must all practise what we preach, lest we cause others to stumble and blame us and the message we preach.

This is the reason many today say, ‘Why go to church? They are all a bunch of hypocrites?’ Yes, this person has the same responsibilities as anyone else, but God forbid that I would live in such a way as to give credence to that statement.

Paul therefore ‘commends’ the ministration of reconciliation to the Corinthians rather than himself or any other man, 2 Corinthians 6:4. Paul had previously said that they had not preached a message that originated from their own mind, 2 Corinthians 4:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Here, he said that they do commend ‘ourselves’ and then qualified that statement. It was for the sake of divine revelation and men’s souls that Paul and his companions endured much to preach, 2 Corinthians 6:4-10.

1. The words ‘great endurance’, 2 Corinthians 6:4, in Greek is ‘hupomone’, and it means a holding out, patient endurance: the enduring to do.

These preachers suffered much they ‘endured’, and held on to the end.

2. The word ‘troubles’, 2 Corinthians 6:4, in Greek is ‘thlipsis’, and it means metaphorically to oppress, afflict, distress.

3. The word ‘hardships’, 2 Corinthians 6:4, in Greek is ‘anagke’, and it means actual force, violence, torture, bodily pain, anguish, distress.

When Paul and Barnabas were preaching on the first tour, some Jews from Antioch and Iconium stoned and beat Paul to the point that they thought he was dead due to the message he preached, Acts 14:19.

4. The word ‘distresses’, 2 Corinthians 6:4, in Greek is ‘stenochoria’, and it means a narrowness of space, want of room.

The road to preaching salvation to the Jew and Gentile was not a downhill run for Paul and his companions. The Jewish people generally rejected Paul, and the Gentiles treated the gospel as an intriguing concept of worldly wisdom, 1 Corinthians 1:21-24. Paul and his companions quickly found what Jesus meant in John 7:7 and John 17:14. The world hates those who expose their sins.

5. The word ‘beatings’, 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is ‘plege’, and it means a blow, stroke, or the person struck. Looking ahead to 2 Corinthians 11:24-25, Paul spoke of the five times that he received forty save one stroke from the Jews. Other beatings with rods occurred at the hands of Romans, Acts 16:22-23.

6. The word ‘imprisonment’, 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is ‘phulake’, and it means a place for keeping others in, a ward, or prison, Acts 13:50 / Acts 14:15 / Acts 16:19 / Acts 16:24 / Acts 19:29 / Acts 21:30.

7. The word ‘riots’, 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is ‘akatastasia’, and it means an unsettled state; disorder, commotion, tumult, sedition.

When Paul was in Ephesus, a great tumult arose, being orchestrated by Demetrius the silversmith, Acts 19:28-32.

8. The words 'hard work', 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is 'kopos', and it means a striking, beating, toil, trouble, suffering, weariness, fatigue.
9. The words 'sleepless nights', 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is 'agrupnia', and it means sleeplessness, waking, watching.
10. The word 'hunger', 2 Corinthians 6:5, in Greek is 'nesteia', and it means not eating, causing hunger, starving.
11. The word 'purity', 2 Corinthians 6:6, in Greek is 'hagnotes', and it means purity, chastity.

What Paul preached was from the sincerity and purity of divine revelation and never any of his own ideas, 2 Corinthians 2:17.

12. The word 'understanding', 2 Corinthians 6:6, in Greek is 'gnosis', and it means a knowing, knowledge.

This knowledge was of divine origin, 2 Corinthians 3:9 / 1 Peter 3:7.

13. The word 'patience', 2 Corinthians 6:6, in Greek is 'makrothumia', and it means forbearance.

Though Paul and his companions often faced terrible circumstances, they did not lash out at their accusers but rather bore the afflictions with patience in hope that some might be saved. They used Christ as their example in this area, 1 Peter 2:23.

14. The word 'kindness', 2 Corinthians 6:6, in Greek is 'chrestotes', and it means of persons, goodness, honesty, the goodness of heart, Luke 6:35.

Sandwiched between 'purity, understanding, patience', and 'in the Holy Spirit', we find 'kindness', 'honesty', 2 Corinthians 6:6. The word 'chrestotes' is found seven other times in the New Testament, always directly associated with truth.

15. The words 'in the Holy Spirit,' 2 Corinthians 6:6, mean as one was 'in the Holy Spirit,' he or she was in Christ and the Father, Ephesians 5:18-20 / Colossians 3:16.

God dwells in the Christian, 1 John 4:12-16. Jesus dwells in the Christian, Ephesians 3:17 / Colossians 1:27. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian, Romans 8:9-11 / 2 Timothy 1:13-14. God dwells in the Christian through faith, Galatians 3:2 / Ephesians 3:17.

16. The words 'sincere love,' 2 Corinthians 6:6, mean Paul commended himself to the Corinthians 'in love unfeigned.'

The word 'unfeigned', in Greek, is 'anupokritos', and it means without disguise. Paul's true feelings for the Corinthians were that they might be saved.

17. The words 'truthful speech,' 2 Corinthians 6:7, indicate that by no other way may men be saved, Acts 4:12 / 2 Corinthians 5:19.

18. The words 'in the power of God,' 2 Corinthians 6:7, mean the power of God is found in the Gospel message. This was God's power and not Paul's nor any other man's, Romans 1:16.

19. The words, 'weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,' 2 Corinthians 6:7, mean as one armed to the teeth for battle, so the Christian is armed with the word of God, Ephesians 6:10-18 / 2 Corinthians 10:3-4. The devil's doctrines are to be destroyed by divine revelation, 1 Timothy 4:1 / 2 Corinthians 11:3-4.

20. The words 'by glory and dishonour', 2 Corinthians 6:8, mean that whether Paul was accepted or denounced, he preached the same divine message from God.

21. The words 'by evil or good report', 2 Corinthians 6:8, mean that, as some gave Paul honour and glory in some places, they dishonoured him in others.

Likewise, as some gave a good report of Paul, others slandered him, calling him a troublemaker, Acts 18:26.

22. The words 'genuine but regarded as impostors', 2 Corinthians 6:8, mean Paul was often charged with preaching his own ideas and seeking to gain a following for himself.

By charging him with deception, some sought to discredit Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12.

23. The words ‘unknown, and yet well-known’, 2 Corinthians 6:9, mean whether, in places well known or not very well known, Paul preached the truth.

He was well known by God.

24. The words ‘as dying, and we live on’, 2 Corinthians 6:9.

When Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city of Lystra, many thought he was dead; however, he survived, Acts 14:19-20.

25. The words ‘beaten, and not killed,’ 2 Corinthians 6:9.

The word ‘beaten’, ‘paideuo’, means to teach one a thing, to correct, discipline. The Lord had brought Paul through many trials in life that he might learn to give God the glory.

At Paul’s conversion, Ananias was hesitant to baptise Saul, knowing the terrible deeds he had done. Though the Lord often chastened Paul, He did not allow Paul to be killed until due time, Acts 9:16.

26. The words ‘as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’, 2 Corinthians 6:10.

Though Paul was a man of sorrow for the things he suffered while preaching the gospel, he had much cause for rejoicing. On one occasion, Paul prayed to God that a thorn in his flesh would be removed.

The Lord would not remove the thorn, and Paul responded, ‘most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’, 2 Corinthians 12:9. Paul’s joy was that of the apostle John and others. They found joy when they heard of other brethren walking in truth, 2 John 4 / 3 John 4.

27. The words ‘poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, and yet possessing everything’, 2 Corinthians 6:10,

mean by the world’s standards, Paul and his preaching companions had nothing, 1 Corinthians 4:11-13.

Though they were poor by monetary standards, they were rich in relationship to the treasures of the Gospel, 2 Corinthians 4:7.

PAUL’S LOVE FOR THE CORINTHIANS

‘We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.’ 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

Firmly established to this point is the idea that Paul and his preaching companions preached nothing but divine revelation. Paul’s earnest desire was that the Corinthians would grasp these truths as he taught them, that they may be rich and filled with joy.

He very seldom appealed by name to those to whom he wrote his letters, and when he did, it was always under the stress of great emotion. We see this when he wrote ‘foolish Galatians,’ Galatians 3:1.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Rarely did Paul address his readers by name in the body of his epistles. He did so only when he felt very emotionally involved in what he was saying, Galatians 3:1 / Philippians 4:15. Here, it was his extreme candour in sharing the painful experiences of his ministry with his dear friends that moved him, 2 Corinthians 6:4-10.’

Paul’s love for the souls of the Corinthians is seen in the idea that ‘our hearts are wide open’ toward you, the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 6:11. Apparently, Paul was making it clear to the Corinthians that his message had not caused them any painful conditions. Their pain and agony rested in their ‘own affections,’ 2 Corinthians 6:12.

Possibly, many of the Corinthians had moved away from where their consciences had been trained and allowed themselves to be given to old lustful appetites. The pain of their conscience was no fault of Paul's, but their own evil doings.

Notice the directness of Paul's appeal in 2 Corinthians 6:12, and notice also the strength of his feelings in 2 Corinthians 6:11. And again, when he thanked the church in Philippi for its financial support, Philippians 4:15. Their support was unique! It was solitary! 'No other church,' and such personal references give us an insight into the heart of the apostle.

I suspect that we are generally inclined to think about him as all minds; he is a thinker, a logician, a debater, who sees nothing and feels nothing except the importance of the message he carries. We overlook the fact that he was a man who felt very deeply and was not immune to insults, slander and misrepresentation.

He felt, and could be hurt by brethren who deliberately tried to harm him by spreading false accounts of what he taught and what he was doing. On the other extreme, he was deeply moved and thankful when people like the Philippians, without being asked, sent financial help to him.

We have another example of the emotion with which he spoke in 2 Corinthians 6:11. And there is an echo of this emotion in 2 Corinthians 6:2, of the next chapter, 2 Corinthians 7, 'Open your hearts.' In 2 Corinthians 6:11, he is saying, 'our heart is enlarged'.

This may not be the sort of expression to which we are accustomed, even though we do sometimes hear the expression, big-hearted, but it appears in various places in the scriptures.

Solomon uses it in 1 Kings 4:29, and Isaiah says something similar in Isaiah 60:5, when he predicts that the time would come when God would 'enlarge the hearts' of his people to make room for the admission of the Gentiles. This is a prophetic reference to what Paul himself wrote about when he said that the time had come for the breaking down of the old 'wall' separating Jew and Gentile, thus making possible a 'new man' in Christ, Ephesians 2:14. In fact, we see something of this 'enlarging of the heart' when we see the Gentile Christians sending financial help to the famine-stricken believers in Judea, Acts 15. This action resulted in the enlargement of the hearts of both sides in the age-old conflict between Jew and Gentile.

Of course, it would have been wonderful if the Corinthians had responded well to Paul's own expression of concern about them. But the reality is that they had not done so, 2 Corinthians 6:12-13.

'But you are withholding yours from us', Paul writes, 2 Corinthians 6:12. Putting it in another way, he says, 'I have made room for you in my heart, but you have not made room for me in yours'! What follows may be described as an appeal for 'fair play'.

His language suggests that children have a simple, innocent sense of fairness. They do not stand on their dignity or adopt a proud attitude. When he says, 'my children', 2 Corinthians 6:13, he is saying, and he uses the expression 'antimisthia', which means 'an exact equivalent'.

The commentator Knox says that Paul is using 'schoolroom language', and is talking to the Corinthians as 'spiritual children', which, indeed, they were, or appeared to be, because of their spiritual immaturity.

Paul was simply asking that the Corinthians, as his children in the faith, would return the open heart of love toward him that he had shown to them by preaching the Gospel.

WARNING AGAINST IDOLATRY

‘Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Although Paul opens his heart to the Corinthians, that does not prevent him from issuing a stern warning whenever necessary! He says, ‘do not be unequally yoked,’ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

We recognise that living in a pagan city such as Corinth at this time, it was difficult, especially for the Greek members of the congregation, to maintain separation and segregation from the culture and customs in which they had been brought up.

Jewish believers would not have quite the same problem, and that is why, in 2 Corinthians 6:11, Paul addresses his instructions to the local believers, ‘Corinthians!’

But the Jewish members of the Corinthian church are not excluded from the command he issues in 2 Corinthians 6:14, because he quotes several Old Testament scriptures with which they would certainly be familiar. They would be aware of the fact that Mosaic Law said in Deuteronomy 22:10, ‘Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together.’

Bear in mind that in his earlier letter, Paul had already written about the necessity of separation from the old life, stressing the need to avoid the idolatrous culture of their home city.

In 1 Corinthians 10:21, he wrote, ‘You cannot sit at the table of the Lord and the table of devils’, and he is now concerned because it appears that some of the Greek Christians had not taken his instructions seriously and were continuing to associate with pagan friends and relatives.

Now, it is not difficult to understand why that would be the case, because of the central role the Temple occupied in the life of Corinth. For example, when a friend or a family member celebrated a birthday, it was customary to mark the occasion by offering a sacrifice to the Temple.

The carcass of the animal that had been sacrificed would be divided into three parts. One part would be offered on the altar to the god of the Temple. A second part was kept by the priests for their own use. The third part was returned to the celebrant, who used it to hold a feast with family and friends, in a court of the Temple.

Paul’s advice warned that such fellowship was both wrong and dangerous, because it not only amounted to a compromise with idolatry, something that is sinful, but it also presented the risk of being drawn back into a world that the Christian had already rejected and abandoned.

If I use a modern example of this kind of situation. If a man who had been an alcoholic is unwise enough to visit places where people are drinking, he puts himself in a situation that he should strictly avoid, he exposes himself unnecessarily to temptation, and he imposes an unnecessary strain on himself, creating the risk of being drawn back into his old ways.

To the Corinthians, having rejected idolatry and everything associated with it, Paul says that regardless of what their Corinthian acquaintances may think, feel or say, they should keep away from the pagan temples, because any kind of association, for whatever reason, would result in contamination, and God says, ‘Come out from among them. Do not touch the unclean thing and I will receive you’, 2 Corinthians 6:17.

2 Corinthians 6:17 implies that failure to obey this law will result in rejection by God. Obedience to the rule is the condition on which God’s acceptance depends. But as we have already said, Paul’s earlier advice had not been taken seriously.

Or, at least, the Corinthian Christians had found it difficult to follow. Today, of course, we readily recognise the danger of compromise, which Paul highlights, and the wisdom of the instruction he gives, but ‘be not unequally yoked!’ Two questions arise.

1. What is the present-day significance of the Old Testament law concerning the ox and the ass for us today?

Because there is no doubt that to modern Christians it sounds very odd! What principle does it represent?

2. How does it concern present-day believers?

Well, consider first that we are talking about two very different animals, animals which are different in two quite distinctive respects.

1. They are different physically.

The Ox is the larger, stronger animal, and this means that if they were to be yoked together, the greater burden would fall on the shoulders of the Ox.

Consequently, any farmer, being fully aware of this fact and recognising the logic and wisdom of Paul’s words, would never make the mistake of putting the two animals together. They are unmatched! Fundamentally, they do not belong together! The ox was used for ploughing. The ass was used for carrying.

2. And more importantly, as any Jew would know.

There is a religious difference between them. In the Law of Moses, the ox is designated a clean animal, whilst the ass is unclean, and, when we take this into consideration, the significance of Paul’s instructions becomes clear.

No Jew would ever consider putting the two animals together for any purpose, and any Christian Jew would recognise immediately what Paul was saying. The two species. Ox and Ass simply do not belong together! Neither do the Christian and the Pagan.

3. Paul makes a further reference to Old Testament Law when he refers to Leviticus 19:19, ‘You shalt not let your livestock breed with another kind’.

In other words, the interbreeding of species was forbidden by God. I recall that, when I was a boy, the news broke that a Tigrion had been produced! This animal was a cross between a Tiger and a Lion.

But if the geneticists thought that they had produced a new kind of animal, they quickly learned that their Tigrion was sterile, as all hybrids are, and all their efforts came to a dead end because an association between a Lion and a Tiger is unnatural.

And Nature rebels! Nature does not cooperate! The Lion and the Tiger do not belong together. Neither does the Ox and the Ass. And neither do believers and unbelievers.

In 2 Corinthians 6:15, Paul then takes his argument a step further. He has been writing about moral situations that cannot possibly be made to harmonise, and he now points out that there are Spiritual forces that are in conflict. Look again at what he wrote, and notice that these unbelievers are those who sit at the table of Demons, who serve ‘Belial rather than Christ,’ 2 Corinthians 6:15.

The word ‘Belial’ means ‘worthless’, and the people whom he calls ‘sons of Belial’ are the people to whom Jesus once said, ‘You have the Devil as your father, and you do his works’, John 8:44. Incidentally, this is the only place in the New Testament where this expression occurs.

Here, Paul has in mind those who are the ‘Temple of God’, in contrast with those who frequent the ‘Temples of idols’, 2 Corinthians 6:16, and he gives examples of circumstances and conditions that are opposed to each other.

He speaks about 'righteousness', that is the Greek word 'dikiosune', and 'unrighteousness', using the Greek word 'anomia', which strictly means lawlessness, 2 Corinthians 6:14. The difference between the two conditions is stark! 'Righteousness' has to do with right-thinking, right-speaking, right-doing. It concerns 'right-ness' in all its aspects, obeying rules, laws, and regulations. Preeminently, 'righteousness' means being right with God, and is kept right by such a relationship, whilst 'anomia' means the very opposite.

Again, he writes about light and darkness, 2 Corinthians 6:14. He reminds the Corinthians that once they were darkness, but they are now 'light' in the Lord, and it goes without saying that light and darkness cannot possibly co-exist.

Some of the Corinthians' affections were obviously founded on what unbelievers were doing around them. Rather than being guided by the principles and ways of the unbelieving, Paul admonishes them to break such yokes, i.e., don't do the same sinful things that the world is doing and expect to maintain favour with God.

Paul set forth a premise, a command, in which five illustrations were used to establish his point. The premise is, 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,' 2 Corinthians 6:14.

The phrase 'unequally yoked' is one word in Greek, 'heterozugeo' and is found nowhere else in the Bible. The Greek word is defined as to be yoked in an unequal partnership with another.

The word 'yoke', in Greek, is 'zugos' and is used in Matthew 11:29-30 / Acts 15:10 / Galatians 5:1, and it represents a doctrine. The yoke is something that connects or joins together. The two things that are yoked together generally work together for a common goal.

For example, two oxen yoked together ploughing work at the same objective. The Old Testament has some interesting areas where God did not approve of two different things being yoked together, so that a common goal is achieved.

1. Cattle were not to be mixed in inbreeding, Leviticus 19:19.
2. Two different seeds were not to be sown in the same field, Deuteronomy 22:9.
3. The ox was not to be yoked to the mule, Deuteronomy 22:10.
4. Two different fabrics were not to be sewn together, Leviticus 19:19 / Deuteronomy 22:11.
5. Israel was not to mix or marry the idolatrous Canaanites, Leviticus 20:22-23 / Deuteronomy 7:3, but rather destroy them, Deuteronomy 7:2 / Deuteronomy 7:16.

Interestingly, the Law of Moses did not forbid marriage to other foreigners apart from the Canaanites. One such example of this is the fact that Boaz, grandfather to David, who is in the lineage of Christ, married a Moabite by the name of Ruth and was commended for his choice, Ruth 2:10-11. The stipulations put on Moab were that they were not to be allowed in the congregation of the Lord. Deuteronomy 23:4.

