

# *II Corinthians*

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# *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

## **A WELCOME TO THE II CORINTHIANS COURSE**

For those who have not studied the Second Letter of Paul to the church at Corinth we give a warm welcome. For those who have previously studied the Epistle it should be a time of gleaning even further insights. This letter not only has much to teach us, but it is the letter of all Paul's epistles which brings us to the heart of the Apostle, for at his heart is the ministry which God has given him. In 4:1–2 (cf. I Cor. 4:1–2) Paul wrote, 'Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart, We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God' (NRSV). He speaks elsewhere of the privilege of ministry has being of grace, but here it is of mercy. In Paul's mind mercy is the greatest thing that God can do.

## **INTRODUCTORY STUDY: THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE—PAUL**

### **Saul of Tarsus—the Opponent of the Gospel**

To understand a letter we need to understand the writer. In the case of the two letters of Paul to the Corinthian church this is not difficult. We can assess his attitude to his converts by the coverage of the Book of the Acts, and the substance of both Epistles. Even so, we have a fund of biographical materials not only in the Book of the Acts but in all letters which we call 'Pauline'. The Acts shows him as a man furiously opposed to the early church, a witness to the death of Stephen and from that point onwards a ruthless persecutor of Christian believers. In I Timothy 1:13 he wrote, 'I formerly blasphemed and insulted him [Christ]'; in I Corinthians 15:9, 'For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God', and in Acts 26:11, 'And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme: and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them to foreign cities.'

### **Paul—Man of Revelation**

In I Corinthians 15:3 Paul had written, 'For I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.' Of this magnificent message Paul speaks of in Galatians 1:11, 'For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.' To this he adds in verses 15 and 16, 'But when he who had set me apart from before I was born, and had called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles [nations]. . .' It is in these two verses that we see the heart of Paul. Grace had set him apart for the gospel before his birth. God

at a point in history was pleased to reveal His Son in Saul of Tarsus, and so came the revelation that was not from man or through man, but which was Christ himself. This revelation was with a view to what Paul had been called for—'to preach him among the Gentile'. Paul could not have a revelation of Christ within him and then *not* preach him to the nations. This was the ever-burning necessity for Paul. To know the gospel—to be transformed by it—is to preach it burningly. Paul believed there was no power to redeem man but the gospel, and that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation.

### **Paul the True Apostle**

Paul was not only a proclaimer: he was an apostle, the founder of churches. He was not only the founder of churches but was as a father and nurse to them (I Thess. 1:7–12) and always held his converts in his heart (Phil. 1:7). As we will see he was passionately concerned for the Corinthian church, for he had had news of some disaffection for him, some resentment at the discipline he would minister to those who were his converts. So he tells of his pain for them, 'For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you'. He speaks of his inner restlessness when as yet Titus had not returned to him to tell him the mind of the Corinthian church, 'When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.' He then cries 'Thanks be to God!' which many commentators take to mean that Titus had come at that point of time with the good news (cf. 7:13–16).

### **Paul the Man of Authority**

The letter opens with these words, 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God', and to be an apostle of Christ was the utmost in the order of the proclamation of the gospel and in the founding and fostering of churches. In Romans 15:14–21 Paul lays out his apostleship. For him it was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles—the nations—(cf. Rom. 1:16–17; 15:18–32). Authority lay with the apostles as the Acts and Epistles well show, but Paul denied in II Corinthians 1:24 that 'we lord it over your faith'. Yet authority was such that he claimed, 'We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.' He asked whether the Corinthians really thought Paul and his band had need to justify themselves before the church, or was it that in his coming many would be discomforted. On all grounds Paul was only, ever, for them, but that did not mean he overlooked evil when it raised itself in many forms among the brethren. In chapters 11 and 12 Paul speaks of his own innate weakness, but this is no reason for the 'super-apostles' to boast over him. When these special persons have a record like his of persecutions received and suffering endured, then they can, perhaps, make boasting of their so-called apostleship.