To illustrate the point that two doctrines, directions, or ways of life cannot coexist to achieve the one goal of heaven, Paul uses five illustrations. 'What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?' 2 Corinthians 6:14.

As water does not mix with oil, neither does a corrupt style of life exist in peace with the way of righteousness. Righteousness and iniquity cannot coexist. Paul had asked a rhetorical question to prove a point.

The answer is obvious to all. Right, lawful, just, and true conduct can in no way be 'unequally yoked' together. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot work together under the same yoke and achieve a goal together because they have different goals.

The point is established, i.e., a believer and an unbeliever cannot work together to achieve a common goal. A believer cannot participate in sin and expect to achieve the goal of heaven, Matthew 6:24. Righteousness and iniquity cannot coexist in the same yoke.

‘What fellowship can light have with darkness?’ 2 Corinthians 6:14. Light and darkness cannot coexist. The word ‘fellowship’, in Greek, is ‘koinonia’, and it means a person united with another or others in some action, enterprise, or business, a partner.

Again, Paul posed a rhetorical question to establish his point that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal. ‘What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?’ 2 Corinthians 6:15. The word ‘harmony’, in Greek, is ‘symphonises’, and it means agreeing in sound, in unison.

Again, the point of Paul’s rhetorical question was to establish that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal; to do so would be termed ‘unequally yoked’.

Christ and Belial, Satan or everything that opposes truth, cannot have harmony and agreement with each other to achieve a common goal. Likewise, a believer and an unbeliever cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal.

‘What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?’ 2 Corinthians 6:15. Paul’s point is again established. How can one who walks in light ‘share’ in the dark deeds and thoughts of the unbeliever and remain in fellowship with God?

‘What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?’ 2 Corinthians 6:16. The word ‘agreement’, in Greek, is ‘sugkatathesis’, and it means to set down together with, to assent, alliance. An alliance cannot be formed between a temple of God and idols.

Paul explained what the New Testament idea of a temple of God is in 2 Corinthians 6:16, as he quoted from Leviticus 26:11-12 / Exodus 29:45 / Ezekiel 37:27 / Jeremiah 31:1.

The believer and unbeliever of 2 Corinthians 6:14 are clearly defined here. The believer is a temple of God because God dwells within, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 / 1 Corinthians 6:19.

‘Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” And, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:17-18

Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:11 / Ezekiel 20:34 / Ezekiel 20:41, and Hosea 1:10, to further establish the point that a believer cannot be yoked to an unbeliever, unequally yoked.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There was a grave danger that, through carelessness and compromise, the Corinthian believers would be carried away, as it were, into a Babylonian captivity of the soul.’

God makes His abode with the sanctified, those set apart from the world of sin, 1 John 1:5-7; such are said to be His children, 1 John 3:1-3.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This final mosaic of quotations, 2 Samuel 7:14 / 2 Samuel 7:27 / Isaiah 43:6, advances the revelation concerning the Christian’s relationship to God. He is not only our God, 2 Corinthians 6:16, who is holy, 2 Corinthians 6:17, but He is our Father. God has a right to demand loyal allegiance from His children. Since He is the Almighty, we must remember that to disregard His word means to incur divine discipline. Paul compared the church here first to a temple, 2 Corinthians 6:17, and then to a family, 2 Corinthians 6:18.’

We are not to physically come away from those of the world, but spiritually. We do not agree, associate, or share in their erroneous thinking and practices. Those who would bring the doctrine of ‘unity in diversity’ are to be exposed and never comforted in their error.

Though the Christian lives in the world, they are not of the world, John 17:16-18. We do not dress, walk, or talk like the world. To do so would be an ‘unequal yoke.’

DOES PAUL'S COMMAND STILL APPLY TODAY?

So far we have no problem! We understand and appreciate what Paul teaches as it refers to the Corinthian church. But 'do not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever,' 2 Corinthians 6:14. What must we take from this command today? Well, it certainly causes problems from time to time! And why is that?

It is because the instruction has been taken to mean something that it really does not mean, with a result, there have been occasions when a very strong stand has been taken against a member of the church who has decided to marry a member of a 'Denomination'.

To correctly understand these words, we need, first of all, to determine what the word 'unbeliever' means in this context. Bear in mind that, when Paul wrote this letter, there were no 'denominations', therefore he was not referring to them!

The New Testament world knew only those who believed in the One True God, and those who did not and the 'unbelievers' were those who worshipped false gods, the Pagans, those who worshipped and served idols. Should we, may we, classify the members of present-day denominations as 'unbelievers'?

As opposed as I am to the errors of present-day 'Christendom', I do not believe that it would be justified to judge such people so harshly, because I do not believe that the Lord Jesus would condone such a judgment. They are in error, and, consequently, in danger no matter how, since they are, but they are not 'unbelievers' in the scriptural sense of the word.

Whilst I do not doubt that an Atheist, without God, may properly be described as an unbeliever, although I am personally saddened whenever I hear that a member of the Lord's Body has married a member of a Denomination.

I do not think that this verse applies in such a case, and it would be uncharitable of me to describe a devout member of one of these so-called 'Christian denominations' an unbeliever.

Those of us who have any degree of authority or influence in the church bear the responsibility to take positive action whenever we learn that such a marriage is being considered. Sadly, and all too often, we take action after the event. 'Shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted' comes to mind!

By all means, let us teach our children to marry 'in the Lord', 1 Corinthians 7:39, but if we wish to express God's disapproval of marriage to a non-Christian, we need to look elsewhere in the Scriptures.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

'Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God.' 2 Corinthians 7:1

This verse is a continuation of the previous chapter. The 'promises' Paul spoke of are the indwelling of God, His walking with the Christian, and are known as God's children, His people, as said in 2 Corinthians 6:16.

To ‘cleanses’ means to make clean, to cleanse. Sins of the ‘body and spirit’ would include the whole range of lawlessness, 1 John 3:4. We sin with our minds, and spirit, Acts 8:22, and with our hands, and body, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Both mind and body are to be clean and pure before God.

To ‘accomplish’ means to complete, finish. The present tense of this Greek verb indicates an ongoing action. The Christian must continue to accomplish holiness by the blood of Christ and individual diligence.

The word ‘holiness’, in Greek, is ‘hagiosune’, and it means to separate, consecrate, sanctify, and moral purity. When we confess our sins to the Lord, He cleanses and makes us holy, from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9. Because we sin from time to time, we must continue to cleanse ourselves, 1 John 3:3.

SUMMARY

Paul began 2 Corinthians 6 by exhorting the Corinthians to hold on to their faith. Paul and his preaching companions had endured much so that the Gospel may be preached and accepted by all who would hear, 2 Corinthians 6:1-11. Paul now called upon the Corinthians to show forth their love for him as he had shown to them through his preaching, 2 Corinthians 6:11-13. Lastly, Paul commanded that the Corinthian brethren be not ‘unequally yoked with unbelievers’, 2 Corinthians 6:14.

To establish his premise, Paul laid down five illustrations in the form of rhetorical questions to prove that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal, 2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

PAUL WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE BRETHREN IN CORINTH

‘Make room for us in your hearts; we have wronged no one, we have ruined no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I told you before that you are in our hearts so that we die together and live together with you.’ 2 Corinthians 7:2-3

This is Paul’s emotional appeal to the Corinthians. The A.V. says, ‘receive us’, the Greek word is ‘choresate’, but this translation of the word does not express the emotional stress under which Paul was writing!

Such a rendering is far too weak, and happily, virtually all modern translations reveal the strength of his feeling for the Corinthian congregation and supply much better translations, such as ‘make room for us’, or ‘open your hearts to us’, 2 Corinthians 7:2, which more clearly expressed the strong emotion under which Paul was writing.

He felt the coldness in the attitude of the Corinthian church towards him, and he was also aware of the reason for the Corinthian coldness towards him. It is clear from what he writes that Paul considers he has been ‘shut out’ by the Corinthians.

They are ‘keeping him at a distance,’ they are ‘stand-offish,’ 2 Corinthians 7:2, as we might say today, and because the Corinthian church was established during the eighteen months he spent working in the city, such an attitude must have been extremely painful for him to bear.

After all, as he points out, he had never done or said anything to cause them to behave in this way towards him, and this is why, in 2 Corinthians 7:2, he again appeals to the appeals he already made in 2 Corinthians 6:11-12.

These two verses, found in 2 Corinthians 6:11-12, are very significant because they tell us that Paul knew why the Corinthians were now distant towards him. He was aware that critics had been attempting to undermine his reputation and destroy his influence in Corinth by spreading lies about him.

The verses imply that these opponents had accused him of dishonesty, of cheating, in connection with the special collection he was raising for the famine-stricken churches in Judea.

A collection which he had been requested by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, to take up as he travelled among the Gentile churches, a request with which, in his letter to the Galatians, he declared himself happy to comply, as he states in Galatians 2:19.

Furthermore, Acts 20:33-34 suggests that he knew that already his opponents were insinuating that he was misappropriating funds intended for the Jewish churches. We shall see more of this in 2 Corinthians 8.

For the moment, bear in mind that the Corinthians had not yet contributed to that fund, even though they had known about it for about a year, and actually begun to respond to the appeal.

But their delay in fulfilling the commitment they had promised was caused after his departure from Corinth, when Judaizing believers who opposed him had arrived and had lied about him, causing the church to grow cold towards him.

Of course, in this letter, Paul passionately repudiates the charges that have been levelled against him, and he again pleads, 'Open your hearts! My heart is open to you, but you are 'restricted in your emotions!' 2 Corinthians 7:2.

Notice, though, he is not rebuking the Corinthians, nor is he accusing them, 'condemning' them, is how he expressed it, 2 Corinthians 7:3. On the contrary, he declares that he has been 'boasting' about them to Titus, his co-worker and messenger, telling him what fine people the Corinthian brethren are! 2 Corinthians 7:4.

He implies that his feelings for them are in complete contrast with their 'coldness' towards himself, and he even tells them that, 'living or dying', they remain in his heart, 2 Corinthians 7:3.

The idea of 'make room for us in your hearts', 2 Corinthians 7:2, is that Paul desired the Corinthians to accept his instructions as having divine origins, 2 Corinthians 6:11-13.

While preaching to the Corinthians, Paul and his preaching companions never wronged, corrupted, or took advantage of anyone, 2 Corinthians 7:2. Everything that Paul taught was for the benefit of his audience rather than himself, 2 Corinthians 4:15. Paul was not 'condemning' the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 7:3.

He simply wanted them to have confidence in his words as having divine origins and thereby follow the instructions given. Paul truly loved these brethren, 2 Corinthians 7:4.

Keener, in his commentary, says the following.

'The caveat that one was writing something not to stir negative emotion but to demonstrate affection, 2 Corinthians 7:3 / 1 Corinthians 4:14, was an appropriate way of showing love'.

'I have great confidence in you; I take great pride on your behalf. I am filled with encouragement; I am overflowing with joy amid all our suffering. For even when we came into Macedonia, our body had no rest at all, but we were troubled in every way – struggles from the outside, fears from within. But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. We were encouraged not only by his arrival, but also by the encouragement you gave him, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your deep concern for me, so that I rejoiced more than ever.' 2 Corinthians 7:4-7

Paul spoke boldly and confidently to the Corinthians because he wanted nothing but the best for their souls, 2 Corinthians 7:5. Paul was confident in the Corinthians' ability to stand in truth, too. He often boasted of their faith to others.

Paul's confidence in the Corinthians brought him comfort and the motivation to endure the heavy-duty afflictions suffered for preaching the Gospel message, 2 Corinthians 7:5 / 2 Corinthians 1:8.

Apparently, Paul continued his narrative from 2 Corinthians 2:13 at this point. There, Paul had revealed that he left Ephesus and travelled northward to Troas to meet Titus, 2 Corinthians 7:6.

Titus had gone before Paul to Corinth to assess the results of Paul's first epistle. When Paul arrived in Troas, Titus was not there, and so he travelled on to Macedonia, 2 Corinthians 7:5.

As Paul travelled to northern Macedonia, and no doubt visited the churches that were earlier established, he saw that there were many troubles. These 'conflicts', 2 Corinthians 7:5, were likely the external doctrines that the churches were forced to combat, Acts 15.

The 'fears', 2 Corinthians 7:5, were Paul's feelings of anxiety for the churches, 2 Corinthians 11:28. Paul was fearful that the Corinthians would permit the divisive group at Corinth to pervert their minds.

As Paul experienced anxiety for the church as a whole, the Lord comforted him with the report that Titus brought, 2 Corinthians 7:6-7. Titus spent time in Corinth seeing and hearing firsthand where the Corinthians were with their faith. Overall, Titus was encouraged by the changes that had been made in Corinth.

The church had a 'longing, mourning, and deep concern' for Paul as they desired to see him again, 2 Corinthians 7:7. Apparently, the efforts of the false teachers and accusers of Paul had not polluted all the minds of the Christians as a whole.

Paul himself clearly felt anxious, as in Macedonia, he waited for the return of Titus. Bearing in mind the cold response with which Timothy had met, he must have wondered how Titus was coping with his difficult commission. He reveals this anxiety when he writes that, whilst he waited for Titus to return, he was 'restless and troubled'.

He speaks about 'conflicts outside' with those unbelievers and believers, who opposed his ministry and 'fears within', an expression which reveals his personal concern about his relationship with the Corinthian brethren and their spiritual condition at the time, 2 Corinthians 7:5.

Notice that he describes this stressful time as 'physical restlessness', 2 Corinthians 7:5. In 2 Corinthians 2:13, he writes about his 'spiritual restlessness'. That expression describes the mental stress he was experiencing at that time in his ministry.

His mind was in turmoil, as he states in 2 Corinthians 1:8. There is no doubt that spiritual strength is often diminished because of physical weakness, and there is no doubt that Paul had been affected by the life-threatening sickness about which he writes in 2 Corinthians 1.

Here in this chapter, however, the expression suggests physical restlessness. We see Paul pacing up and down as he anxiously waits for Titus to return. He was experiencing stress that was caused and aggravated by the presumed 'delay' of the return of Titus. His messenger was late in bringing news from Corinth.

Such passages as these help us to appreciate that Paul was no superman, impervious to all difficult conditions and situations! He was a human being who experienced the joys and sorrows, successes and disappointments, hopes and fears, of people like ourselves.

One thing that weighed particularly heavily on his mind was his fear that perhaps the letter that Titus had carried to Corinth may have been too severe! He even confesses that he had been inclined to regret writing it, 2 Corinthians 7:6-7.

But when Titus returned with the news of the wonderful improvements that had been made in the congregation, the news of the change in their attitude towards him and the assurance that they were even longing for him to return and could not wait to see him again changed his mood completely! They were 'mourning' because of the way they had treated him, but now they were 'zealous' for him!

TITUS

We do not know very much about Titus, because he is not mentioned in the accounts of the Missionary Journeys recorded in the Book of Acts, although, at some stage, he was one of the helpers and travelled with Paul.

What we know is that he was Greek, Galatians 2:3. Although he had become a believer, it would be advisable to have him circumcised, if he was to work among the churches, both Jewish and Gentile, Galatians 2:3.

When Paul and his co-workers travelled from Antioch in Syria to Jerusalem to resolve the thorny question of the position of Gentile Christians towards the Mosaic Law, Paul took Titus along with him, Acts 15:2 / Galatians 2:1, because his Greco-Jewish ancestry would probably enable him to speak with authority on the subject.

With regards to Paul's group of helpers, it is interesting to consider his 'missionary method'; we are inclined to forget the fact that Paul never travelled alone, and his journeys were usually well-planned.

Even if it may appear to us that sometimes they resulted from a sudden impulse, Acts 15:36. In fact, they must have taken some time to organise, once the decision to make the journey had been taken.

For instance, we see from Luke's record in Acts that on his journeys, Paul was accompanied by groups of co-workers, whose names are not always recorded by the inspired historian.

Indeed, we know that Luke himself joined Paul at various times during his travels, as is proved by his use of the word 'we', but he never names himself in his writings, although he does give us the names of several of the men who were among those who did accompany the Apostle.

In Acts 20:4-5, Luke records the names of a group of seven men from various cities, who were Paul's travelling companions. Romans 16 also provides us with interesting information about some of those with whom Paul shared his experiences, and whom he names 'fellow-workers'.

When churches were established during those missionary journeys, the newly-formed congregations were not left to struggle alone. It was Paul's practice to leave workers behind for a time, in order to help the new believers to become established in the faith.

1. Titus, who was one of those co-workers, is brought to our attention for the first time in 2 Corinthians, in which he is mentioned eight times.

2. He is twice mentioned in the Galatian letter, first in Galatians 2:1, where Paul records that fourteen years after his own conversion, he went up to Jerusalem, taking Titus with him, and again in Galatians 2:3, where we learn that Titus was a Greek.

3. He is later mentioned in Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy, where we read that when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, Titus had been sent to Dalmatia, 2 Timothy 4:10.

That chapter is also interesting because, in it, we find the names of other unsung co-workers of Paul.

4. Finally, in the letter to Titus, Paul describes him as 'a true son in our common faith', Titus 1:4, and we learn that he had such confidence in Titus that he left him in Crete, commissioned with the responsibility of appointing Elders 'in every city,' Titus 1:5.

PAUL REVEALED THE DESIRED EFFECT OF HIS FIRST LETTER

‘For even if I made you sad by my letter, I do not regret having written it (even though I did regret it, for I see that my letter made you sad, though only for a short time). Now I rejoice, not because you were made sad, but because you were made sad to the point of repentance. For you were made sad as God intended, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death. For see what this very thing, this sadness as God intended, has produced in you: what eagerness, what defence of yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what deep concern, what punishment! In everything, you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So then, even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did wrong, or on account of the one who was wronged, but to reveal to you your eagerness on our behalf before God.’ 2 Corinthians 7:8-12

We should remember that the Corinthians and Titus now know each other. It is clear, however, that Titus was not with Paul during the time he spent establishing the church in Corinth, nor had he ever been to Corinth before he went as the messenger, carrying the letter which the apostle describes as the ‘painful letter’, 2 Corinthians 7:8.

This is why Paul tells the Corinthians that he had been ‘boasting’ about them to Titus. The fact that they did not know Titus, and Titus did not know them, obviously made this a difficult assignment for the messenger, and therefore, Paul wanted him to know that, despite the ongoing problem, the brethren in Corinth were fundamentally good people.

THE HISTORY OF THAT PROBLEM

We should bear in mind that the young Timothy was with Paul in Corinth when the Roman letter was sent to the church in Rome, Romans 16:21, and also with Paul in Ephesus when 1 Corinthians was written. This was the letter that Timothy probably carried to Corinth as Paul’s messenger.

However, when he returned to Paul in Ephesus, and he had not stayed very long in Corinth, he reported that the letter had not been well received, and the situation was not good.

It was this disturbing report which resulted in the sending of another letter, the one which Paul describes as the ‘painful letter’. This time, however, it was Titus who was to be the messenger going to Corinth, not Timothy.

It may well be that the Corinthian problem had proved too serious for Timothy to manage. He was young, and the proud Corinthians may have had little respect for his youth, 1 Timothy 1:2 / 1 Timothy 4:12 / 2 Timothy 2:22, and may even have resented being told what to do by him, even though he was Paul’s personal representative.

Titus, on the other hand, was older and probably more experienced and more skilled in dealing with problems.

Clearly, the ‘sorrow’ of 2 Corinthians 7:8 was the sorrow produced in the Corinthians by Paul’s first epistle regarding their sinful practices.

Paul realised that his teaching caused this sorrow in them; however, he would not apologise, that is, regret, helping them see their error and regain fellowship with God, 2 Corinthians 7:8.

At some point in the past, Paul did regret writing to the Corinthians, as we all do when admonishing an erring brother. It is difficult to admonish and never easy. Such admonishment often leaves us questioning ourselves as to what our motives were behind saying what we say. Paul was no different.

The other issue was that some were made sorry only for a ‘little while’, 2 Corinthians 7:8. Many had repented of the sins enumerated in 1 Corinthians; however, it is apparent that some had gone back to their old ways. Paul has revealed two new issues.

1. The Corinthians needed to forgive the sinner mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 / 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.
2. They needed to clear their affections for the sinful things unbelievers loved, 2 Corinthians 6:11-18.

Paul's joy and relief are found in the Corinthians' repentance, 2 Corinthians 7:9. The epistle had its desired effects on many. Divine revelation pointed up their error, and rather than being hard-hearted, the Corinthians humbly submitted to Paul's divine instructions and made the appropriate changes, 2 Corinthians 7:9.

Salvation cannot be obtained without repentance, and repentance will not occur without godly sorrow, and godly sorrow in the heart of man will not occur without the saving truths of the Gospel, 2 Corinthians 7:10 / Romans 1:16. Judas is a perfect example of 'worldly sorrow'; his sorrow led to his death, Matthew 27:3-5. Peter's 'godly sorrow' led him to tears but also to life, Luke 22:54-62.

THE SEQUENCE OF REPENTANCE

1. Man reads or hears divine revelation and is convicted of sin, Romans 7:7 / Galatians 3:24.
2. Man's faith in God and His promises motivates him to great sorrow over his transgressions, 2 Corinthians 7:8-9.
3. Man determines to turn away from that sinful conduct due to regret, Acts 2:37-38, and hatred of sin, Romans 12:9, that reconciliation may occur.

This is Paul's analysis, of what the Corinthians did when repentance was made due to their godly sorrow over their sins.

1. They had an 'earnestness' for God's promises, and this moved them to repent.

Clearly, Paul is saying that his 'painful letter' produced a sense of serious urgency in the hearts of the faithful. They were convicted of their sins and hastened to make it right with God.

2. The first letter of Paul produced a 'clearing' of the Corinthians.

Repentance resulted in being cleared from sin. Secondly, the reputation of the Corinthians may have begun to waver among brethren. Their repentance cleared them as a defence, and they regained the respect and joy of brethren all over.

3. The 'painful letter' produced 'indignation' within the Corinthians. Matthew 21:25 uses the word 'displeased'. The 'painful letter' produced this displeasure; however, the displeasure was not in the epistle but in themselves. They had become known among brethren as those in error, and this greatly displeased them to the point of wanting to make things right with God.

4. The 'painful letter' produced in the Corinthians was 'alarm.'

The alarm or fear of God is not that He terrifies us like a monster, but He terrifies us through our knowledge of what He is capable of doing to those who disobey him, Matthew 10:28.

5. The 'painful letter' to the Corinthians was a 'longing', that's the Greek word 'epipothesis'.

This word is defined as strong affection. As it was the Corinthians' longing to see Paul, 2 Corinthians 7:7, even so, it was the Corinthians' earnest desire to be forgiven of their sins that the first epistle pointed up.

6. The Corinthians had to receive the 'painful letter' as a concern.'

The brethren sought after forgiveness with a sense of fervent urgency.

7. The final reaction the Corinthians had because Paul wrote the 'painful letter' was 'readiness to see justice done'.

The Greek word used is 'ekdikesis', which means to take revenge or exact satisfaction. Who was this revenge or vengeance taken out on?

Paul had exposed the deeds of false teachers among the Corinthians in the first epistle, and thereby the faithful's vengeance must have been directed at them and Satan, 1 Corinthians 12:13 / 1 Corinthians 15:12. Paul had admonished them in 1 Corinthians 16:13. Apparently, these brethren took the admonition and dealt quickly with those who opposed truth.

8. Then Paul stated, 'At every point, you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter', 2 Corinthians 7:11. What Paul was addressing is not said.

Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

'He (Paul) acquits them of all responsibility for the offence which was committed. At first, they had been to blame. By not protesting against the outrage, they had seemed to acquiesce in it, but all this had been put right by their reception of Titus and submission to Paul's letter.'

Yes, he had indeed felt a tinge of regret about the letter, which he knew would be 'painful' for them, and would probably hurt them, 2 Corinthians 7:8-9. But, hearing that they have acted on the advice he had given to them, he no longer feels sorry that he wrote it because he realises that the pain they have felt has led them to repentance. It had not caused permanent hurt and resentment. It had made them 'sorry', and their sorrow is the good kind, the kind that leads to true repentance. This passage is important because it defines the sorrow that leads to salvation.

Paul points out that there are two kinds of 'sorrow'. One he calls, 'the sorrow of the world' which Jeremiah 2:26 describes perfectly, 'as a thief is ashamed when he is found out.'

This is 'sorrow for self', not 'sorrow for sin'. The sorrow which the Corinthians had experienced, he calls 'godly sorrow' because it leads to genuine repentance, genuine regret for sin. And such sorrow is therapeutic, healing.

The word 'repentance', in Greek, is 'melanoia', and it literally means 'to have another mind', or 'to think again' and describes a change of mind which produces a change of behaviour.

In sin, we turn our backs on God and walk away from Him. We hear the Good News of His love as revealed in the sacrifice of His Son, and we change our minds about Him, about ourselves and our sin.

We say, in effect, 'I can no longer continue to sin against the God Who has such love for me, nor can I live without Him. I must turn around and go back to Him'. That turnaround is repentance. It is a change of mind, producing a change of heart, resulting in a change of conduct.

'Therefore, we have been encouraged. And in addition to our own encouragement, we rejoiced even more at the joy of Titus, because all of you have refreshed his spirit. For if I have boasted to him about anything concerning you, I have not been embarrassed by you, but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus about you has proved true as well. And his affection for you is much greater when he remembers the obedience of you all, how you welcomed him with fear and trembling. I rejoice because in everything I am fully confident in you.' 2 Corinthians 7:13-16

Paul was not only excited about the news regarding the Corinthians, but he was also made happy because his beloved brother in Christ, Titus, was filled with joy over the Corinthians.

Titus apparently had the same anxiety over the Corinthians as did Paul. When Paul sent Titus to Corinth to check on their spiritual well-being, it appears that Titus had his doubts about them.

Paul assured Titus that the Corinthians were worthy of praise and was sure that all would be well. These encouraging words to Titus proved to be true for the most part; however, there continued to be those who stirred up trouble, 2 Corinthians 1:17 / 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12-13.

When we read 2 Corinthians 7:13-14, it is apparent that Titus did not expect to be so received by the Corinthian brethren upon his arrival in Corinth.

Harris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul’s relief stemmed from the fact that his generous assurances to Titus about the Corinthians had not proved unfounded and therefore embarrassing, 2 Corinthians 7:14. On the contrary, just as his own truthfulness had been vindicated at Corinth, 2 Corinthians 1:18-20, so also his boasting about them had now proved fully justified.’ Out of a sense of shame, repentance, and respect for God’s Word, the Corinthians received Titus with ‘fear and trembling,’ 2 Corinthians 7:15-16.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul was now completely confident of the Corinthians’ continuing submissive obedience to him as their spiritual father and apostle. Consequently, he proceeded to appeal to them again, 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 2 Corinthians 9:15.’ This series of verses speaks volumes regarding the attitude of the Corinthians. The types of people that the Lord seeks to serve him are those who are willing to admit their errors and repent with fear and trembling, 2 Corinthians 7:15 / Isaiah 57:15.

We may also reasonably assume that Paul would not have sent Titus to Corinth on such an important and critical mission without first explaining to him exactly why he was being sent, and what he should be prepared for, once he arrived.

Consequently, given what Paul told him, it would be quite understandable if Titus viewed his mission with some trepidation and with concern about the difficulties of the task that awaited him in Corinth and after having learned of the failure of Timothy’s visit, he would try to prepare himself for any unpleasantness he might have to face.

Paul then left Ephesus for Macedonia, probably going to Philippi, where he was well-loved by the brethren, and Titus left for Corinth carrying the letter which contained Paul’s stern, apostolic response to the news brought back by Timothy.

SUMMARY

The objective of Paul’s second recorded letter to the Corinthians is to prove that he has no personal agenda whatsoever, 2 Corinthians 3:1. Paul had suffered at the hands of ungodly men for preaching truth rather than his opinions or personal conviction, 2 Corinthians 1:5-11.

The content of the message was not based on ‘worldly wisdom’, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Paul has repeatedly stated that the gospel message preached is ‘not from ourselves’, 2 Corinthians 4:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:7 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 5:20 / 2 Corinthians 6:4.

All the work that Paul and the other inspired men had done in the Gospel message was for the sake of the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 4:15. Though some had charged Paul with having personal agendas, his words proved to be of a divine origin, 2 Corinthians 6:8.

Though the Corinthians had obviously repented and corrected the problems that were exposed by the first Corinthian letter, they needed to continue the process of perfection.

Paul and his companions continued to demand reconciliation on the part of the Corinthians with the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:20. Paul was putting the Corinthian brethren to the test.

Would they be obedient in ‘all things’ or just some things, 2 Corinthians 2:8? The new error was in the area of forgiveness. The Corinthians needed to forgive the sinner of 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, because he had repented, 2 Corinthians 2:5-7.

Secondly, the Corinthians needed to put away their ‘affections’ for the things of this world, 2 Corinthians 6:11 / 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Paul, as did Jesus, explains to the Corinthians that they cannot possibly serve God and be in agreement with the ungodliness of any form, Matthew 6:24.

Paul has displayed confidence in the Corinthians’ willingness to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 2:3. Now was the time to be ‘cleansed from the defilement of body and spirit’, 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Paul was not trying to scam anyone, and neither was he trying to gain a personal following by preaching the Gospel. If only the Corinthians could move past such faulty rumours, they would see the true love Paul and his preaching companions had toward them, 2 Corinthians 7:2.

These rumours were the source of brethren stumbling over Paul’s words. The apostle had obviously lost his effectiveness among these brethren; however, Paul would not let such rumours move his beloved brethren.

Rather than giving up and moving on, like many preachers today, Paul sets out to prove the divine origin of his message, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 4:4 / 2 Corinthians 4:7 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 6:3-4 / 2 Corinthians 6:8 / 2 Corinthians 6:11-12.

Paul tells the Corinthian brethren that his and Titus’ hearts were filled with anxiety over them until he finally met up with Titus and heard of their good behaviour and love for Paul, 2 Corinthians 7:7.

Paul knew that his first letter was a scathing rebuke; however, it was what a loving friend had to do. The apostle now calls upon the Corinthians to remember the ‘earnestness’ that the first epistle produced in them and respond equally now to the new charges against them, 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Apparently, Titus had told Paul of the Corinthians’ humble reaction and obedience regarding the sins revealed in the first epistle; however, two new issues had come about. Will the Corinthians correct these errors, too? 2 Corinthians 2:8.

Paul was excited over the fact that the Corinthians had obeyed in all the matters of the first epistle, 2 Corinthians 7:15-16. Such are the people that the Lord seeks to serve him, Isaiah 57:15 / Psalms 51:17. All of Paul’s work of love was done for the Corinthians’ benefit, 2 Corinthians 4:15 / 2 Corinthians 5:11.

His own change of mood is revealed in the language that he uses to describe the change in the mood of the Corinthian believers, as described by the returning Titus. They had been ‘cold’ towards him, as he states in his letter, but now their ‘godly sorrow’ has produced truly amazing changes!

He is almost overwhelmed by the transformation that has occurred as the Corinthians seek to ‘clear themselves’, that is, rid themselves of the sense of guilt they have felt, because of their treatment of him. He exclaims. ‘What Indignation’ as they realise what shame they have brought on themselves.

‘WHAT FEAR!’

As they recognise the wrath of God to which they had exposed themselves by allowing the church to get into the state about which Paul had written in his first letter to them.

‘WHAT ZEAL’

The church had shown in dealing with the offenders as it acted on the advice he had given them; and, also, as they had defended his honour, which had been sullied by the false accusations of his opponents.

IT IS ALL GOOD NEWS!

At every point, Paul believes that the Corinthian believers have shown themselves ‘clear’ and the word, here, means ‘guiltless’. But there is another aspect to all of this, which also delights Paul. He sees the effect that the visit to Corinth has had on Titus!

His messenger had, undoubtedly, set out for Corinth with a good deal of apprehension! He would be wondering, after the failure of Timothy’s visit, what kind of reception awaited him!

How would they receive him? What would they say? And, more importantly, being a Greek himself and well-aware of the volatility of the Greek temperament, what would they do?

But, to his intense relief, they had treated him right royally, and he has returned to Paul in a truly buoyant mood. And Paul is delighted that Titus has benefited and learned from the experience. All this has prepared the way and set the tone for Paul to raise a pressing material issue.

In 2 Corinthians 8, he raises the matter of the collection for the famine-stricken churches in Judea, and reminds them of their promise of support, a promise which has not yet been kept.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

‘Now we make known to you, brothers and sisters, the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, that during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity.’ 2 Corinthians 8:1-2

THE COLLECTION FOR THE LORD’S PEOPLE

Notice the change of tone in this chapter. Paul is going to deal with the problem he really wanted to talk to them about, and that’s the offering they were supposed to take up for the poor saints in Jerusalem who were suffering because of a famine, A.D. 47. Acts 11:28.

To this point, Paul has laboured to prove that his message is of a divine origin rather than some personal agenda, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 3:1-4 / 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 7:2.

Secondly, Paul labours to convict the Corinthians of additional sins so that repentance and cleansing may occur, 2 Corinthians 7:1. Paul put the brethren to the test to see whether they would be obedient in all areas of life, 2 Corinthians 2:8.

The two additional sins were, first of all, their not forgiving the fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5:1, of sin when he had repented and asked for forgiveness, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Secondly, the Corinthians had set their affections on the sinful things of this world, 2 Corinthians 6:11-18.

Paul now deals with the third major subject matter of this letter. There were needy saints in Jerusalem, and Paul had encouraged the Corinthians to be considerate of their brethren's needs and begin collecting funds so that Paul could bring the help back to Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

The 'grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia', 2 Corinthians 8:1, is obviously the monies that they had collected to send to the poor in Jerusalem. The Macedonian churches would include Berea, Philippi and Thessalonica.

When Paul was in Ephesus, on his third missionary journey, he gained the intelligence that the brethren in Jerusalem were in need. Paul began spreading the word, apparently first to the Galatian brethren, 1 Corinthians 16:1.

Secondly, Paul received news about the same time that the brethren in Corinth had many spiritual problems. This news likely came to Paul at the hands of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, 1 Corinthians 16:17.

At the end of approximately two and a half years in Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia due to the reports that he had received regarding the Corinthians' spiritual problems, Acts 19:22.

The purpose of Timothy and Erastus was to 'put you (the Corinthians) in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church', 1 Corinthians 4:17.

Secondly, Timothy and Erastus were to deliver instructions to the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia to lay by in-store on the first day of the week for the needy saints in Jerusalem, Romans 15:26 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 / 2

Corinthians 9.

The churches of Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea received the Gospel message and kept to it, even though they underwent extreme trials, 1 Thessalonians 1:6 / 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

Though they suffered, they were filled with joy knowing that their sins had been forgiven, 2 Corinthians 8:2. Many were monetarily poverty-stricken; however, they gave with liberality in comparison to what they had. Here were Christians who heard of the need of their fellow brethren and did all within their limited means to help.

'For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means. They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness for the blessing and fellowship of helping the saints. And they did this not just as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us by the will of God. Thus, we urged Titus that, just as he had previously begun this work, so also he should complete this act of kindness for you. But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all eagerness and in the love from us that is in you – make sure that you excel in this act of kindness too' 2 Corinthians 8:3-7

To give according to one's 'own means', 2 Corinthians 8:3, is the Greek word 'authairetos', and it means by free choice, of oneself, voluntary. 'Gave beyond their means' literally means they gave everything they had, Luke 21:1-4.

To what end were the brethren in Macedonia giving of their means even beyond that which they were able? 2 Corinthians 8:3. Clearly, the matter at hand was the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem that Paul spoke of in Romans 15:26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

The Macedonian brethren responded to Paul's request with amazing liberality, even beyond their means. The entire event is termed a 'fellowship' between the needy saints of Jerusalem and those of Macedonia.

Brethren were sharing the blessings that God had given them, 2 Corinthians 8:4. Before trying to help others in need, the Macedonians were commended for first taking care of their spiritual well-being, 2 Corinthians 8:5.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Three characteristics marked the giving of these Macedonian brethren. First, they gave sacrificially, beyond their ability, 2 Corinthians 8:3. Second, they gave on their own initiative, before receiving any suggestion or pressure from others that they should give, 2 Corinthians 8:3-4. Third, they gave as a part of their larger personal dedication primarily to the Lord but also to Paul for any service he might request of them, 2 Corinthians 8:5.'

Titus not only had the objective of visiting the Corinthian Christians to see how they fared spiritually after Paul's first epistle, but he also was to remind the Corinthians of the need in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:6 / 2 Corinthians 8:10 / 2 Corinthians 9:2.

The tenses of 2 Corinthians 8:1 indicate that the churches in Macedonia had already collected this 'grace' and were ready to deliver it to Jerusalem. Paul was not turning the need in Jerusalem into some sort of contest between the brethren of Corinth and those of Macedonia; he was simply using Macedonia as an example of giving to meet others' needs out of a sense of compassion and love.

Paul desired the Corinthians to 'excel' in faith, speech, knowledge, and earnestness, which in Greek is the word 'spoude', which means to make haste, be serious, and love, 2 Corinthians 8:7.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

'I have met pastors and missionaries who have argued that, since they devote their whole time in serving the Lord, they are not obligated to give. Paul argued just the opposite: since you are wonderfully gifted from God, you ought to want to give even more!'

Their love toward the physical needs of their needy brethren in Jerusalem was to be exercised with the same liberality and urgency as those in Macedonia.

'I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' 2 Corinthians 8:8-9

Paul wouldn't bind upon the Corinthians what the Macedonians gave. Each individual would need to take a look at their own finances and make a judgment as to what they could give for this cause, 2 Corinthians 8:8.

Paul knew that such a judgment rested with the individual. Paul was simply informing the Corinthians of the 'earnestness', or diligence, of the Macedonians in this area, and so encouraging them to do the same.

When the Corinthians so responded to Jerusalem's need, all would know the 'genuineness' of their love for brethren. As we continue in this chapter, we find that even though Paul did not command that the Corinthians give this grace, he highly recommends it.

The Corinthian brethren had been informed of the grace of Jesus Christ toward them and all men. The grace or favour of Jesus was that He gave Himself as a sacrifice for all, 2 Corinthians 8:9. Such grace was indeed costly. Jesus was 'rich' in that He shared the same glory as the Heavenly Father, John 17:5.