We look forward, then, to the spiritual riches of this Epistle, and are grateful for the man Paul whom the Father and Christ raised up to be the true apostle in the foundational days of the churches.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER

In Acts 18:1–18—Paul’s second missionary journey—we read of the founding of the church at Corinth. Paul remained at Corinth for 18 months (v.11), teaching. Towards the end of that time the Jews sought to have Paul indicted before the local tribunal but failed. After a time Paul returned to Antioch in Syria, passing through Ephesus on the way, but only staying a short time, promised he would return for a longer period, which he did on his third missionary journey, thus founding the church there. In Acts 19 we see that Paul had a fine ministry in Ephesus for a period of some three years. Acts 20:1–6 is thought to be the time when the present II Corinthians was written. It is thought that Paul wrote 4 letters in all to the church, though not all at this time. Studies on I Corinthians show us the nature of that church, its problems and Paul’s advice concerning them. The second letter was written from somewhere in Macedonia about the year AD 56. It appears Paul had visited the church a second time—although this visit is not recorded in Acts—the visit being occasioned by Timothy’s report to Paul on the church at Corinth, which explains ‘the third time I am coming to you,’ (II Cor. 12:14; 13:1). The third letter—often called ‘the severe letter’—was written (7:8), and was painful both to the Corinthians and Paul. Titus brought news to Paul of the church at Corinth that was good. They had accepted Titus as Paul’s messenger (II Cor. 7:13–16) and his severe advice, especially about the person who had caused distress to Paul and the church (2:5–11; cf. I Cor. 5:1–5) and so Paul was relieved (cf. 2:12ff.; 7:5ff.), and wrote this 4th. Letter, now called ‘II Corinthians’.

## PAUL’S REASON FOR WRITING THE LETTER

When we read the Epistle we discover what Paul is telling us. Roughly speaking the Epistle divides into sections which reveal the purpose of Paul’s writing.

- (i) **1:1-3** gives the normal salutation and establishes apostolic authority.
- (ii) **1: 3–11** speaks of blessing in suffering—a testimony to Paul’s authentic apostolic ministry.
- (iii) **1:12–7:16** is a long section justifying Paul’s attitude and actions towards the Corinthians church. Yet it is more than this—it is a defence of the apostolic ministry. It is subdivided into
  - (a) **1:12–2:13** explaining Paul’s seeming vacillation in coming—or not coming to Corinth.
  - (b) **2:14–17** the triumph of Christ in the apostolic life and ministry.
  - (c) **3:1–17** the superiority of the new covenant, grace and freedom to that of the former covenant .
  - (d) **4:1–18** Paul’s faithfulness to his calling, the nature of suffering that always come with the proclamation of the gospel, yet which brings to more and more people.
  - (e) **5:1–21** the hope of resurrection and the new body in the face of the judgement of Christ, and the motivation this brings for the proclamation of the gospel which is that of the new creation through the Cross and the reconciliation that is based on that work of the Cross.

(f) **6:1–2** an appeal to receive grace fully, but which—3–12—it will be accompanied by the ministry of suffering—something which inevitably results in separation from that which is polluted and polluting—**6:14–7:1**.

(g) **7:2–16** Paul's heart opened to tell of the sorrow he felt regarding the writing and receiving of the 'severe letter' but then his joy at knowing it had been fully received, through his messenger Titus.

(iv) **8:1–9:15** is a dissertation on the whole matter of the collection for the impoverished church at Jerusalem, and a biblical exposition of the principles of giving.

(v) **10:1–13:10** is a special argument and defence regarding the matters which have arisen in the Corinthian church because of the coming of those Paul called 'super-apostles', i.e. those who make out their ministry is superior to Paul's, call his in question, and so may force him—when he comes—to bring correction, discipline and so a change in the thinking of some. In this section Paul again introduces the matter of his suffering, but shows that he is no 'super-apostle' but yet is a real apostle. On the one hand he has been exalted to heaven, and on the other he is essentially and wholly weak, thus being an exposition of the grace of God.