The Lord gave up these heavenly riches to become a man and die for the sinners the world over. The Corinthians, through Jesus becoming man and being crucified on the cross, had the opportunity of receiving the riches Jesus had glorified in heaven. If the Lord was willing to make such sacrifices, shouldn't we do the same for our brethren? Philippians 2:1-11.

'So here is my opinion on this matter: It is to your advantage, since you made a good start last year both in your giving and your desire to give, to finish what you started, so that just as you wanted to do it eagerly, you can also complete it according to your means.' 2 Corinthians 8:10-11

These verses tell us the spacing between the first and second epistle, i.e., one year, 2 Corinthians 8:10. One year ago they were told of this need in Jerusalem, they had the will to help, and now Paul prodded them to make an end to their will with a real contribution to the needy saints in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:11.

Communication and travel were quite different in these Bible days.

No doubt the saints in Jerusalem were in great need; however, relief would not reach them for over a year, as far as the Corinthians' aid was concerned. They would need to be patient and strong while awaiting the aid. The main thing is that the aid requires planning and coordination between churches.

We must note that Paul sets the example as to how churches help the needy in this chapter. First, we note that the aid from the churches of Christ throughout Asia, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Rome would be sent to needy people. Secondly, we shall see in this chapter how that aid was sent.

Though Paul would not command a free-will offering upon the Corinthians, he gives his judgment as an apostle and told them that it would be to their ‘advantage’ for them to do so, and it would be best for them.

The words ‘best for you’, 2 Corinthians 8:10, in Greek is ‘sumphero’, and it means to be profitable. Paul was saying that it was certainly appropriate for the Corinthians to help their brethren in this time of need.

‘For if the eagerness is present, the gift itself is acceptable according to whatever one has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not say this so there would be a relief for others and suffering for you, but as a matter of equality. At the present time, your abundance will meet their need, so that one day their abundance may also meet your need, and thus there may be equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.” 2 Corinthians 8:12-15

The amount of money the Corinthians sent was not the issue with Paul; it was their ‘eagerness’ to give, 2 Corinthians 8:12. The brethren in Macedonia were very poor; however, they gave what they could and even beyond.

The widow who gave all she had, two mites, did not give much, but she certainly was ready to give, Mark 12:41-44. Whether rich or poor, the saints were to give as they were able.

Paul didn’t intend to begin a need in Corinth so that the brethren in Judea would be relieved; this would not be ‘equality’ among the brethren, 2 Corinthians 8:13-14. He was simply telling them to be ready and a willing giver. In 2 Corinthians 8:15, Paul quoted from Exodus 16:18. God had provided manna for the Israelites while wandering through the wilderness. Each household was to gather a measured amount for each soul in their household. The more in the household the more were gathered. All had an equal amount supplied to them by God. Paul was thereby saying, let us who have more in abundance give to those who have less that there be the equality among brethren that God has ever provided.

TITUS SENT TO RECEIVE THE COLLECTION

‘But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same devotion I have for you, because he not only accepted our request, but since he was very eager, he is coming to you of his own accord. And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his work in spreading the gospel.’ 2 Corinthians 8:16-18

How did God put the same devotion into the heart of Titus? 2 Corinthians 8:16. We must first examine the ‘exhortation’ of Paul and his preaching companions toward Titus. We have examined the fact that Titus was sent by Paul to Corinth to see how they fared, 2 Corinthians 2:12-13.

Secondly, 2 Corinthians 8:17, stated that Titus went to Corinth, though exhorted to do so, on his own ‘accord’, of his own will. This passage inferentially reveals that Titus had as much of a desire as Paul to see how the Corinthian brethren were faring after the ‘painful’ letter.

God didn’t put into Titus what was already there, i.e., an earnest desire to see how the Corinthians fared. What did God ‘put’ into Titus then? God ‘put’ into Titus the will to do that which he had the earnest desire to do.

Titus was made confident by the Lord in the same way that Paul was made confident to continue onward in difficult situations, Acts 27:23-24 / 2 Corinthians 12:14.

When Paul and his companions sent Titus to Corinth, he was not sent alone. Titus was to be accompanied by an unnamed brother, ‘praised by all the churches for his work in spreading the gospel,’ 2 Corinthians 8:18.

These statements again help us to see that the churches were in full communication with each other. These churches knew the faithful and were well acquainted with them.

‘In addition, this brother has also been chosen by the churches as our travelling companion as we administer this generous gift to the glory of the Lord himself and to show our readiness to help. We did this as a precaution so that no one should blame us in regard to this generous gift we are administering. For we are concerned about what is right not only before the Lord but also before men. And we are sending with them our brother, whom we have tested many times and found eager in many matters, but who now is much more eager than ever because of the great confidence he has in you. If there is any question about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; if there is any question about our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore, show them openly before the churches the proof of your love and of our pride in you.’ 2 Corinthians 8:19-24

We are not told who this brother of great reputation is. He was one, however, that was so well thought of that he was ‘chosen by the churches as our travelling companion as we administer this generous gift,’ 2 Corinthians 8:19 / Matthew 22:37-39.

The gift here spoken of is the same throughout the context of 2 Corinthians 8, i.e., the collection from the Gentile churches for the needy in Jerusalem. This verse, upon first reading, would appear to teach that the churches were involved in making universal decisions.

That is, the churches met together at some point, and all the heads and elders made a decision for the universal church. If this is the case, then other passages of scripture that teach local church autonomy would be violated, 1 Peter 5:1-2 / Acts 14:23 / Acts 20:28.

How then did the churches make a unified decision without violating each other’s autonomy? The answer is simple: autonomy, which means self-governing. Each local church governed itself with the truth through qualified elders, deacons, evangelists and members.

Each Macedonian church decided on the amount that would be sent to Jerusalem for their aid; no one made that decision for them. When the churches agreed to let this unnamed faithful brother assist Paul in collecting and distributing the funds for the needy saints, they were in no way making any decisions for each other, financial or any decision that would interfere with any church’s authorised autonomy.

There was a multitude of such brethren that accompanied Paul as he carried this bounty of grace to Jerusalem, Acts 20:1-6. The method of sending aid is thereby established. The churches agreed on who would come to their local church and collect the funds that had been prepared for the needy saints and take that money to them.

To avoid being blamed for thievery or any other mishandling of funds, the churches deemed it appropriate to send the unnamed faithful brother with Paul and his companions, 2 Corinthians 8:20. Paul not only wanted to be accepted by God but by his brethren in this matter as well.

Therefore, the safeguards were in place. Paul would do only those things which were ‘right’ in the sight of men and God, 2 Corinthians 8:21. It would not be ‘right’ to take these collected funds for himself.

Once again, it appears that some of the Corinthian brethren had suspicions about Paul. Paul has spent a considerable amount of space in this epistle proving that he has no personal agendas.

The ‘them’ in 2 Corinthians 8:22 would be Titus and the unnamed faithful brother whom all have confidence in. This verse reveals a second unnamed brother who has been many times proved honourable and just. Having heard the same report that Titus gave Paul, this unnamed brother had great confidence in the Corinthians, too, 2 Corinthians 8:22.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Why did Paul not mention Titus’ two companions by name? Perhaps the Corinthians already knew who they were, or Paul may have wanted to heighten anticipation for their arrival by keeping their identities a secret.’

Paul explained to the Corinthians who these men coming to them were. Titus was Paul's 'partner and fellow-worker' to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 8:23. Clearly, the brethren in Corinth were familiar with Titus.

The other 'representatives of the churches' would be accompanying Titus, 2 Corinthians 8:23. These messengers were simply men who were appointed by each church to carry their gifts of grace to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is one place where the Greek word apostolos, usually translated 'apostle,' but here rendered 'messenger,' occurs in the non-technical sense of someone sent on a mission, Philippians 2:25 / Acts 14:4 / Acts 14:14. Usually it refers to one of the thirteen apostles whom Jesus Christ personally commissioned, e.g., 2 Corinthians 1:1.' These brethren that were coming to Corinth had experienced the liberal giving of the churches they had come from, and Paul did not want them to experience anything different in the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 8:24.

SUMMARY

The church is at work on a universal level. The universal church must rise to the occasion whenever and wherever physical or spiritual needs arise among the saints of God.

A case in point is the poor saints in Jerusalem mentioned in Romans 15:26. The apostle Paul had gained intelligence of this fact about the same time he received news that the Corinthian brethren were in grave error.

Paul responds to both issues by sending Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, Acts 19:22, to put the Corinthian brethren 'in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church,' 1 Corinthians 4:17.

And to deliver instructions to the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia to lay by in store upon the first day of the week for the needy saints in Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3.

Paul had sent Titus on to Macedonia a year after delivering his 'painful letter' to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 8:10 / 2 Corinthians 8:16-17. Titus' purpose was twofold.

1. Titus was to check the welfare of the Corinthians' spiritual condition and report back to Paul in Troas, 2 Corinthians 7:5-7 / 2 Corinthians 7:13-16.

2. Titus was to remind the Corinthian brethren of their responsibility toward the needy saints in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:6.

2 Corinthians 8 reveals the liberality with which the churches in Macedonia gave, 2 Corinthians 8:2. It was, therefore, Paul's desire that the Corinthians use the Macedonians as an example and give with the same liberality, 2 Corinthians 8:4-5.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

'There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord's people. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.' 2 Corinthians 9:1-2

In this chapter, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their responsibility toward those in need. The ‘service to the Lord’s people’ is the service of helping the needy saints in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 9:1.

The word ‘eagerness’, in Greek, is ‘perissos’, and it means more than sufficient. Paul tells the Corinthians that he realises it is a redundant thing for him to write; however, he wants to make sure that they are ready with the aid.

Paul knew and was confident in the Corinthians’ readiness in this matter. Paul was so confident that he ‘boasted about their, that is, the Corinthians, behalf to them of Macedonia,’ 2 Corinthians 9:2.

The ‘one year’ gives us an idea as to when 1 Corinthians was written in relation to this epistle, 2 Corinthians 8:6 / 2 Corinthians 8:10. Sometime, less than two years ago, Paul had sent the first letter to the Corinthians.

This is important because it helps us understand that God does not tolerate sin. The Corinthians needed to correct their errors, and Paul was filled with anxiety while waiting for news from Titus regarding their spiritual state.

A study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians proves the same message. While Paul commanded the Thessalonians to be patient and admonish the disorderly in the first letter, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we find him commanding the brethren to withdraw themselves from the disorderly, 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

‘But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one is grudgingly given.’ 2 Corinthians 9:3-5

Paul explains to the Corinthians that he has sent Titus and the two unnamed brethren of 2 Corinthians 8:18-19 / 2 Corinthians 8:22, back to Corinth to prepare them for the collection for the needy saints, 2 Corinthians 9:3. The Macedonians have given beyond that which they were able, 2 Corinthians 8:1-6.

Paul is afraid that, as he travelled to Corinth with some of the Macedonians who had given so much that they would be discouraged and think ill of the Corinthian brethren if they did not give to the cause in Jerusalem.

The Corinthians would put Paul and his companions who gloried in the Corinthians to shame if they were not given for this cause. Paul is telling the Corinthians not to embarrass him in this matter.

Paul sends Titus and the two other brethren to Corinth, 2 Corinthians 9:3. Titus’ objective was therefore to make sure that the monies that the Corinthians had previously promised would be ready for collection and delivery. What if Paul came to Corinth and found the brethren lethargic in this service? 2 Corinthians 9:4.

Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

‘He is not afraid that they will refuse to give, but he is afraid that they may be dilatory for want of organisation. It will produce a bad impression if the money is not ready when it is needed. He carefully limits his anxiety to ‘this particular.’

They meant to collect the funds, and were willing and ready; however, the matter just simply didn’t get done, 2 Corinthians 9:5. Paul would find himself hurriedly politicking for the monies that the Corinthians had promised a year back.

What does this do? When one knows the needs of others, is willing and able to help, however, time slips by, and he never does anything due to procrastination. It says to others that you do not set this activity as a priority in your life. It just does not speak well for such a one in the minds of others, and so it shouldn’t. Christians should be willing to help and not delay!

Sometimes we know that a shut-in is lonely and starved for attention. We know that we have the ability to stop by and see them, read some scriptures with them, sing a few songs of praise with them or have a prayer with them.

However, we just get ourselves too busy with our own lives. Paul did not want to see this kind of behaviour on the part of the Corinthians, and it should not be our behaviour, 2 Corinthians 9:5.

GENEROSITY ENCOURAGED

‘Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.’ 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Paul used an illustration of a farmer who sows a few seeds in the field as opposed to the one who sows many seeds in the field by hard labour, 2 Corinthians 9:6.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘One of the great spiritual principles of life is that God blesses people in proportion to their blessing others, Proverbs 11:24-25 / Proverbs 19:17 / Proverbs 22:8-9 / Luke 6:38 / Galatians 6:7.’

The one who sows a few seeds will only reap a few products. The one who labours with purpose and sows much will have much product. Those who work hard and purposefully in the kingdom of God will reap many rewards.

Many needs will be met, and souls will come to Christ. The individual who works with little purpose will help few and save few souls. This principle stands true for many areas of life. The hard worker is rewarded with greater outcomes because he is interested, energetic, enthusiastic, and willing to work.

REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

At first glance, when we read Galatians 6:7-8, when we think about Karma and the idea of reaping what we sow, it’s very easy to conclude that the doctrine of Karma is a very Biblical concept, especially when we read what Paul wrote to the Galatian church.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In Galatians 6:7, the emphasis is on ‘that’ rather than ‘reap.’ Paul’s point there was that we reap in kind what we sow, Galatians 6:8. He did not say that we will get back more of whatever we sow.’

The Bible teaches that we reap what we sow in this life, Hosea 8:7 / Matthew 7:15 / Romans 2:6 / 2 Corinthians 9:6, but it would be a serious mistake to believe that we can escape the consequences of our actions, Romans 2:6.

Paul is basically teaching what he’s been teaching throughout the book of Galatians; he’s contrasting all those who sow to please the Spirit, Galatians 5:16 / Galatians 5:18 / Galatians 5:25, with those who sow to please the flesh, Galatians 5:13 / Galatians 5:19.

Those who sow to please the flesh will reap the curse of God, Galatians 1:6-9, but those who reap to please the Spirit will reap eternal life, Galatians 5:21. When we put our faith in works, ‘Karma’, in order to determine our earthly outcome, we’re sowing to please the flesh, but when we put our faith in Christ, we’re sowing to please the Spirit, and we shall reap eternal life.

In other words, with Karma, you trust in yourself and your own righteousness, and you reap corruption but if we trust in Christ and His righteousness, 2 Corinthians 5:21, we will reap everlasting life.

Karma teaches people to believe that they will always get what they deserve, if they do good, good things will naturally come their way; if they do bad, bad things will inevitably come, and so on.

While the idea of having good come around again for the good things we do and having bad come around again for the bad things we do, sounds like the sowing and reaping principle of Galatians 6:7-8, but it really isn't.

Karma insists on receiving the returns of what we do today in the afterlife, something like 'if you're a bad man today, you'll be a dirt-eating fly in the next life,' but the Bible gives us just one simple explanation to say what we deserve, because of our sin we deserve death, Romans 3:10 / Romans 3:23 / Romans 6:23.

The Bible simply says that all of us deserve nothing good for what we've done and how we've lived. Karma says we can do good and receive our due after this life, but the Bible says there's nothing we can do in this life to make us worthy of receiving goodness in this life or in the life to come.

What's more, Karma says all of us will live again, to either a better or worse life based on what we do today, but the Bible, however, says that we can only live if we believe in the Son of God, John 3:16-17. In other words, our actions can't win a better afterlife for us; only the blood of Jesus can, Hebrews 9:12-14 / Hebrews 10:38 / 1 Peter 1:2 / Ephesians 1:7.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of reincarnation and Karma are foreign to the Scriptures, both of which are free from any accountability to anyone, Romans 14:12. It's very true that how we live in this life will affect where we end up for eternity, and it's also true if we don't know God or obey the Gospel, we will end up in hell, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, but the belief that we can determine where we spend eternity by our good or bad Karma, isn't Biblical, Isaiah 64:6 / Ephesians 2:8-9 / Proverbs 14:12.

Notice in 2 Corinthians 8:7 that the work that one does to help others is to be done 'cheerfully' as opposed to 'grudgingly'. Here we see the difference between the apathetic and lethargic brother who has the means and will to help those in need; however, he has not placed their needs at a high priority in his life, and thereby the needy go on in need.

Such a one has not 'decided in his heart' to meet the needs of the needy by giving in the treasury, 2 Corinthians 9:7. The cheerful giver is the individual who has a spiritual vision, one who understands the work of the church and is willing to give for that cause in a timely and cheerful manner.

Such a one knows the consequences of such deliberate and purposeful giving. Needs are met! Those needs may be met by helping the needy, preachers are supported, and materials for such activities are provided.

Notice that Paul did not impose upon the Corinthians the tithing of the Old Testament. The Jews were required to pay a tenth part or tithe of all their property, grain, vineyards, produce, cattle, etc., for the support of the system of worship. Generally, the fund or supplies went to the priest and Levites who ministered to the service of the tabernacle, Numbers 18:20-24.

When a Jew lived a great distance from Jerusalem, he was permitted to liquidate his product for currency and bring this to Jerusalem at the appointed time, Deuteronomy 14:24-29.

The new covenant in Jesus Christ is one of the heart, Jeremiah 31:31-33. Individuals in the church perform the Lord's commandments out of earnest love for the Lord and not because they 'have to do something' as was the case under the Mosaic Law.

One becomes a Christian voluntarily; we are not born into this relationship. So God desires those who would seek him, Hebrews 11:6, those who have a humble and contrite heart, Isaiah 57:15, those who keep His commands because they want to not because they have to, 1 John 5:3.

And those who give into the treasury of the church because they see the need not because it is a tax imposed upon them as saints, 2 Corinthians 9:7. God desires those who desire Him.

When a parent has to make a child do his chores, mow the grass, pick up room, clean house, wash the care etc. even after the child is trained to do so, it grieves the parent, Proverbs 15:20 / Proverbs 17:25. Likewise, those servants of the Lord who must be continuously told what to do are grievous to the Lord and the church.

‘And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.’ 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

The words ‘bless you’, 2 Corinthians 9:8, must be the monetary things mentioned in the context of 2 Corinthians 8-9. Apparently, Paul was saying that God will always take care of us as we do our work in His Kingdom, Philippians 4:11 / 1 Timothy 6:6.

To prove this providential care, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 9:9, quoted from Psalms 112:9. As God cared for His people in the Old Testament, so He cares for His people now, 2 Corinthians 9:10 / Matthew 6:25-34.

The service of giving as one prospers and purposes in their heart with cheerfulness serves two purposes. First, the needs of the saints are met, and secondly, God’s name is glorified, and much thanksgiving is given on His behalf, 2 Corinthians 9:11.

‘This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!’ 2 Corinthians 9:12-15

All things are well when we are doing God’s commands by choice. We cause others to give God praise through our obedience and relationship to God and His word.

We cause others to praise God when we give with a spirit of liberality into the treasury, 2 Corinthians 9:12-13. We cause others to pray for us and love us because of our generosity, 2 Corinthians 9:14.

So Paul exclaimed, ‘Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift,’ 2 Corinthians 9:15. The word ‘indescribable’, is the Greek word ‘anekdiegetos’, and it means beyond expression, indescribable or unspeakable.

Words cannot convey the gift God has bestowed upon man, the gift of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins. This being said, we ought to do all within our power to show the Father our sincere gratitude.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Corinthians did follow through and assemble their gift. It was only a few months after Paul penned 2 Corinthians that he wrote Romans. In it, he said that the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia (including Corinth) had made a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem, Romans 15:26-27. Paul and his delegation then travelled back to Jerusalem from Corinth through Macedonia and Asia Minor, Acts 20:3 to Acts 21:19. The leaders of the Jerusalem church evidently received the gift gladly, Acts 21:17.’

SUMMARY

Most of us are ready and willing to help anyone in need, especially those of the household of faith, Galatians 6:10.

We want nothing but the best for all our brethren.

We know the shut-ins are lonely, we know that if the work of the church is to be accomplished, we must give liberally of our means, we know that some brethren stand in jeopardy of losing their souls, and we know that brethren the world over are in need.

The problem, however, with many of us, is that we lack the motivation to meet these needs. Paul knew the Corinthian brethren were ready and willing to help even as far back as a year ago, 2 Corinthians 9:2.

Paul's concern for the Corinthians was that they would be lax in their promise of helping the needy saints in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 9:3. We can have all the good intentions in the world for those in need, until we do something about their need, the need remains, James 2:15-17 / 1 John 3:17-18.

There are great consequences that result when we help those in need.

1. God will take care of our needs, 2 Corinthians 9:8.
2. God will increase the fruit of your labours, i.e., those who are in need will be helped and those who are lost in sin will regain fellowship through our help, 2 Corinthians 9:10.
3. Those we help will glorify God and offer up prayers of thanksgiving on our behalf, 2 Corinthians 9:14. Suddenly, the name of God will be glorified.

Are you ready and willing but lack the motivation to help? Why not look at 2 Corinthians 9, and realise that simply thinking good thoughts about others is not going to help them out of their poverty or sin. True Bible love depicts the saint motivated to action by love.

What message do we send to God and our fellow man when we know of people's needs and have the means to help, yet we do not? Procrastination tells others that aiding the needy is not a priority in our lives. Christians should be willing to help and not delay!

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

‘Now I, Paul, appeal to you personally by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (I who am meek when present among you, but am full of courage toward you when away!) now I ask that when I am present I may not have to be bold with the confidence that (I expect) I will dare to use against some who consider us to be behaving according to human standards.’ 2 Corinthians 10:1-2

PAUL'S DEFENCE OF HIS MINISTRY

In this chapter, we read of Paul's defence against the divisive of Corinth who laid faulty claims against him that were designed to persuade the faithful not to have confidence and trust in his words.

Notice that instead of using the plural pronoun 'we', as he has in the previous chapters, he now uses the singular pronoun 'I', 2 Corinthians 10:1-2. This was Paul's personal defence of his apostleship and admonition to divisive brethren in Corinth.

The word ‘appeal’, 2 Corinthians 10:1, in Greek is ‘parakaleo’, and it means to urge or incite by strong argument. Paul appeals to the Corinthian brethren not to be caught up in the talk of the factious.

Paul determined to deal with the divisive and those who had heard the lies they were spewing with ‘the meekness and gentleness of Christ,’ 2 Corinthians 10:1. Here we see what Jesus was all about.

Jesus claimed to be meek and lowly, Matthew 11:29-30; however, His speeches were often very bold and abrasive, Matthew 5:20 / Matthew 7:15-29 / Matthew 10:34-42 / Matthew 12:30-37 / John 8:44.

Paul was meek and lowly; however, meek and lowly does not mean weak and cowardly, as we shall see in this chapter. The word ‘meek’, in Greek, is ‘praus’, and it means gentle, kind, forgiving, Matthew 5:5.

Paul will begin his defence with a spirit of mildness and gentleness because he understands man’s frail state of being.

Paul admitted to being ‘lowly’ in the presence of the Corinthians; however, his lowliness was not cowardice, as some had charged, but demonstrated the mind of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:10.

Again, Paul was confident in the Corinthians’ willingness to hear his arguments or defence and make the proper assessment of the situation under consideration, i.e., the divisive charges against him, so that the Corinthians would have no trust or confidence in his words, 2 Corinthians 10:2.

The word ‘some’, 2 Corinthians 10:2, tells us there were just a few divisive brethren in Corinth. Paul was encouraging the faithful brethren to deal with these divisive ones before he came to Corinth and had to deal with them himself. Secondly, as stated above, he was giving a defence against their accusations so that the faithful would not be persuaded in error by them.

What was the divisive saying? They were discrediting Paul, Titus, Sosthenes and others’ preaching as being that of the ‘human standards,’ 2 Corinthians 10:2. The idea is human reasoning, Matthew 16:17 / 2 Corinthians 1:12.

Much of 2 Corinthians is spent in Paul’s defence of divine revelation being opposed to human wisdom, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:17 / 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 / 2 Corinthians 5:7 / 2 Corinthians 6:4-12 / 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

‘For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.’ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The first accusation dealt with in 2 Corinthians 10 is the charge that Paul and his preaching companions are teaching by human reason rather than divine revelation. Paul and his preaching companions did not walk ‘according to human standards’. There is a big difference. All of humanity shares in flesh and blood, Hebrews 2:14.

Some of humanity are dependent upon human reasoning for their existence and way of life, while others are dependent upon the word of God for their existence and way of life, 2 Corinthians 10:3.

Paul said that his preaching was of divine revelation alone, 2 Corinthians 10:4 / 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 3:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 / 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 / Galatians 1:11-24.

Paul’s words and defence were divine ‘weapons of warfare’ against the factious, 2 Corinthians 10:4. The ‘strongholds’ Paul spoke of are made by Satan. He makes inroads into man’s reasoning by his ‘devices’, 2 Corinthians 2:11 / James 1:13-15.

He captures and enslaves man through ‘arguments and arrogance’, 2 Corinthians 10:5 / 2 Corinthians 4:2 / 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul said, ‘we are not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices’, 2 Corinthians 2:11.

The word of God is able to ‘tear down the strongholds’ of Satan. This warfare is not a worldly and physical battle between two governments or kingdoms; it is a spiritual warfare between good and evil, 2 Corinthians 10:3. The Christian is thereby called upon to take a stand and arm themselves to the teeth with the Gospel of Christ, Ephesians 6:10-18.

Paul is essentially and effectively letting the Corinthians know that the divisive are doing the work of Satan as they accuse him of speaking after worldly wisdom rather than divine revelation.

Note that the word of God has the power to ‘tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God,’ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

The word ‘arguments’, in Greek, is ‘logismos’, and it means reckoning, calculation, reasoning power. Any man conceived, dreamed up, plotted, contemplated, opinion, or personal reasoning that is opposed to the word of God is ‘torn down’ by divine revelation, knowledge of God.

‘Take every thought captive to make it obey Christ,’ 2 Corinthians 10:8. The humble Christian will have his mind and conscience trained by the word of God alone, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / Romans 12:1-2.

Harris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is not a case of the Christian’s effort to force all his thoughts to be pleasing to Christ. Rather, the picture seems to be that of a military operation in enemy territory that seeks to thwart every single hostile plan of battle, so that there will be universal allegiance to Christ.’

‘We are also ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. You are looking at outward appearances. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should reflect on this again: Just as he himself belongs to Christ, so too do we.’ 2 Corinthians 10:6-7

The word ‘punish’, in Greek, is ‘ekdikeo’, and it means to punish a crime. Paul would come ready to punish the ‘disobedient’ with the rod of correction, 2 Corinthians 10:6 / 1 Corinthians 4:21.

This would not be a physical punishment but a spiritual one that the souls of those who were disobedient would be saved, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 / 1 Timothy 5:20 / 2 Corinthians 13:3-6.

Before punishment was to commence, Paul would wait the proper time for all to come to repentance. Paul, in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, would be patient and long-suffering to see whether or not the Corinthians would be obedient in all things, 2 Corinthians 2:9.

This appears to be a questioning on the part of Paul regarding the false statements made by divisive brethren in the church at Corinth, i.e., Paul is inconsistent, preaching his own ideas, is beside himself, deluded and a coward.

Those who would say such things needed to take a look at the spiritual gifts that abounded at Corinth right before their faces. They needed to realise that the church would not be there without the efforts of men such as Paul, Sosthenes, Titus and others.

Paul’s point was that if one claims to belong to Christ, let the same understand that Paul and his preaching companions were no different than Christ when it came to preaching, 2 Corinthians 10:7.

This was Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 10:1. If Christ was not inconsistent, preaching His own ideas, deluded and a coward as one identified as meek and lowly, then neither were Paul and his companions.

‘For if I boast somewhat more about our authority that the Lord gave us for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of doing so. I do not want to seem as though I am trying to terrify you with my letters, because some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but his physical presence is weak, and his speech is of no account.” Let such a person consider this: What we say by letters when we are absent, we also are in actions when we are present.’ 2 Corinthians 10:8-11

Paul wrote and spoke the things he did by divine revelation and therefore by the authority of God, 2 Corinthians 3:5. The purpose of such writings and language used was to build up others in the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul had stressed the divine origin of his call and gospel when he defended himself to the Galatians, Galatians 1:1 / Galatians 1:11-12 / Galatians 1:15-16. Here he stressed the divine origin of his authority, 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 / 2 Corinthians 13:10, and how he had used it for his readers’ good.’

The wording of 2 Corinthians 10:8-9 appears to say that the false teachers were saying that Paul only made threats and was not willing to carry out his intimidation tactics. Nothing could be further from the truth.

For the first time in this epistle to the Corinthians, Paul quoted from the false teachers. Paul quoted the false teachers in 1 Corinthians when he said, 'How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?' 1 Corinthians 15:12. The primary issue to this point has been the factious efforts to discredit Paul's words as being of his own human reasoning. Now, the division brings a personal attack against Paul.

These false teachers called Paul a weakling who should not be listened to. Some believe that Paul had some serious health issues that caused him to look grotesque in the eyes of others, 2 Corinthians 12:7-8 / Galatians 4:13-14.

Whether this is the case or not, it does not take away from the fact that the false teachers were trying everything to discredit Paul's preaching. Paul assured these critics that he would be just the same in bodily presence as he was in his letters, acting by the authority of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:10-11.

'For we would not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who recommend themselves. But when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. But we will not boast beyond certain limits, but will confine our boasting according to the limits of the work to which God has appointed us, that reaches even as far as you.' 2 Corinthians 10:12-13

This idea of 'recommending', 2 Corinthians 10:12, oneself has been dealt with by Paul on a few occasions already in this epistle, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12.

The word study yielded the results of one who would preach or thrust his own ideas upon others rather than using divine revelation. This is the idea of 'living according to human standards', 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:3. This one charge irritated Paul most because he knew what the ramifications would be if the divisive succeeded in this area.

Paul put the blame back upon the factious. It was not Paul that was preaching his own ideas and commending himself to the brethren; it was factious, 2 Corinthians 10:12. The very accusations they made were not against Paul but God. This reminds us of Israel's problems with Moses. When Israel rejected the divine direction of Moses, they were not rejecting a man, but they actually were rejecting God, Numbers 12:1-8.

This also reminds us of the zealous spirit of Elijah when contending with Ahab, 1 Kings 18:17-18. There may be many today who have problems with certain preachers or men who represent truth, but in reality, their problem is not with men but with God.

To 'measure' oneself is to 'measure in any way', 2 Corinthians 10:12. The standard by which these teachers were measured was each other's human reason, the very thing they accused Paul of. Paul would not measure himself by any man's standards but by the word of God alone.

Again, Paul boldly proclaims that the origin of his message was divine, i.e., of God, 2 Corinthians 10:13. Those who measure each other by human standards in the area of spiritual affairs are 'without understanding.'

'For we were not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach as far as you, because we were the first to reach as far as you with the gospel about Christ. Nor do we boast beyond certain limits in the work done by others, but we hope that as your faith continues to grow, our work may be greatly expanded among you according to our limits, so that we may preach the gospel in the regions that lie beyond you, and not boast of work already done in another person's area.' 2 Corinthians 10:14-16

Paul and his preaching companions came to Corinth on his second tour of preaching. That which was preached was divine revelation. The foundation of the church of Christ that was established in Corinth was Christ preached by Paul, 2 Corinthians 10:14.

Paul did not build upon another man's labours in Corinth, 2 Corinthians 10:15 / Romans 15:20. Paul rather came to a city, Corinth, where no church had been established. It was here at Corinth that he began to preach the Word of God in all its purity to these people, 2 Corinthians 10:16.

The idea may also be that Paul never wanted to build upon what another man taught but rather go to new areas and introduce the purity of God's divine revelation. Those who heard would have no preformed ideas of the Gospel message.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul wanted the Corinthians to continue to support him as he reached out to yet unevangelized fields such as Rome and Spain in the future, Acts 19:21 / Romans 1:11 / Romans 15:24 / Romans 15:28. He hoped that his ministry would take him even farther still.'

The most difficult thing to do is undo errors that other preachers have taught in the realm of religion, 2 Corinthians 10:16. The Corinthians were introduced and obeyed that Gospel message of divine revelation, 1 Corinthians 15:1-58.

'But the one who boasts must boast in the Lord. For it is not the person who commends himself who is approved, but the person the Lord commends.' 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:24, and says don't get excited about preaching your own ideas, don't boast about it, but rather boast in what the Lord has done, 1 Corinthians 1:31, get excited about divine revelation.

God does not recognise the man who preaches an unauthorised man-made gospel. God commends or approves of the man who will preach by divine revelation the authoritative word of God.

The standard of truth will expose the teachings of men as being either that of divine revelation or the opinions, personal convictions, or human reasoning of man.

SUMMARY

Dealing with the divisive with a spirit of meekness and gentleness. Many of the brethren had repented of their sins, which Paul enumerated in 1 Corinthians. The Corinthians' repentance was cause for great joy on the part of Paul and his companions, 2 Corinthians 7:5-16.

Though many had repented, there yet remained divisive men who sought to destroy the reputation of Paul. They charged him with being inconsistent, 2 Corinthians 1:17, practising self-commendation by preaching his own ideas, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:12, being 'beside himself', deluded, 2 Corinthians 5:13, and being one who lacked courage when in person, 2 Corinthians 10:1 / 2 Corinthians 10:10.

Paul now answered these dissenters in 2 Corinthians 10, with the spirit of meekness and gentleness like Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:1. 2 Corinthians 10 is an apostolic example of how to handle ourselves when others are making false accusations against us and not handling the word of God in truth.

Paul said that he would conduct himself in the spirit of meekness and gentleness that Christ be portrayed in His life, 2 Corinthians 10:1. After we read 2 Corinthians 10, there is no doubt that being meek and gentle is not being weak and cowardly.

Jesus dealt harshly with his critics, Matthew 5:20 / Matthew 7:15-29 / Matthew 10:34-42 / Matthew 12:30-36 / John 8:44, Paul dealt aggressively with his critics, 2 Corinthians 10:11, and so must we deal with those who would pervert the Gospel of Christ today, Philippians 4:9.

There is a standard of truth set by God, and the man approved of God will be measured by it and it alone, 2 Corinthians 10:17-18. Once again, the thrust of Paul's argument against the divisive brothers of Corinth was the idea of human reason versus divine revelation.

Paul denied having preached a message dreamed up by human devices, 2 Corinthians 10:2 / 2 Corinthians 10:12. This has been a major theme in 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / 2 Corinthians 2:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 / 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 6:4 / 2 Corinthians 7:2.

The words Paul and his preaching companions preached were done by the 'authority' given to him by God Himself, 2 Corinthians 10:8, compared to 2 Corinthians 3:5.

The standard Paul lived and preached was the Word of God, 2 Corinthians 10:13. The Word of God is a powerful weapon in the hands of Christians to 'tear down human reason, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God,' 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

The word of God is all one needs to wage an effective battle against Satan, 2 Corinthians 10:3. Let all those who would claim fellowship with the Lord arm themselves to the teeth with the Gospel of Christ and wage war, Ephesians 6:10-18.

2 Corinthians 10 is a chapter of such a battle between the apostle Paul and divisive troublemakers in the church. We must do the same today and thereby show the world the spirit of meekness and gentleness as did Christ and the apostles, 2 Corinthians 10:1 / Matthew 11:29-30 / Philippians 4:9.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

'I wish that you would be patient with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are being patient with me! For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.' 2 Corinthians 11:1-3

PAUL AND THE FALSE APOSTLES

In this chapter, we read about Paul's fear for the Corinthians. The words 'be patient' are the Greek word 'anéchomai', which means to endure patiently, to suffer.

The 'little foolishness', 2 Corinthians 11:1, that Paul desired is for the Corinthians to patiently endure, was his necessary defence against the divisive false teachers of Corinth.

These men had claimed that Paul was inconsistent, 2 Corinthians 1:17, preaching his own ideas, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:12, beside himself, deluded, 2 Corinthians 5:13, and one who lacked courage, 2 Corinthians 10:10.

The word 'jealous', 2 Corinthians 11:2, in Greek is 'zeloo', and it means to be over another in a godly sort, to be impelled by zeal. The word can mean to be envious; however, the Greek word used here indicates the zeal one would have for another.

Paul loved the Corinthian brethren with Godly zeal. He could not sit back and be a spectator as the divisive ruined his reputation and the souls of these beloved brethren.

The Corinthians had obeyed the Gospel of Christ and formed a local church in the city. These individuals in the church were ‘promised’ to Christ as a bride, 2 Corinthians 11:2. Paul’s desire for the Corinthians was that they would represent a pure virgin in relation to sin before Christ.

The false teachers in Corinth were teaching that the resurrection had already passed, 1 Corinthians 15:12, and were mingling the Mosaic Law with the Law of Christ as did those brethren of Acts 15, 2 Corinthians 3:7-17. Furthermore, they were attacking the person of Paul to discredit his words and work.

Notice that Paul’s concern was for the Corinthians, not because of these men, but because of the work of Satan, 2 Corinthians 11:3. It is Satan who beguiles by craft and deceit, 2 Corinthians 2:11 / 2 Corinthians 4:2.

The devil simply uses foolish men as his servants to carry out his will. The word ‘deceived’, 2 Corinthians 11:3, in Greek is ‘exapatao’, and it means to delude. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the Devil’s ways. He is one of craft and deceit and has been so since the days of Adam and Eve, Genesis 3:1-7 / Genesis 3:13.

Though God gave Eve law instructing her not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she ate anyway because the devil deceived her by saying, ‘you shall not surely die’, Genesis 3:4.

The woman’s mind was deluded by the devil’s false doctrine, and so she sinned. Paul’s concern for the Corinthians was that their minds would be deluded into a drunken stupor by the statements of the divisive and false teachers who were doing the work of the devil, 2 Corinthians 11:3.

To have ‘your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ,’ 2 Corinthians 11:3, was to be in a state of ruin, waste, to have suffered loss from a shipwreck, 1 Timothy 1:19-20. The doctrine of Christ is pure and simple and needs no man-made devil-deluded ideas added to it, 2 Corinthians 1:12 / Galatians 1:6-9 / Revelation 22:18.

Barnett, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The very future of the Corinthians as an apostolic church is in jeopardy.’