Paul's reasons, then, for writing the Letter are to counter the charges and criticisms which have arisen against himself. In the process of penning the epistle he opens up the whole subject of the ministry that suffers and the necessity for weakness that the grace of God may work effectively. What we must see is that whilst Paul's ministry as an apostle came in for various criticisms, yet the principles for his ministry are the same as for our ministries today.

Now we can look at what we have called a bird's eye view of the Letter.

## A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE EPISTLE

### Chapter One

**Vss. 1–2.** The typical Pauline salutation to the church. This asserts the authority of Paul as an Apostle, thus authenticating what he writes in the letter, and the doctrine on which he insists. It is written to a particular location and so is apt for the church to which it is sent. 'Grace' and 'peace' are always found together, grace being the basis of the gospel which the apostles preached, and peace (Heb. *shalom*; Greek *eirene*) being the result of being justified by grace (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:1).

**Vss. 3–7.** Paul refers to the principle of suffering, then of receiving divine comfort, and so having the ministry of comfort to others. In verse 3 Paul blesses<sup>1</sup> the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That Paul should bless shows the rich state of his being as he sets out to pen the letter. Paul's richest theology lies in doxology. Speaking of God as Father brings the whole principle of God's Fatherhood to the readers (cf. Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5f.0. 'Father of all mercies' is a

**Vss. 8–11.** Paul recounts the terrible experience 'we' (*he* or *they*, i.e. both?) had sustained in Asia, which proved almost to be lethal. Paul does not explain the actual event but it was certainly a dangerous and demanding one.

**Vss. 12–14.** Paul insists that what he does has been in purity of motive and intention, praying they will understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Blessing is a great theme throughout Scripture since God blessed sentient creation and in particular the man and women together in Genesis 1. From that point onwards God blessing Man, Man blessing God, and humans blessing one another is a constant and significant theme.

**Vss. 15–24.** It seems Paul could be accused of vacillation in his plans to come to Corinth, but he protests that this was not the case. He points to the firmness and faithfulness of God in Christ Jesus (i.e. no vacillation) and claims his action was similarly faithful and truthful. Indeed it was to spare them (pain) that he had not come to Corinth as promised.

## Chapter Two

**Vss. 1–4.** Paul insists that he intentionally refrained from coming but wrote in pain and tears, not to spare them the truth, but to show them his love for them, and thus to prepare them, for his coming to the church.

**Vss. 5–11.** Someone at the church had been strongly disciplined. Was it the man of I Cor. 5:5—given over to Satan? We do not know, but certainly he had received severe discipline, and now it was time for forgiveness by the majority. It does not seem that he was set against Paul, primarily. Love must now restore this one, for otherwise Satan could use the occasion powerfully.

**Vss. 12–13.** Paul, having sent the letter written tearfully was restless to know the outcome, so much so that he could not use the opportunity for ministry afforded him at Troas, and had gone on to Macedonia. (In 7:5 Paul takes up the narrative again, having spoken from 2:24 to 7:5 on the Apostolic ministry).

**Vss. 14–17.** This is the beginning of the main subject of this letter, namely the Apostolic ministry. It may that Titus has come and Paul is expressing rich praise for the good outcome, but in any case he is here saying that this ministry has two aspects, one of life unto life, and the other death unto death. It is God who leads them in the ministry through Christ. Their ministry is truth i.e. no peddling of the word of God.

## Chapter Three

**Vss. 1–3.** Does Paul require commendation to present himself to them—the Corinthians (cf. chs. 10–12; I Cor. chs. 2–4)? No! Sometimes messengers had to have credentials (Acts 9:2; 22:5; 18:27. Rom. 16:1), such credentials—regarding Paul—were written on the Corinthian believers’ heart for they were the outcome of the preaching of Paul—they thus authenticated it, yet it (their lives) was also the very writing of the Spirit.