‘For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough!’ 2 Corinthians 11:4

Clearly, some in Corinth had so perverted the Gospel of Christ that Paul termed their teachings, ‘another Jesus of a different spirit, a different gospel,’ 2 Corinthians 10:5 / Galatians 1:6-9.

Consider the fact that Paul had requested that the Corinthian brethren ‘be patient with him in a little foolishness,’ 2 Corinthians 11:1, regarding his defence of the Gospel message against the false teachers that bring another doctrine, 2 Corinthians 4:1.

Paul now asks these same brethren to ‘put up with it well enough!’ 2 Corinthians 11:1. The question is, what are the Corinthians to ‘put up with’? Are the Corinthians to endure the erroneous teachings by admitting and permitting it? Paul is requesting that the Corinthians ‘endure patiently’ those false teachers who bring a different gospel, not tolerate it. The idea is that the brethren would not allow their minds to be deluded or seduced by the erroneous teaching, but endure through fighting each step of the way, Ephesians 6:10-17.

‘For I consider myself not at all inferior to those “super-apostles.” And even if I am unskilled in speaking, yet I am certainly not so in knowledge. Indeed, we have made this plain to you in everything in every way.’ 2 Corinthians 11:5-6

Here are more charges levied against the apostle Paul. Those who would call him inconsistent, deluded, one who preached his own ideas, and a coward, now called him ‘unskilled in speaking.’

The word ‘unskilled’ means idiot, one who has no professional knowledge, an ignorant, ill-informed man. They called Paul an idiot! Paul stated that he was not behind one of the other apostles in the knowledge of God’s word, and so he preached to the Corinthians.

Paul received his teachings by direct revelation, as did all other apostles and was therefore not an idiot in spiritual matters, Galatians 1:12. Interestingly, those who were calling Paul an idiot were, in all reality, calling God an idiot since Paul received his knowledge from God.

‘Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you could be exalted, because I proclaimed the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so that I could serve you! When I was with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia fully supplied my needs. I kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.’ 2 Corinthians 11:7-10

Apparently, the difference between Paul and the other apostles was in how they obtained a living. Paul worked with his own hands, often making tents to provide for himself, 2 Corinthians 11:7 / Acts 18:3.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that he did not take wages from them, not even once, 2 Corinthians 11:7. It seems by the wording of these verses that some of the Corinthians had been swayed by these divisive false teachers against Paul.

One may have said, ‘If Paul was an apostle, why did he not take wages from us for his labours as do the other apostles?’ Paul sarcastically asked forgiveness from the brethren of Corinth for not taking these wages at 2 Corinthians 12:13.

Remember when a Jewish man had been given a good education, he received a large key at their graduation, the key was the key to knowledge. Any man worth his weight in teaching was paid for his time and knowledge when he shared it. Paul refused to get paid, and so they thought he didn’t have anything worthwhile to say.

Not only did Paul make tents, but he also received wages from churches in Macedonia that he might preach to the Corinthians. From the Corinthians’ point of view, Paul’s support from another church is seen as ‘robbery,’ 2 Corinthians 11:8.

He took from another congregation to preach to the Corinthians. The brethren of Macedonia had aided Paul in his work while in Thessalonica and most probably were the ones who supported Paul in Corinth, 2 Corinthians 11:9 / Philippians 4:15-16.

Paul gave no opportunity to his adversaries to charge him with preaching for money in the region of Achaia, 2 Corinthians 11:10. Not one time did he take from any church in Achaia funds for support, even though he was due them, 1 Corinthians 9:6-12. Paul did not make these statements out of bitterness but rather by way of defence of the charges that were laid against him.

‘Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And what I am doing, I will continue to do, so that I may eliminate any opportunity for those who want a chance to be regarded as our equals in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will correspond to their actions.’ 2 Corinthians 11:11-15

Did Paul not take wages from the Corinthians because he did not love them? No, he did not do so because he did love them, and he wanted them to realise that the gospel he preached was designed to save their souls, and this alone was all Paul was interested in, 2 Corinthians 11:11.

Apparently, there were false teachers receiving support from the brethren in Corinth as preachers, 2 Corinthians 11:12. These false teachers were not about to cut off their support and do as Paul did. Paul, therefore, had an advantage in the minds of the Corinthian brethren over these false teachers.

There was a battle going on for the souls of the Corinthians. Paul, Sosthenes, and Titus battled with truth against divisive false teachers who sought to sway the hearts of the Corinthians away from divine revelation.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The moment has come for Paul to drop the veil of irony and to speak in the plainest possible terms in denunciation of these would-be ‘super-apostles’ who have invaded his territory in Achaia.’

Those who would use deceit and craft to move the disciples’ minds from the one Gospel of Christ were truly ministers of Satan, veiled as ministers of righteousness. Paul exposed these men for what they are, ‘false apostles and deceitful workers,’ 2 Corinthians 11:13.

These types of people appeared so loving and true to the untrained ear; however, within, they had devilish agendas. Not one of these men would say, ‘I am a minister of Satan who has fashioned himself into an angel of light,’ 2 Corinthians 11:14.

These brethren were truly deluded by Satan and truly believed that they were doing God’s work when in reality, they were tearing down the body of Christ. By their ‘actions’, 2 Corinthians 11:15, they shall be known, and as Jesus said, by their ‘fruits’, Matthew 7:16, we shall know them! 3 John 1:9-10.

Paul’s defence of his qualifications as an apostle of Jesus Christ was thereby designed to ‘cut off occasion from them that desire an occasion.’ The divisive were looking for any perceived weakness or flaw in Paul so that they could nail him to the wall. Paul would remove any of their hopes before they could be established.

PAUL BOASTS ABOUT HIS SUFFERINGS

‘I say again, let no one think that I am a fool. But if you do, then at least accept me as a fool, so that I, too, may boast a little. What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I do not say the way the Lord would. Instead, it is, as it were, foolishness. Since many are boasting according to human standards, I too will boast.’ 2 Corinthians 11:16-18

Here we read about Paul’s justification for bringing himself to the level of his critics regarding boasting of worldly things. Paul stated clearly that he was not an idiot but rather one who had received divine revelation from the heavenly Father.

From a logical standpoint, Paul’s critics were guilty of ‘Argumentum ad hominem’, an argument directed at the man by attacking the person who made the assertion. They called Paul a deranged, 2 Corinthians 5:13, cowardly, 2 Corinthians 10:10, and an idiot, 2 Corinthians 11:6.

Though men may say these things, Paul’s message stood alone as an authoritative revelation. If others deemed him foolish, so what? 2 Corinthians 11:16. Let the Corinthians accept this foolish man and his perceived foolish message and let the wicked reject it and perish.

Apparently, what Paul was saying was that he would glory by means of the necessity to defend the truth and ‘not as the Lord would,’ 2 Corinthians 11:17. His meaning is that Jesus never boasted of self, and neither is boasting a quality of a Christian.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The reason for Paul’s embarrassment at this juncture is now given: self-commendation is not ‘after the Lord’, Romans 15:5 / Ephesians 4:24 / Colossians 2:8, but, the exact opposite, ‘after the flesh’, 2 Corinthians 5:16, that is, typical of the old unregenerate nature whose values are dictated by the external, self-centred standards of this fallen world.’

What had taken place was that the false teachers had so magnified themselves in the eyes of the Corinthians and demoted Paul that the apostle felt it necessary to defend himself thoroughly.

There comes a time when we may have to tell people about our education and personal experience. There is no reason to be called an idiot with no experience when quite the opposite is true, 2 Corinthians 11:18.

‘For since you are so wise, you put up with fools gladly. For you put up with it if someone makes slaves of you, if someone exploits you, if someone takes advantage of you, if someone behaves arrogantly toward you, if someone strikes you in the face. (To my disgrace, I must say that we were too weak for that!) But whatever anyone else dares to boast about (I am speaking foolishly), I also dare to boast about the same thing.’ 2 Corinthians 11:19-21

Here is an alarming verse that indicates the state of many of the Corinthians. Though many had repented of their unlawful deeds and Paul rejoiced over that fact, 2 Corinthians 7:7-12, they continued to be misled by false teachers, 2 Corinthians 11:19. We have noted the additional sins of the Corinthians brought out in this study.

The Corinthians needed to forgive the fornicator who had repented and thereby prove their obedience in all areas of faith, 2 Corinthians 2:5-9. The Corinthians had set their affections on the things of this world and thereby fellowshipped sin, 2 Corinthians 6:11-18.

Now we find that some of the Corinthians had received the false accusations against Paul and his preaching companions and thereby were led astray from the faith, 2 Corinthians 11:19-20.

These false teachers were receiving wages from the Corinthians and were leading them into ‘slaves’ and ‘exploit you’ while they ‘take advantage of you’, the brethren, and figuratively ‘strike you in the face’, 2 Corinthians 11:20. These are apparent allusions to the Judaizing false teachers that Paul dealt with in Galatians and Acts 15, who were teaching a different doctrine.

Paul could have noted that the Corinthians had repented of their gross sins and left them alone, even though some sketchy characters were leading them. Paul, however, loved these brethren too much to leave them to the devices of the false teachers. Paul intended to root out every cause of evil among the brethren!

The word ‘shame’, 2 Corinthians 11:21, in Greek is ‘atimia’, and it means to dishonour. What may seem to be weakness and dishonour on the part of Paul for participating in the same boasting his critics have is really a defence, 2 Corinthians 11:21. Paul was bringing himself to the level of his accusers because these men had made great inroads and strongholds in the minds of the brethren at Corinth.

We can feel the frustration of Paul here. He preached nothing but the truth; however, such preaching produced critics who were succeeding in drawing away the minds of the Corinthian Christians from the truth he preached. Truly, the words of Jesus in John 7:7, and John 17:14 bear testimony to the events transpiring in Corinth. The world hates those who will expose their evil deeds.

PAUL BOASTED OF THE FLESH

‘Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am talking like I am out of my mind!) I am even more so: with much greater labours, with far more imprisonments, with more severe beatings, facing death many times. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once, I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea.’ 2 Corinthians 11:22-25

Paul’s critics apparently boasted to the Corinthians regarding the fact that they were Hebrews, Israelites, and of the seed of Abraham and were thereby magnified in the eyes of the brethren, 2 Corinthians 11:22. Paul said, ‘so am I’, Philippians 3:4-7.

It is thought that the term ‘Hebrews’ depicted the fact that they had retained the original language of God’s people rather than forgetting it. Paul was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, Philippians 3:4-6. Paul was of the seed of Abraham, as were his critics.

Clearly, these false teachers were stating that they were ‘servants of Christ’, 2 Corinthians 11:23; however, Paul has identified them as ‘false prophets’ and ‘ministers of Satan’, 2 Corinthians 11:13.

Paul now began his list of things in which he may boast based on the fact that he was now ‘out of his mind’, 2 Corinthians 11:23, in regard to what these critics are saying.

The phrase ‘out of his mind’, in Greek, is ‘paraphroneo’, and it means deranged or mad. Paul ‘worked’ at preaching the Gospel to the point of it hurting, 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. He travelled the world over that souls may be saved.

While working so vigorously for the souls of men, he suffered persecution, ‘far more imprisonments,’ 2 Corinthians 11:23. When preaching in Philippi, he and Silas were arrested and put into prison, Acts 16:23-25.

Paul suffered ‘more severe floggings’, 2 Corinthians 11:23, from the Gentiles who did not have the restriction of the Jews, i.e., thirty-nine stripes, Deuteronomy 25:3. There were times when Paul preached that he was beaten to the point of being considered dead, 2 Corinthians 11:23 / Acts 14:19. His own countrymen scourged him with whips on five different occasions, 2 Corinthians 11:24, none of which are recorded in Acts.

On three occasions, Paul was beaten with rods by the Romans, 2 Corinthians 11:25 / Acts 16:22-24. On one occasion Paul was stoned and left for dead, 2 Corinthians 11:25 / Acts 14:19.

On three occasions, Paul suffered a shipwreck while preaching the Gospel, 2 Corinthians 11:25, none of which are recorded in Acts, other than the shipwreck at Malta, Acts 27:27-28:5, which happened after the writing of 2 Corinthians.

Paul stated, ‘night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea’ 2 Corinthians 11:25, which indicates floating on a piece of ship wreckage until saved or coming ashore.

‘I have been on journeys many times, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea, in dangers from false brothers, in hard work and toil, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, many times without food, in cold and without enough clothing.’ 2 Corinthians 11:26-27

Grouped with the others ‘dangers’, which is the Greek word ‘kindunos’ and means a risk, hazard, Paul faced was the dangerous journeys he took. The dangers he was exposed to were thieves, murderers, and those in each city he travelled to who were offended by his message.

Paul was in ‘dangers from rivers,’ 2 Corinthians 11:26. As Paul travelled, he would have had to traverse treacherous rivers where many men drowned to death. Paul found himself in ‘dangers from robbers’, 2 Corinthians 11:26.

Apparently, Paul was robbed from time to time as he travelled about.

Paul found himself in ‘dangers from my countrymen,’ 2 Corinthians 11:26. The Jews were the ones to show forth bitter hatred toward Paul as he went about preaching, Acts 13:50, in Antioch of Pisidia.

Paul found himself in ‘dangers from the Gentiles,’ 2 Corinthians 11:26, which completes the whole human race, Jews and Gentiles. Paul suffered at the hands of all classes and races of people, Acts 19:23-40.

Paul experienced ‘dangers in the city, wilderness, and sea,’ 2 Corinthians 11:16. Not only were all classes and races of people persecuted by Paul, but in every possible location, he found himself subject to ill-treatment due to his message of repentance from sins.

To complete the picture of a life filled with dangers from people to geography, it would seem that at least he would be safe among brethren. Paul, however, found himself in ‘dangers from false brothers’, 2 Corinthians 11:26.

This must have pained Paul more than the other perils he fell into. Brethren who were ‘pseudo’, that is, ‘false’. Their falsehood may have been the doctrines they followed or their evil agendas.

Some who would be termed ‘brothers’ would persecute Paul as did those of the world. Paul fitted the admonition he gave young Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12. Why? Because Jesus said that when one exposes another’s dark deeds, they will hate you, John 7:7 / John 17:14.

With the sufferings came hard work and ‘toil’, 2 Corinthians 11:27, which is the Greek word ‘mochthos’, which means hardship, distress, trouble. Paul’s hardships would put many of us to shame as he underwent hunger, thirst, fasting, being cold and without proper clothing, 2 Corinthians 11:27. Though the world viewed Paul as ‘poor’, 2 Corinthians 6:10, ‘foolish, weak, and the filth of the world’, 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, he was indeed rich unto eternal life!

‘Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast about the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows I am not lying. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to arrest me, but I was let down in a rope-basket through a window in the city wall, and escaped his hands.’ 2 Corinthians 11:28-33

In addition to the above-mentioned suffering, Paul had to deal with the fact that divisive false teachers were devouring the souls of many Christians, 2 Corinthians 11:28. His intense love for brethren burned deep within to the point of pain and distress, anxiety.

As we look at each of Paul’s epistles written to different brethren in various geographic locations, he dealt with each one’s problems and exhorts all to repent that they may obtain the eternal promise of salvation.

When false teachers added their own twist to the doctrine of Christ, Paul corrected these things in all the churches. Paul did not have a love for one local church of brethren; he cared for all the ‘churches,’ 2 Corinthians 11:28. Paul experienced the hardships of all those who suffer in weakness, 2 Corinthians 11:29. Paul felt the shame of his brethren’s sins and the sins of his own, Romans 7:24. Paul knew what it was like to be human and to suffer the pains of life and the pains of sin.

Such acknowledgement and enlightenment gave Paul great joy as he went about preaching and teaching, knowing that the consequence of one individual obeying the Gospel would mean another soul saved if they remained faithful to the end. For this cause, Paul could glory in the things he suffered, 2 Corinthians 11:30. Through Paul’s hardships came the Gospel message to the world.

Those false teachers in Corinth who would glory in their heritage yet live as kings could in no way stand in comparison to the love Paul had for the Corinthians’ souls. No man in his right mind could reject Paul for the derogatory statements of his critics.

One may be amazed to hear the things Paul has just said, and so Paul exclaimed that God knows that ‘I am not lying’, 2 Corinthians 11:31. Paul appears to save the information regarding his suffering in Damascus for last, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33.

It is likely that Paul speaks of this now because it was the birthplace of all his coming agony for preaching the Gospel. Paul was converted in Damascus, Acts 9:10-25.

After his conversion, he immediately preached Jesus. Paul left Damascus and travelled into Arabia preaching the Gospel for some time, Galatians 1:17, and then returned. Paul spent three years in Damascus preaching and teaching the Gospel, Galatians 1:18.

Apparently, at the end of these three years, the events spoken of in Acts 9:10-25 occurred. The Jews sought to kill him because of the message he preached. Some of his brethren lowered Paul down the wall of Damascus, and Paul escaped to Jerusalem.

Paul escaped the king of Damascus and Arabia. This initial persecution was an example of the hardships that he would experience, from this point forward, as he preached the Gospel, Acts 9:16.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In many of his examples, Paul presented himself as one who did not fit the pattern of “successful” ministers of the gospel. Like the Corinthians, we modern Christians tend to evaluate a person’s success on the basis of the standards of the world. Rather than playing down the events in his ministry that made him look inferior, Paul emphasised them because they glorified God’s remarkably sufficient grace. In view of all Paul’s calamities, there is no way he could have been so effective unless God was with Him.’

SUMMARY

Are we willing to go that far? 2 Corinthians 11 is a continuation of the defence and argument that was between Paul and the divisive false teachers in Corinth. These critics had used the form of argument called ‘argumentum ad hominem’, an argument directed at the man by attacking the person who made the assertion.

The assertion Paul made was that the Corinthians were in sin. Paul’s critics responded by calling him names such as ‘unskilled in speech’, 2 Corinthians 11:6, ‘out of his mind’, 2 Corinthians 5:13, a ‘coward’, 2 Corinthians 10:10, and one who ‘preached his own ideas’, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:12.

Apparently, many Corinthians were buying into these false accusations against the apostle Paul. Paul appears to be ramping up his bold speech against the factious.

Truly, there was a battle for the Corinthians’ affection, 2 Corinthians 11:20. The divisive were using base modes to discredit Paul and his teaching. Paul’s only defence was to write these epistles until he could get to Corinth and address the divisive brethren face to face, 2 Corinthians 10:11.

Paul’s great fear for the Corinthians was that these critics would totally convince the Corinthian brethren of his personal worthlessness and thereby all would lose their souls.

Paul clearly identified the work of his critics as a beguiling work of Satan, 2 Corinthians 11:1-4. His critics were ‘servants of Satan, false apostles, deceitful workers’, 2 Corinthians 11:13. Their method not only included attacks against Paul’s person but also self-importance in the form of boasting of their past heritage, 2 Corinthians 11:22. It is most probable that the divisive and false teachers of Corinth were Jews who held to the Mosaic Law while claiming to be Christians, 2 Corinthians 3 / Acts 18:1-11 / Acts 15. Paul could not sit back and say anything in this situation.

He proved his great love for the Corinthian brethren by reviewing his life of suffering that others, such as the Corinthians, might obtain eternal life, 2 Corinthians 11:22-30.

As we explore the life of Paul, we find that in all points of his existence, he suffered. Paul suffered in every known geographic location, city, wilderness, river and sea.

Paul suffered at the hands of every race of people, Jew and Gentile. Paul often found no solace in brethren for they too would persecute him. Paul found himself without proper clothing and shelter. He was often hungry and thirsty. The world looked upon him and his preaching brethren as the ‘filth of the world’, 1 Corinthians 4:13.

Why would a man undergo such trouble if it were not for love? He received no wages from the Corinthian brethren, 2 Corinthians 11:8-9. He simply came and preached the gospel so that they would be saved. Paul’s critics could in no way make such claims.

What application can we make of 2 Corinthians 11? Clearly, we may learn that the devil is busy making disciples through craft and deceit. Brethren are buying into his doctrine and devouring it.

Brethren are allowing Satan to make strongholds within their minds as they slip further and further from the truth. As Paul experienced anxiety for all the churches, so must we stand up and speak out against sin and the devil's evil tactics.

Secondly, we can learn that when we do stand up and speak out as did Paul, we will be persecuted as was our Lord and His apostles. Jesus said it would be so, John 7:7 / John 17:14.

This is the life of the true loving Christian, 2 Timothy 3:12. God's people are called upon to fellowship the sufferings of Jesus. Are we willing to go that far? Philippians 3:10.

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

'I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.' 2 Corinthians 12:1-4

PAUL'S VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

2 Corinthians 11:18 exposed Paul's reason for glorying after the flesh. Paul's critics had literally forced him to bring himself down to their level. These men had persuaded many faithful brethren against Paul and the divine message of revelation, 2 Corinthians 11:20.

Self-glorification is not 'profitable,' however, it was necessary for spiritual matters, 2 Corinthians 12:1. The word 'gained' means to confer a benefit, be useful.

Generally, self-glorification will not profit or benefit anything but shame the individual; however, in this particular case, it was necessary that the minds of the Corinthians would be brought back to Paul and divine revelation.

This is not a situational ethic but rather an example of boasting about the right things, i.e., spiritual things. I may boast that God is the creator of this universe. I may boast of Christ's glorious sacrifice. I may boast of my salvation. I am a fool if I boast in matters that have nothing to do with God.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ and worthy of a receptive audience because he delivered divine instructions. Paul said that he would 'go on to visions,' 2 Corinthians 12:1. 'Visions' are supernatural visages such as the one that Peter saw, Acts 10:10-19.

'Revelations', 2 Corinthians 12:1, are disclosures of divine information. Those who called Paul names could not boast of the things that Paul is about to because they are not apostles and neither had they been authorised by the Lord to speak the lies they speak.

The man that Paul knew who was 'in Christ' was himself, 2 Corinthians 12:2 / 2 Corinthians 12:6-7. The event transpired 14 years ago. Paul was in a 'trance' much like Peter, Acts 10:10, in that he was not sure as to whether he

was transported bodily or by spirit, 2 Corinthians 12:2-3. The place he was transported to was the ‘third heaven,’ 2 Corinthians 12:2. The word ‘heaven’ simply means ‘the sky’. The Jews believed in three heavens.

1. They saw the area of the clouds in the sky, Genesis 2:1 / Genesis 2:19.
2. They saw the area in which the sun, moon, and stars hung as the second heaven, Deuteronomy 18:3 / Matthew 24:29.
3. The third heaven was known as the dwelling place of God, Matthew 5:12-48.

Paul is saying that he was transported to the dwelling place of God, heaven or paradise, Luke 16:22. The word ‘paradise’, 2 Corinthians 12:2, is used in connection with ‘the third heaven,’ 2 Corinthians 12:4. The word ‘Paradise’ is used in Revelation 2:7. Paradise is the heavenly realm of God.

The thief on the cross was going to ‘paradise’, and there’s no need to speculate where Jesus was going when He died, Luke 23:42. Did Jesus go to Hades for three days? 1 Peter 3:19-20. No. Jesus went to paradise, Luke 23:43, the third heaven, the dwelling place of heaven.

While in paradise, Paul heard things that were not lawful to utter, 2 Corinthians 12:4. There are things that God does not intend for His people to know and those things which He does want us to know, Deuteronomy 29:29. This reminds us of the things the apostle John heard in Revelation and was not permitted to speak the utterances of the seven thunders, Revelation 10:1-4.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul never revealed in Scripture what God told him. However, it had the effect of strengthening his faith and hope that the Lord would abundantly reward his sufferings. This experience evidently took place when Paul was ministering in and around Tarsus. He did so about A.D. 42, 14 years before A.D. 56, the most probable date for the composition of 2 Corinthians.’

I find it amazing today when people have ‘experiences’, they often can’t wait to tell people what they ‘experienced’, but Paul says he wasn’t permitted to do so.

‘I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.’ 2 Corinthians 12:5-7

Paul’s glorying occurred only in that the Lord brought him into the heavens to see paradise, the third heaven, and hear wonderful things unlawful to utter. These were facts.

Paul would not, however, glory in his self-accomplishments in life, 2 Corinthians 12:5. Such indeed is foolishness, 2 Corinthians 12:6. Paul’s glorying would fall into one category, i.e., ‘weaknesses’, which he will explain in 2 Corinthians 12:9.

If Paul had boasted in himself, some may have thought more highly of him than they should. Such a statement ought to cause each of us to be cautious when talking about ourselves, Romans 12:3. If Paul was concerned about people thinking too highly of him because of his self-bragging, shouldn’t we be too?

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ endowed with spiritual gifts, visions, and revelations. Paul saw and heard things of eternity in the third heaven, experienced miraculous powers, and received direct revelation from God, 2 Corinthians 12:6. Such events drove him to pursue a life of Godliness and convince others to do so.

The tendency to think too highly of oneself was a temptation for all, and especially the apostles. To eliminate this temptation in Paul’s life, the Lord allowed Satan to afflict Paul’s flesh, i.e., a thorn in the flesh, 2 Corinthians 12:7 / Job 2:1-10 / Luke 13:16.

We are not told what the ‘thorn in the flesh’ was. It is very well possible that the ‘thorn in the flesh’ was an eye malady of some sort, [Galatians 4:13-15](#). Whatever the ‘thorn in the flesh’ was, Paul, like Jacob, who had his hip dislocated, [Genesis 32:25](#), had a permanent reminder of whom they should rely on.

‘Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.’ [2 Corinthians 12:8-10](#)

God heard Paul’s prayer all three times, [2 Corinthians 12:8](#). God heard the prayer of Jesus while in the Garden of Gethsemane, [Matthew 26:39-42](#). It was not God’s will that the cup of death should pass from Jesus, and neither was it God’s will that Paul’s thorn in the flesh should be removed.

God knows all our needs, [Matthew 6:32](#) / [Romans 8:26-28](#). He is able to strengthen us through our trials so that we may endure them, [Philippians 4:12-13](#).

God’s grace, His favour of salvation, is sufficient to strengthen both Paul and all of us today, [2 Corinthians 12:9](#).

How is God’s ‘power made perfect in weakness’? Paul’s weakness is mentioned in [2 Corinthians 12:5](#), and here was his ‘thorn in the flesh.’

When we call out to the Lord in anguish due to our common affliction, the Lord gives us strength through His word of grace that we might endure. No matter what the affliction suffered, the Christian sees heaven with spiritual eyes and so endures.

Having hope in a heavenly home, Paul was able to ‘boast in his weakness’, [2 Corinthians 12:9](#), and so can we. It is in our times of weakness that we realise our humble state before God. We are not all-sufficient and cannot make it through this life without God. Weaknesses help us to realise this, and thereby we grow closer to Christ.

Without the context, [2 Corinthians 12:10](#) would seem very strange, like [James 1:2](#). Paul’s point was that if insults, troubles, persecutions and so forth strengthen him by forcing a dependency of a man with Christ, then he stated, ‘I am strong’ in such events, [2 Corinthians 12:10](#).

Man finds himself most dependent upon Christ during distressful days in life, and thereby he is forced to magnify his faith in Christ’s promises, [Acts 2:38](#) / [1 John 2:25](#).

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘What is grace? It is God’s provision for our every need when we need it.’

PAUL’S APOSTOLIC CREDENTIALS

‘I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles. How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!’ [2 Corinthians 12:11-13](#)

Paul’s foolishness was in having to stoop to the level of his critics due to the Corinthians’ believing and being swayed by their method of self-glorification, [2 Corinthians 11:1](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:16](#).

Paul was not of the practice of self-boasting; however, due to the Corinthians being swayed toward his critics, he had no choice but to do so, [2 Corinthians 12:11](#).

Note, however, that Paul’s boasting was in spiritual matters so that all would know that he is qualified and authorised to speak on behalf of Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:20](#). Paul did everything that the other apostles of the Lord did.

He seems to be asking, ‘How are some among you swayed from the truth I delivered to you by these critics?’ Paul considered himself ‘a fool’, 2 Corinthians 12:11, in comparison to others; however, the fact of the matter was that he was a hard worker and one who was endowed with the same powers and knowledge as the other apostles, 1 Corinthians 15:8-9.

One must appreciate Paul’s words of boasting, which are topped with the phrase, ‘I am nothing,’ 2 Corinthians 12:11. Paul had been humbled by God with a thorn in the flesh. Though he did grand things by the authority of Christ, he was nonetheless nothing in comparison to God.

The ‘marks of a true apostle’, 2 Corinthians 12:12, occurred at Corinth so that all should not doubt in their minds as to whether or not Paul was an apostle that should be trusted in doctrine delivered. Though he suffered much, he endured and did the work of an apostle among them.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The ‘signs of an apostle’ refer generally to the supernatural gifts and activities that marked the true apostles. This reference seems to indicate that Paul was referring to the Twelve rather than to the professed apostles when he used the term ‘super-apostles’, 2 Corinthians 12:11 / 2 Corinthians 11:5.’

The three terms, ‘signs, wonders, and miracles’, 2 Corinthians 12:12, occur together in Acts 2:22.

1. The word ‘signs’, in Greek, is ‘semeion’, and it means reasoning or proof.

This aspect of miraculous works proved to the world the validity of the apostle’s message, Mark 16:20.

2. The word ‘wonders’ in Greek is ‘teras’, and it means marvel.

The miracles were proof of the reality of God and his message. These miracles produced amazement in those who witnessed them. Again, such amazement indicated the realness of the event and, thereby, the validity of the message preached.

3. The word ‘miracles’, in Greek, is ‘dunamis’, and it means might, strength, ability to do a thing beyond one’s strength.

There was great power displayed in the fact that the apostles did things that they could not otherwise do without God. Point of reason, if the Corinthians received the same teaching and had the same spiritual gifts, why would some believe that they were inferior to other churches that had the same? 2 Corinthians 12:13.

There seems to be a sense of insecurity portrayed by Paul’s critics toward the brethren in Corinth. Since Paul was not one of the original apostles who worked directly with Jesus, some questioned the validity of his work.

The only difference between the other churches and the Corinthian church was that the other churches supported the apostles, and Paul; however, Corinth did not support Paul.

If this matter would cause the Corinthians to lose their faith, Paul proclaimed, ‘Forgive me this wrong,’ 2 Corinthians 12:13. Whether this statement is sarcastic is difficult to say. The more important point is that Paul truly loved and cared for the Corinthians’ souls and did not want such a thing to plague their souls.

PAUL ANSWERED HIS CRITICS’ CHARGE THAT HE WAS TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE BRETHREN

‘Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? I urged Titus to go to you, and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit?’ 2 Corinthians 12:14-18

Paul first visited Corinth in 51 AD, Acts 18:1-17. Aside from this first visit, we have no other record of a visit, 2 Corinthians 12:14. Clearly, Paul mentions a second visit, 2 Corinthians 13:1-2.

Again, Paul stated that he would not be ‘I will not be a burden to you, because I do not want your possessions, but you,’ 2 Corinthians 12:14. Paul was more interested in the Corinthians’ souls than he was in their money, 2 Corinthians 4:15. Though he had every right to take wages from them, he would continue to choose not to do so, 2 Corinthians 11:12.

As a parent would take care of their children, even so, Paul viewed himself as a parent toward the Corinthians in the faith, 2 Corinthians 12:14 / 1 Corinthians 4:14ff / 2 Corinthians 6:13. Paul would not take wages from his children but rather provide for them the bread of life.

Paul considered it a light thing to expend energy, time, and necessities of life so that the Corinthian brethren would learn more about how to be pleasing to the Lord. Why should the Corinthians be moved to doubt Paul’s love for them? 2 Corinthians 12:15. When the faithful read these words, they would, with zeal, reject Paul’s critics. The Lord’s church today needs more men who are willing to spend and be spent for the souls of brethren and the world. It takes time to do the work of the Lord. People are generally selfish with their time.

They will spend most of their time doing what pleases them most. Juggling family and work time does not leave much time for God if we are not careful. Let us spend and be spent for the brethren.

2 Corinthians 12:16 tells us that Paul did not burden the brethren by asking wages from them, even though he had the right. Apparently, Paul’s critics were charging him with craft and guile. When Paul was working among the Corinthians, he did not take wages.

Now he planned to come again to them and collect a huge bounty to take back to Jerusalem for the needy saints. Some may have believed that the whole ordeal was a sham on Paul’s part to take the collected funds for himself.

Paul asked a simple question to those who would believe the false words of his critics, 2 Corinthians 12:17. Paul did not send Titus and the other brother to Corinth to rob them of money, and they knew this, 2 Corinthians 12:18. Not one man that Paul sent to the Corinthians received wages from them. They all walked in the same steps in that they preached the same message of salvation from sins.

PAUL’S AIM WAS TO EDIFY THE CORINTHIANS

‘Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come, I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again, my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.’ 2 Corinthians 12:19-21

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul said what he did, especially in 2 Corinthians 10:1 to 2 Corinthians 12:18, primarily to build up the Corinthian believers in their faith. His self-defence was only a means to that end. It was for that worthy goal that he was willing

to speak ‘foolishly.’ He recognised that he, as a man in Christ, was ultimately responsible to God, not to his critics, 2 Corinthians 2:17 / 2 Corinthians 5:11.’

The words ‘defend ourselves’ 2 Corinthians 12:19, in Greek is ‘apologeomai’, and it means to speak in defence, to allege in one’s defence against a charge. Apparently, Paul was correcting a false view by the Corinthians. He was not on trial by them, and the defence he was giving was not to them but on behalf of them.

The Corinthians clearly believed the things Paul’s critics had said and were now sitting back waiting to hear Paul’s defence regarding the matter. Paul was virtually saying, ‘I am not on trial by you Corinthians. You should know my love for you and the truth and thereby reject these critics.’

All that Paul spoke was by the authority of Jesus Christ and was for the purpose of building the brethren up in the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Three times now Paul has said that all he does is for their benefit, not his, 2 Corinthians 4:15 / 2 Corinthians 12:14 / 2 Corinthians 12:19.

Remember that Paul’s fear was mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:3, as well. This fear was that the Corinthians would be deluded by the craft of Satan’s devices. Paul now proclaimed his fears once again toward the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 12:20.

He was fearful that these critics that were claiming that Paul was inconsistent, 2 Corinthians 1:17, preaching his own ideas, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12, out of his mind, 2 Corinthians 5:13, one who was a coward, 2 Corinthians 10:1 / 2 Corinthians 10:10.

Unlearned, 2 Corinthians 11:15, not an apostle, 2 Corinthians 12:11 / 2 Corinthians 13:3, and that he and Titus were participating in a scam of the brethren, 2 Corinthians 12:17-18, would actually make strides in the minds of some brethren, that some would actually believe their reports.

If this were to be the case, Paul would have to come unto them with the rod of correction mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:21. Paul would not sit back idly while these divisive false teachers tore the church apart, 2 Corinthians 13:2 / 2 Corinthians 13:10.

Paul was hopeful that he would not find the following.

1. The word ‘discord’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘eris’, and it means debate or contention.

Strife is a symptom of a lack of Biblical unity.

2. The word ‘jealousy’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, means envious of others.

Jealousy is a symptom of spiritual immaturity.

3. The words ‘fits of rage’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, mean great and sinful anger.

Wrath is a symptom of a lack of self-control.

4. The words ‘selfish ambition’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘eritheia’, and it means to serve for hire, to serve a party, or a feud.

A faction is a symptom of spiritual discontentment. It generally forms when a group of people do not like the current leadership and decides to take matters into their own hands.

These do not share the same views as the leaders of a congregation. Truth ought to prevail in the minds of every child of God; however, some brethren want to do things as they so desire and cast God’s word away.

5. The word ‘slander’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘katalalia’, and it means evil report.

False reports are given that another may be brought down from a post.

6. The word ‘gossip’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘psithurismos’, and it means a false statement maliciously made to injure someone.

7. The word ‘arrogance’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘phusiosis’, and it means being puffed up, inflation.

Here is one who thinks too highly of self, Romans 12:3.

8. The word ‘disorder’, 2 Corinthians 12:20, in Greek is ‘akatastasia’, and it means unstable, unsettled.

The above symptoms indicate an overall dissatisfaction with God’s laws and His ways. Some want everything to go their way, and if it doesn’t, they gossip, get angry, and cause strife because they are jealous, filled with wrath and think too highly of themselves.

Martin, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is an understatement to say that Paul was afraid of what he might find at Corinth upon his third visit. This list of sins reflects a church that was in turmoil. Little wonder that he was coming to correct the situation.’

Here, Paul’s critics are defined. Paul fears that they would make inroads into the minds of those who would otherwise be faithful Christians, 2 Corinthians 12:21. To be ‘humbled’, that is ‘tapeinoo’ in Greek, by God is to be brought down, dejected.

If Paul found the Corinthians in a state of divisive behaviour, it would utterly deject him and cause him to mourn greatly, 2 Corinthians 12:21. The cause of his mourning would be their divisive spirit combined with a hard heart that refused to repent of their ‘impurity, sexual sin and debauchery,’ 2 Corinthians 12:21.

SUMMARY

Boasting of oneself is not generally practised by New Testament Christians, Romans 12:3. This fact being established, Paul found himself doing the very thing he condemned here in 2 Corinthians 11-12.

There is, however, one area that the Christian is permitted and actually encouraged to boast about. That one area is our salvation, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Our boasting is in truth that saves!

What caused Paul to do the boasting in 2 Corinthians 11-12? Paul had boasted of all the things he had gone through in this life for the sake of the Gospel and men’s souls.

The Corinthians ‘forced’ Paul to boast due to being persuaded by Paul’s critics, 2 Corinthians 12:11 / 2 Corinthians 11:20 / 2 Corinthians 12:17 / 2 Corinthians 12:19.

Something had to be done. Apparently, Titus had brought the report back that the brethren were doing well, however, there was a divisive element in the church that was growing day by day due to their teachings, i.e., that Paul was inconsistent, preaching his own ideas, not an apostle, a coward, idiot, and one who was devising plans to scam the brethren at Corinth.

Paul answered every one of these accusations and then expressed his fear for the Corinthians as he did in 2 Corinthians 11:3. Conclusively, Paul feared that more and more brethren would get caught up in the divisive party spirit and fall away from the living God, 2 Corinthians 12:20.

To keep this from happening, the apostle Paul boasted of his divine authority and past perceived weaknesses, which were actually intended to cause him to rejoice in God.

Paul really gets after the Corinthians in these final chapters. Paul was making his way to Corinth for the third Time, 2 Corinthians 12:14. Paul expresses his deep love and willingness to be physically and emotionally spent for their sakes, 2 Corinthians 12:15.