**Vss. 4–6.** Paul knows of no self-recommendation. As 1:9 shows their reliance is only on God, so here, God has given them—the apostolic team—the power and capacity to serve in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant rested on the written code of laws, but the New is dependent on the Spirit, i.e. they ministered not laws but the Gospel *in the Spirit*. In this way Paul is about to contrast law and grace.

**Vss. 7–11.** Now comes the contrast of the glory of the two Covenants. He uses a Jewish way of reasoning (a *midrash*—a semi-allegorical comparison by way of application) to compare two dispensations. The *law* (an era of judgement) cannot equal the era of righteousness (justification by *grace*), so that the glory of the first—shown in Moses on the Mount—is surpassed by the era of true glory (grace).

**Vss. 12–18.** The former glory was fading, the latter unfading—the very basis of a concrete hope—so we have hope in the new glory. Moses veiled his face—this *midrash* interprets—so that the transient nature of glory (hope) should not be seen. So when Moses—the law—is read there is necessarily a veil, a lack of full and pure understanding. In Exodus 34:34 Moses would remove the veil when going to meet the Lord. So in our meeting the Lord—(by the Spirit bringing the Gospel) the veil is removed. Here Paul means by ‘the Lord’, ‘the Spirit’ (see v.18). The Spirit brings freedom (by contrast to the

veiled face from the law), and so there is liberty, i.e. the liberty of justification from law. Now with unveiled faces—i.e. in boldness, not dreading to look—we reflect the glory of the Lord (or the Lord’s glory is reflected, i.e. by the mirror of the Gospel), and as we continue to behold him we are changed from one stage of glory to another (cf. I John 3:3; Heb. 12:2). This is the work of the Spirit as he applies the Gospel.

## Chapter Four

**Vss. 4:1–6.** The ministry is of grace (Ephes. 3:7ff.) and so we persist. Against much current practice (cf. 2:17) it is ministry in honesty, so that the truth confronts those who hear. They sense its reality, and are affected by it. Those who do not hear the truth have been affected by Satan—‘the god of this world’—and so their eyes are blinded to seeing the glory of God in Christ’s face, i.e. the New Covenant message of grace. Paul preaches Christ’s Lordship. As at creation so the light [here, of the Gospel] has shined to reveal the glory of God and has given true knowledge of Him.

**Vss. 8–12.** Paul enunciates the principle that (i) the gospel is innately the treasure, (ii) that our frail humanity is a vessel to contain the treasure, and *only* a vessel, (iii) that the proclaimers of the Gospel are constantly attacked in a variety of ways, and (iv) to carry in one’s body the ‘killing of the Lord Jesus’—i.e. constantly to *live* and *proclaim* the Gospel— means the constant death-attack, but at the same time the manifestation and impartation of life to true hearers. There can be no other way of imparting that life.

**Vss. 13–15.** As in Psalm 116:10 so now the principle of believing in the face of, and by stimulation of, suffering. That strengthening faith is based upon the knowledge of the sure resurrection. This then is the way of imparting grace to more and more people, out of which God is (increasingly) glorified.

**Vss. 16–18.** The wearing down of the earthen vessel by persecution, opposition and suffering must not be regarded with care or dismay. Such suffering by comparison (Rom. 8:18–19) is very light, and its outcome will be for the proclaimer a ‘weight of glory’, i.e. something substantial. Hence the things of hope are regarded with faith for they alone are eternal.

## Chapter Five

**Vss. 1–10.** The things of hope are regarded—they not being transient. The substance of passing from this life to the next concerns the new body of resurrection (I Cor. 15:35ff.; Phil 3:21). Does Paul see a putting off of the earthly body, a becoming naked for a time and then putting on (at the resurrection in time) a new body of glory, or does he see this new body given at the moment of death? (NB. Commentators debate this strongly—one way or the other). The Spirit is the *arrabon*, i.e. the guarantee so that we *now* have *part* of what is to come. That encourages the believer who now has to walk by faith until—in the life beyond—he can live by sight. Whether encouraged here now or glorified there, we must all stand before the judgement seat to give an account of our lives, so that we might receive back what we have done—things good or bad.

**Vss. 11–15.** In the light of what will be we now live. The ‘fear of the Lord’ motivates us to warn men and women. The Corinthians, then, should understand Paul and his team. No self-commendation is needed, but what explanation is given is to be passed on to those who do not approve of Paul. Whatever state Paul is in—ecstasy or sobriety—it is for his hearers’ benefit. The only constraint the apostle knows is Christ’s love for him. Christ’s death was to cause men to change from self-servers to God-servers.

**Vss. 16–21.** Paul contrasts the two systems—the old life in the flesh and the new in the Spirit, i.e. the old and new creations (creatures). The change to the new is by [the Spirit of] God, because through Christ He has reconciled the world to Himself, justifying the world of men, through the message He has given to His servants. They now proclaim reconciliation and exhort men and women to receive it. This all happened by the Cross where God made the sinless one (Jesus) to be sin for sinners so that they might become the righteousness of God in him—Christ.

## Chapter Six

**Vss. 1–3.** Paul entreats his readers (supposedly believers) not to accept the grace of God in vain, i.e. in an empty way. It appears that even believers can have an empty (vain) way of seeing and receiving the Gospel. The *now* of time is what is important: we must live by grace *now*.

**Vss. 3–12.** Paul now brings in the proofs of his apostolic ministry (See also 11:23–29), namely his sufferings which no one would endure, who was not gripped by the Gospel, authenticated (in this case apostolically by the Lord) and sent. Paul reveals the various forms of persecution, opposition and denigration the true apostle knows. Paul protests his love for the Corinthians, and exhorts love in return.

**Vss. 14–18.** (Note: **7:1** is also in this section). Paul gives practical advice on the belief and action system of those in Christ. In I Cor. 6:9–11 he warned against the things that prevent entering the Kingdom of God. In I Cor. 10:18f. he warned against idolatry in strong terms. Here in equally strong terms he warns against any form of partnership with iniquity, darkness, unbelievers, or idols. With three quotes (Isa. 52:11; 43:6; Hos. 1:10) he shows the utter oneness of God's sons and daughters with Him. **In 7:1** he calls for an application of purging oneself from every form of impurity so that practical holiness of life can be effected.

## Chapter Seven

**Vss. 2–4.** Paul appeals to the Corinthian church to respond to his true (Apostolic) ministry, confessing and displaying his love for them, and stating his confidence in them, not counting his suffering as anything.

**Vss. 5–16.** The narrative which he began in 2:1–13 he now continues. He recounts the restlessness he knew even when he came into Macedonia, but how with the coming of Titus this was relieved. Not only was he glad that the Corinthians had accepted his letter and his injunctions, but that they had personally felt for him. Their grief at their own failure had led them to the repentance that is fruitful as against fruitless worldly grief or remorse. The substance of his letter to them had not been merely such repentance, or the discipline of the sinful person but their keenness for Paul in the sight of God. Titus had been delighted at his acceptance by the Corinthian church and their acceptance not only of Paul's disciplinary letter but the obedience they had displayed to both Paul and Titus. The mission had been highly successful.

## Chapter Eight

**Vss. 1–7.** The simple and total giving of the churches in Macedonia Paul calls 'the grace of God'. Being very poor themselves these Macedonian Christians had given up to the hilt and even beyond their means. Paul's instructions to Titus concerning the collection for the



saints in Jerusalem was that the worthy saints at Corinth should give in similar manner. He was confident they would.

**Vss. 8–16.** Here Paul gives a powerful example of ‘the grace of giving’. Christ being rich became poor so that we being poor might become rich. So this principle should obtain in the voluntary giving of love. Whilst not advocating rigid equality of means, Paul was urging a sharing of substance in love, pointing out that this made life even more fruitful for the one who gives.