Paul asks the fickle-minded Corinthian Christians if there was ever a time that he had taken advantage of them by asking for monetary support, 2 Corinthians 12:17. The idea that he was trying to scam the brotherhood by asking them to lay by in-store on the first day of the week was ridiculously false, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Apparently, not all of Titus' report was comforting, 2 Corinthians 7:6-7. Though many had obviously repented or were working on repentance, the divisiveness of Corinth was causing some to backslide into their 'impurity, sexual sin and debauchery,' 2 Corinthians 12:21.

Paul did not want to arrive in Corinth and mourn over the brethren's sin. He wanted to see them perfected in Christ with the funds ready to send to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

'This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return, I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.' 2 Corinthians 13:1-3

PAUL'S REQUEST FOR RESTORATION AND PERFECTION

We have no record of the second visit other than what is said here in 2 Corinthians 13:1 and 2 Corinthians 12:14. The Mosaic Law authorised punishment of sins based on the testimony of two or three witnesses, 2 Corinthians 13:1 / Numbers 35:30 / Deuteronomy 17:6 / Deuteronomy 19:15.

Jesus and the apostles made this Mosaic principle binding on New Testament Christians, Matthew 18:16 / Hebrews 10:26-31 / 1 Timothy 5:19. The word 'witness', in Greek, is 'marturon', and it is used in a legal sense, one who is mindful of what he has seen or heard or knows by any other means, Acts 7:58 / Matthew 18:16 / 2 Corinthians 13:1 / 1 Timothy 5:19.

The purpose of witnesses is given in Matthew 18:16, 'that every word may be established.' The word 'establish', 2 Corinthians 13:1, in Greek is 'histemi', and it means a matter is to bid to stand by, to cause a person or thing to keep his or its place, i.e. to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything, to validate, confirm, Matthew 18:16.

What connection is there between Paul's coming a third time and having two or three witnesses verify sin? Paul's 'fear' for the Corinthians was that he would arrive and find many in sin, 2 Corinthians 12:20-21.

Such a state would mean the judicial process in the church must proceed, 2 Corinthians 13:2. Paul had clearly stated that he would not 'spare' those who had participated in the party spirit and lust of the flesh, 2 Corinthians 11:19-20 / 2 Corinthians 12:20-21.

Apparently, the meaning is that a judicial process would take place. The time of long suffering had ended for such ones. Their insubordination to truth was not to be tolerated.

Paul would not act as the church in Corinth's judge; however, he would unashamedly and forcefully deliver to them divine principles that they may discipline the divisive and lustful members.

Paul handled the fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; compare that to 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. The wording of 2 Corinthians 13:2 is strikingly similar to 1 Corinthians 5:3. Paul was not present; however, he judged based on the facts given.

These facts would be established by witnesses, and the judicial process from that point would proceed. One thing we take careful note of is that Paul would not allow faction nor sin to reign in the church of Jesus Christ, and neither should any today. Tolerance of brethren's sins will only cause others to fall into sin, Revelation 2:18-29.

What application of these two verses can we make today? One may find oneself in a few situations. One may have knowledge of a brother's sin through first-hand experience. One may have been sinned against by a brother.

Whatever the case may be, if I am charging a brother with sin, out of a spirit of love and concern for that brother's soul, 1 John 4:10-18, I must back my accusations up with two or three witnesses.

If the witnesses are not in place, no facts are established. God will be the judge of those matters, John 12:48. If I choose to suborn false witnesses to get a brother in trouble with the church, I have caused the Lord's anger to be kindled against me, Proverbs 6:19.

Brethren are not mind readers. If a false witness bears false testimony, he shall be punished by the Lord. An innocent one may suffer; however, the guilty will not go unpunished, Proverbs 19:5.

PAUL IS COMING TO CORINTH

He will deal with each brother's sins. The brethren are to get the witnesses together. The apostle Paul is about to clean house, the church. The time of long-suffering and teaching had ended for these brethren.

The word 'since', 2 Corinthians 13:3, in Greek is 'epei', and it means from the time when, ever since. The Corinthians had sought after 'proof', that is, signs, 2 Corinthians 12:12, that what Paul was saying was the words of Christ as an apostle, 'ever since' the critics convinced them that Paul was not an apostle, 2 Corinthians 11:19-20.

These statements help us to determine the level of success the divisive false teachers were having among the Corinthians brethren. Paul said, 'He is powerful among you,' 2 Corinthians 13:3. The ability to perform miracles was given to the Corinthians by Paul through the Holy Spirit and was not 'weak, but powerful in you.'

The Corinthians, if honest, would have at this point said, 'Yes, Paul, you're right, we have these powers because of you, and we saw these same powers in you. Forgive us for our doubting spirits. You do represent Jesus Christ.'

'For indeed he was crucified by reason of weakness, but he lives because of God's power. For we also are weak in him, but we will live together with him, because of God's power toward you.' 2 Corinthians 13:4

The power of God rested upon the Corinthians to do mighty works; however, this power came by the 'weakness of Christ.' How was Christ 'weak'? Christ was weak in that He took on human flesh and blood, John 1:1 / John 1:14 / Hebrews 2:17.

Jesus was crucified and killed in this state of flesh and blood, Colossians 1:22. He arose from the tomb of death and thereby gave the most powerful proof that He was the Christ, Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 26:31-32 / Matthew 27:62-66 / John 2:18-22 / John 11:25-26.

All Christians today 'shall live with him through the power of God toward you.' How? By the power of God, which Christ raised from the dead, and by the power of God are we justified from our sins, Romans 1:16 / Romans 4:25 / Romans 8:34 / 2 Corinthians 5:15. There is, therefore, great 'power' in the resurrection of Christ, and that power is our salvation, Philippians 3:10.

Martin, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It appears that Paul and the Corinthians did not understand ‘power’ in the same way. For them, it was on display in an aggressive and a mighty personality. For the apostle, it is seen in weakness.’

‘Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless, indeed, you fail the test! And I hope that you will realise that we have not failed the test!’ 2 Corinthians 13:5-6

The Corinthians had tried Paul. Paul reminded them of the signs that they witnessed. The Corinthians were thereby left with no doubt as to Paul’s apostleship. Now, Paul put the emphasis where it belongs. i.e., on the Corinthians.

They believed that Paul was on trial due to the words of his detractors. Paul effectively turned this around and indicated that it was the Corinthians’ faith that was on trial, 2 Corinthians 12:19-21 / 2 Corinthians 2:9.

Brown, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Instead of a threat, Paul’s challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is a sobering reminder about the true mark of a Christian’s ministry. The barometer of Paul’s ministry was people, the believers in Corinth, as well as those in Ephesus, Philippi, and other cities where he ministered. Eternally redeemed people were the proof of his apostolic authenticity and of God’s presence in his life.’

Paul’s words were the very commandments of God, 1 Corinthians 14:37. Paul thereby admonished the Corinthians to administer a test upon themselves to find out whether or not they were ‘in the faith,’ 2 Corinthians 13:5. The phrase ‘in the faith’ is found twelve times throughout the New Testament and is indicative of one who is walking by the direction of divine revelation.

If, therefore, Paul’s words were the commandments of God and the phrase ‘in the faith’ indicated one who conducted himself by the word of God, Paul was commanding the Corinthians to examine themselves alongside the words he preached and see whether or not they measured up, 2 Corinthians 13:5 / 2 Corinthians 2:9.

Once the test was administered by individuals, they would know whether Christ was in them, 2 Corinthians 13:5. If they examined their lives and found themselves faithful to the words of God, then they would know with confidence that Christ was in them, John 14:23.

If the Corinthians examined themselves and found that they were walking contrary to the teachings of Paul, of God, then they would have to conclude that Jesus was not in them and they were ‘failures’.

The word ‘fail’, 2 Corinthians 13:6, in Greek is ‘adikos’, and it means wrong-doing, unrighteous, or unjust. Here, the matter of right, Paul’s words that were the commandments of God and wrong, the man conducting himself by his own standards, is put forth.

Paul’s desire and expectation for the Corinthians was that they would recognise Paul’s teachings as of divine origin rather than being of his own thinking. This was the main thrust of Paul’s critics.

They claimed that Paul was preaching his own ideas as opposed to divine commandments, 2 Corinthians 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 5:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:12. The way for their confidence in Paul has been laid forth. Divine power has been experienced and witnessed in Paul and among themselves.

‘Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong, not so that people will see that we have stood the test, but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak, but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored.’ 2 Corinthians 13:7-9

It was not Paul’s objective to have the Corinthians conduct themselves according to his teaching that he and his preaching companions might ‘appear to have passed the test’ before men, 2 Corinthians 13:7 / 2 Corinthians 12:14-15 / 2 Corinthians 4:15.

Paul's prayer for the Corinthians was that they would walk by faith that their souls be saved, even if he appeared to be a reprobate by his critics, 2 Corinthians 13:7-8. Note the important thing that Paul prayed for the Corinthians. Paul prayed that the Corinthians would 'do what is right', 2 Corinthians 13:7-8. No man may be approved of God while walking in even one sin. This is the focal point of 2 Corinthians. The Corinthians would only enjoy eternal fellowship with the heavenly Father if they 'do what is right'.

What benefit would it be to Paul if he should 'come to the Corinthians with a rod' of correction? 1 Corinthians 4:21.

What benefit would it be to Paul if he should 'mourn' over the sins of the Corinthians? 2 Corinthians 12:21.

What benefit would it be to Paul if he came to Corinth and 'spares not' the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 13:2, and 'deals sharply' with them? 2 Corinthians 13:10. All things thereby Paul preached and strongly admonished were done in truth for the sake of the Corinthians' souls.

Paul was really 'strong' when 'weak' with injuries, 2 Corinthians 12:10. The Corinthians were 'strong' in faith when the power of Christ's word rested within, 2 Corinthians 13:3-4.

Such a state caused Paul and his companions to rejoice. Paul had prayed that the Corinthians would not participate in evil, 2 Corinthians 13:7, and now prayed for the Corinthians' 'restoration,' 2 Corinthians 13:9.

The word 'restored', 2 Corinthians 13:9, in Greek is 'katartisis', and it means training, education, discipline, to put back in place. Paul was simply saying that he continued to actively pray that the Corinthians would obtain a state of restoration to God. The implication was that at present many were not restored unto the Lord, 2 Corinthians 12:20.

'Because of this, I am writing these things while absent, so that when I arrive I may not have to deal harshly with you by using my authority – the Lord gave it to me for building up, not for tearing down!' 2 Corinthians 13:10

Paul had given us the reason for writing the first epistle, 2 Corinthians 2:9, and now tells us the reason for writing this second epistle. He wrote to 'restore' the Corinthians' faith and cause a 'full restoration' in their attitude toward truth because his detractors had derailed the faith of many.

If he succeeded, there would be no need to 'deal harshly' with anyone. The words 'deal harshly', in Greek, is 'apotomos', and it means cut off, severe, relentless. This word indicated the urgency of the matter.

One year had passed between the writings of 1 and 2 Corinthians. The time had now come to deal sharply with those who continued in their error lest they lose their souls forever and sway others to lose their souls.

To deal so abruptly with the Corinthians was an act of the authority of Jesus Christ for the saving of the soul rather than its destruction. It was not Paul's desire to so deal with people; however, they put themselves in positions where sharpness was the only recourse. No one likes to deal sharply with people, but it must be done.

FINAL SALUTATION AND BENEDICTION

'Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people here send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

It would not be long until Paul saw the brethren in the flesh; however, for now, he bid them farewell and gave some final admonition.

1. Paul requested that the brethren be 'restored', restored to the faith, 2 Corinthians 13:11.

2. Paul requested that the brethren be 'encouraged', 2 Corinthians 13:11.

The word ‘encouraged’, in Greek, is ‘parakaleo’, and it means to console. Their consolation was to be found in divine revelation as opposed to worldly wisdom, [2 Corinthians 1:17](#).

3. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to ‘be of one mind,’ [2 Corinthians 13:11](#).

Their restoration and consolation had as its foundation divine revelation. Thereby, Paul exhorted the brethren to be united in this one true doctrine, [John 17:17](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:10](#) / [Romans 15:5](#) / [Philippians 1:27](#).

4. Paul requested that the brethren ‘live in peace,’ [2 Corinthians 13:11](#).

To live in peace is to be at peace with God. To be reconciled and comforted by Him through our fellowship with the Father comes through our walking by faith and according to divine authority, [Philippians 4:9](#).

Paul gave a condition upon the ‘God of love and peace’ being with the Corinthians, [2 Corinthians 13:11](#). They needed to be reconciled to God and universally walk by that one divine standard, be of one mind.

When the brethren in Corinth would do such, the critics and false teachers would have no place, and they would leave, [1 John 2:19](#). The word ‘greet’, [2 Corinthians 13:12](#), in Greek is ‘aspazomai’, and it means greetings to or remember me to.

The words ‘holy kiss’, in Greek, are ‘hagios philema’, and they mean a kiss. What makes the kiss ‘holy’, that is, ‘hagios’ as opposed to a normal kiss?

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ON THE ‘HOLY KISS’

New Testament use of the word kiss, ‘philema.’ The word ‘philema’ is found in [Luke 7:45](#) / [Luke 22:48](#) / [Acts 20:37](#) / [Romans 16:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:20](#) / [2 Corinthians 13:12](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#) / [1 Peter 5:14](#).

The word ‘greet’ is synonymous with these verses. To ‘greet’ one was to greet, bid welcome, wish well, [2 John 10](#). The apostle John commanded that Christians ‘give no greeting’ to those who refuse to walk in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The kiss then was a symbol of fellowship commanded by Paul and Peter through the Spirit for Christians. Should you and I, therefore, kiss each other today as a sign of fellowship and love toward each other?

Old Testament use of the kiss. Esau kissed Jacob as a sign of forgiveness, [Genesis 33:4](#). When Joseph made himself known to his brothers in Egypt, he kissed them, [Genesis 45:15](#).

Moses and Aaron kissed in the wilderness, [Exodus 4:27](#). David kissed his best friend Jonathan when fleeing from Saul, [1 Samuel 20:41](#). After Samuel anointed Saul as king, he kissed him, [1 Samuel 10:1](#).

By this same kiss, the early Christians expressed the intimate fellowship of the reconciled community; the practice gradually died out in the West after the 13th century. Consider [Galatians 2:9](#). Paul and Barnabas were given ‘the right hands of fellowship’ by James, Cephas and John, [Galatians 2:9](#).

CONCLUSION LEADS US TO FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship with brethren who held to the truths of Jesus Christ was outwardly expressed either through a handshake, [Galatians 2:9](#) or a kiss, [Romans 16:16](#). The conclusion is obvious: when I shake my brother’s hand today, I am expressing the same outward sign of fellowship as if I were to kiss him with a holy kiss, [Romans 16:16](#).

Christians in the UK are more likely to shake another's hand rather than kiss them. Whatever the expression, it is a sign of fellowship. The command to greet is an outward expression of one's fidelity to God, whether that is done by kissing or handshaking.

God forbid that we would shake hands with or give a holy kiss to one named a brother who will not hold to the teachings of Jesus Christ, Romans 16:17-19 / 2 John 9-11.

The handshake and kiss are modified by the word 'holy.' It is not a breach of God's laws of fellowship to simply greet one who is not a Christian or one who holds to different doctrines as a matter of courtesy; this, too, is a custom and not a law.

The idea is that I am not to give a greeting to one who stands opposed to the doctrine of Christ in a manner that indicates spiritual approval. There is, it seems, a subtle difference, 2 John 9-11.

Paul told the Corinthians to give each other a holy kiss after his remarks regarding walking by the same mind. The connection is apparently one of fellowship.

2 Corinthians 13:13 clearly refers to all those who walk by the same mind in Christ Jesus, while absent from them, greet them for the same purpose. A 'holy kiss' would serve in their presence. Their greetings are given because of their like precious faith in the Lord.

Paul desired that the 'grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,' 2 Corinthians 13:14. God's grace is His unmerited favour of salvation to the one who is justified by faith in Christ Jesus, Romans 5:1-2. The Corinthians needed restoration, and then they would have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 13:9.

Paul desired that the 'love of God be with you all,' 2 Corinthians 13:14. God's love is with us when we keep His commandments, 1 John 4:12-18. The Corinthians needed to discard the derogatory statements made by Paul's critics, regarding his having preached his own ideas, and accept Paul's words as divine revelation.

Paul desired that the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,' 2 Corinthians 13:14. What is the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit'? The word 'fellowship', in Greek, is 'koinonia'; it is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, and means association, a person united with another or others in some action, enterprise, or business.

That which joins each Christian with the Holy Spirit is the Word of God, Galatians 3:2. The Holy Spirit dwells within each Christian as does God and Jesus, Romans 8:9-11 / 2 Timothy 1:13-14, as we abide in His doctrine.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Note the centrality of Jesus Christ's cross work in Paul's arrangement of these prayerful wishes. Note, too, the clear testimony to the Trinity that this verse provides. It is in the grace of Jesus Christ displayed in His substitute sacrifice, 2 Corinthians 8:9, that we see God's love, Romans 5:8, which the Spirit uses to produce fellowship, Ephesians 4:3.'

Paul's desire, therefore, was that the Corinthians be joined together in their understanding and life's application of divine revelation.

SUMMARY

Paul's attitude toward divisive brethren, false teachers, false witnesses, and sinful men in 2 Corinthians comes to a close. With the close of the letter, Paul delivers the objective for writing, 2 Corinthians 13:9-10.

Paul's objective was to perfect the saints before he arrived so that they could go on with the work of the Lord in peace. The Corinthians needed to be restored to a state of being recognised as sanctified, saints, and unreprouvable, 1 Corinthians 1:2-8.

Paul has clearly set forth God's expectation of man's perfection in this second epistle to the Corinthians. The saints are those who are obedient in all areas of truth, 2 Corinthians 2:9. The saint is to be the mirror image of Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The saint is to be cleansed from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1. The saint is to be presented to God as a pure virgin with respect to sin, 2 Corinthians 11:2. The saint of God is to 'do what is right', 2 Corinthians 13:7.

Paul has clearly outlined three areas of the Corinthians' sins that needed correction.

1. The Corinthians had not yet forgiven the sinner mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5-9, even though he had repented. To be recognised by God as unprovable in all areas of life, the Corinthians would need to forgive the one who sought forgiveness.

2. The Corinthians had apparently gained an affection for the things of this world.

Their fellowship with sin put them in an unequal yoke with unbelievers, 2 Corinthians 6:11-18. These affections included the sins of impurity, sexual sin and debauchery mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:20-21.

3. The Corinthians had been swayed by many false doctrines and false accusations against Paul and needed restoration and reconciliation to the Lord, 2 Corinthians 12:19 / 2 Corinthians 13:3.

They had permitted the divisive to sway their minds from the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's coming to Corinth was to this end. He admonished them to get the witnesses of the sins committed in place, 2 Corinthians 13:1-2. He boldly stated that he would deal 'sharply', 2 Corinthians 13:10, with the erring and 'will not spare' them, 2 Corinthians 13:2.

These were not the words of a coward but the words of one who had a proper attitude toward divisive brethren, false teachers, false witnesses, and sinners alike, 2 Corinthians 10:10-11.

Paul loved his brethren and was not going to allow them to lose their souls. What is our attitude toward the divisive, false teachers, false witnesses, and sinful men?