**Vss. 16–24.** Paul speaks now of Titus voluntarily going back to Corinth. With him Paul is sending ‘the brother who is famous in all the churches’ for his preaching of the Gospel. This brother will administer the collection for the saints and Titus will also go to Corinth to minister with the brother, both in the word and the giving of the Corinthians, who in their turn are to receive both men, thus justifying Paul’s sending them, as also Paul’s confidence in them—the Corinthians.

## Chapter Nine

**Vss. 1–5.** Again Paul wants them to vindicate his trust in them and their giving. This is one reason why he sends the brethren to them so that if Paul were to come with some from the churches of Macedonia he would not be shamed before his accompanying brethren if the Corinthians were to be giving in a lesser manner than the Macedonians.

**Vss. 6–15.** Paul again teaches on the principle of giving. He shows the blessing and enrichment which comes from ‘hilarious’ (cheerful) giving, citing God as the true Provider, so that as they give so they will draw out great thanksgiving to God by those who see and/or benefit from the giving. All of this will be consonant with the Gospel, so that folk will ‘long and pray for you’ because they see the surpassing grace of God in you (them).

## Chapter Ten

**Vss. 1–6.** Paul returns to personal vindication of his apostolic ministry. Some Corinthians have had the idea that Paul is a lamb at home and a lion abroad! Not so. Paul—as also other believers—knows and uses spiritual weapons—as against carnal or worldly weapons which believers should not use. Whilst the weapons are used against powers outside the church, they can be used to bring discipline within the church, also.

**Vss. 7–12.** Paul develops his stand against the criticisms which have been made against him. People had said his letters were indeed powerful, but that when he was present neither his person nor his preaching were of true power. These critics use themselves as the critical criteria by which the apostle must be assessed, but Paul’s coming will prove these (people and criteria) to be wrong. As yet they do not really understand Paul or his Apostolic authority.

**Vss. 13–11.** Paul further presses the fact of his authority in relation to the church for he had founded it—under God. With their growth in faith will come further opportunities for the apostles to preach the Gospel—even beyond the borders of Corinth and Greece. It is unwise for anyone to be critical of another or to boast in himself. In the ultimate true commendation comes from the Lord Himself.

## Chapter Eleven

**Vss. 1–6.** Paul is now about to speak of ‘the superlative apostles’—a term of irony! Paul had brought the Corinthians to Christ and had a certain claim on them. These so-called apostles will seek to seduce them from Christ, and get them to be under their instruction. Paul refuses to authenticate these so-called apostles.

**Vss. 7–11.** Paul pursues his opposition to the super-apostles, for doubtless they are living at the expense of the church. Paul had not done that. Perhaps he ought to have so done! No, not really. By supporting himself he had showed them his love for them. Not so the ‘superlative apostles’.

**Vss. 12–15.** Paul is out to destroy their confidence in the so-called apostles who claim to be no less than Paul, and to teach what he has taught, which is not the case. They are servants of Satan disguising themselves as angels of light. Such have within themselves the seeds of self-destruction.

**Vss. 15–29.** Paul now gives way to irony—the Corinthians are gullible in regard to the super-apostles. Whatever these men boast can they begin to match what Paul does and has done?. In verses 22–29 he lists the unending persecution and suffering he has known—a list wider than the accounts concerning Paul in Acts. He concludes by saying he has always had the Corinthians in his heart, and he helps the weak.

**Vss. 30–33.** The term ‘weak’ in v. 29 brings his thinking on to the line of comparing the powerful super-apostles with his own weak self. He seeks now to show his weakness, such when he had been dangled over the wall of Damascus—in a basket!

## Chapter Twelve

**Vss. 1–10.** Paul now develops the idea of the power of weakness (as against the ‘strength’ of the so-called powerful apostles). Using the example of the man caught up—in a vision—to Paradise he shows that visions may make a man boast, in which case he needs a ‘stake in the flesh’ from God, otherwise Satan will get the advantage of the proud person through his pride. The one suffering from Satan’s harassment (Paul of course) pleaded 3 times for release from this painful situation only to find he needed the stake in the flesh to keep him from pride. He learned the great lesson that one is only strong when weak, only powerful in grace when he sees grace alone can aid him.

**Vss. 11–13.** Paul rebukes himself for so foolishly vindicating himself, yet behind it is reality. He has proved himself as a true apostle by patience—‘with signs and wonders and mighty works’, which had been so evident at Corinth. Again they should acknowledge his true Apostolic calling.

**Vss. 14–21.** Paul now clinches his apostolic vocation in their eyes. He is ready to come for the third time. He had not burdened them, nor would he now do so. Just as Titus had come in love so he would come in love. Do they then think with all that he has said prior to this letter and now in it that he has been trying to prove himself? Oh, no! He has spent himself for the Corinthians—not for himself. He fears that when he comes he will find such division in the church that he will; have to bring his powers or rebuke and discipline to the occasion. Paul’s words are strong enough to make some of them tremble.

## Chapter Thirteen

**Vss. 1–4.** Paul continues the matter of godly discipline. Do they want proof of his apostleship? They will discover it in his authority as he rebukes and punishes sin in the church. Sure, his strength lies in weakness. So did Christ’s who was crucified through

weakness, but is strong through God. Paul will be likewise strong through God. Let them not despise what they have regarded as weakness in Paul.

**Vss. 5–14.** Paul goes so far as to say they had better consider whether they even be in the faith! He trusts they will not do wrong or be wrong. He does not desire to be attested by them as being correct—that is not his concern. His concern is whether *they* are in the faith, and *they* are attested as true. Paul does not mind being weak when they are strong (a little irony here?). He prays for their progress. He reiterates that when he comes his authority will appear severe, especially if they require it! He prays for their unity under ‘the God of love and peace’. He closes with the now well-known ‘grace’.

## CHAPTER ONE 1–7

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus.** The former enemy of the gospel—Saul of Tarsus—was turned by Christ and the Spirit into the great apostle to the Gentiles. He who burned with zeal *against* Israel’s Messiah now burned with zeal *for* him. Commissioned on the road to Damascus, and three days afterwards in Damascus through Ananias, he became the willing slave of Jesus (Rom. 1:1). The Corinthians had seen this powerfully for it was through him they had come to Christ. Since he was an apostle **by the will of God**, they would have to listen to him as though he were Christ himself to them—whatever other messengers purporting to be apostles they may have heard (cf. 11:1–21). See Galatians 1:1). **Timothy our brother.** Timothy had come to the gospel through Paul (Acts 16:1–5) and whilst here is ‘our brother’ yet he was a son to Paul (I Cor. 4:17; I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2) who had commissioned him in the gospel. The Corinthians would have known him as one of the apostolic band.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

Paul understood **To the church of God** and the whole idea of the church of Christ—so many he had founded, and so deep a doctrine he had of the Body of Christ as his other Epistles show. **which is at Corinth.** The marvel of it in one locale—Corinth—showed how much on the earth it is, with its unseen Lord in heaven as its Head. Corinth—known as ‘the cesspit of the East’—was the miracle of grace Paul now addressed. **with all the saints.** I Corinthians 1:26–31 shows that the saints were drawn from socially, intellectually and economically material that was not outstanding, but which had been wonderfully transformed. The word ‘saints’ probably had its origins in Daniel 7:13ff. but the doctrine of ‘sanctification by faith’ (Acts 15:8; 26:18; cf. I Cor. 6:11). **who are in the whole of Achaia.** Achaia was really the whole area south of the province of Macedonia (cf. I Thess. 1:7).

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

**Grace to you and peace.** Undoubtedly this salutation containing the two great words ‘grace’ (*charis*) and peace (*eirene*) were well known to all believers, but they were words filled with rich meaning. Having their origins in God’s covenant with Israel (cf. Exod. 34:6–7) Christ had given them new a deeper meaning. Grace is the working of the Persons of the Son and Father—**from God our Father and**—working firstly to bring salvation, and then to keep, sustain and mature the saints (cf. 6:1–2). Peace (Heb. *shalom*) carries the ideas of serenity, security, assurance, reconciliation with God (cf. Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:15–17) and with all in the community. Both peace and grace come from the Father and **the Lord Jesus Christ**— a term which, when broken into its 3 components carries great meaning, ‘Lord’ meaning at least the ‘adonai’ of the O.T. and at most ‘Yahweh’. I Corinthians 12:3 show this designation can only be understood by the Holy Spirit. ‘Jesus’ means ‘Yah our Saviour’ (Matt. 1:21) whilst ‘Christ’ (Gk: *Christos*; Heb. *mashiach*) or ‘Messiah’ had long been understood by Israel as its coming Deliverer.

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

**Blessed be.** Not only are the hearers to be blessed but Paul—as often—breaks into doxology<sup>2</sup> towards God, in this case *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, whom he worships. Paul’s doxologies are many and are spontaneously uttered as—time and again—the greatness and goodness of God bursts in upon him afresh. This is often as he discusses the great themes of grace, peace, mercy, love and hope. His statement is profound that the man Jesus—always dependent upon God—has as his Father God himself (cf. Eph. 1:3) since it places Christ before us a member of the Triune Godhead is a statement of unutterable depth. *he Father of mercies.* a beautiful statement can mean simply—but wonderfully—‘the merciful Father’ or ‘the Father as the source of all mercy’, since there is no mercy originating elsewhere. In Ephesians 2:4 speaks of God as ‘rich in mercy’ and Exodus 34:6–7—the revelation of Yahweh’s glory—says ‘The Lord, the Lord, merciful’. Mercy is often appealed to, but is never—so to speak—a right.<sup>3</sup> Paul—our context shows—has known the mercy of God<sup>4</sup> in his suffering in Asia (v.8ff.). this, too, is a beautiful statement. **God of all comfort,** All true comfort—a word used 10 times in verses 3–7—proceeds only from the Father. ‘Comfort has the idea of encouragement (cf. 2:7; 7:6, 7,13; I Thess 3:7; 4:18; II Thess. 2:17). The very *parakaleo*—‘to exhort’ is the one which gives us the translation of the Holy Spirit as ‘Comforter’ (John 16:6, AV), otherwise translated as ‘the Counsellor’. Paul had been in need of comfort.

1:4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

**who comforts us in all our affliction.**

Paul is saying that even as he writes there are afflictions, continuing afflictions—and it has always been so with him and those who proclaim the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Later, in chapters 4, 6 and 11 we will see the great need for ‘comfort’—exhortation, encouragement and the assistance of grace. *so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.* Yet suffering is not simply a thing one bears with fortitude and on one’s own, but it brings sympathy and understanding of others, and helps to share on the same plane of such suffering. Thus suffering is immensely profitable.

1:5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 1:6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 1:7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

**For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.**

The sufferings<sup>6</sup> we experience *cannot outweigh* the comfort that comes to us. God more than matches the suffering with such support and strength, and its end is always glory (Rom.8:17ff.). In 4:16 this suffering is not heavy: in fact it is light. So see 11:23 and

<sup>2</sup> It has been said that all good theology is doxological: it is in the midst of praise that we truly see God. It is in truly seeing God that we cannot do otherwise than praise.

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Trench once said that grace has to do with the guilt of sin, but mercy to do with the misery of sin. Mercy relieves from terrible misery, as its contexts generally indicate.

<sup>4</sup> Paul speaks of God’s mercy as saving him (I Tim. 1:13) and the gift of ministry being mercy (II Cor. 4:1).

<sup>5</sup> Doubtless mixed with these external sufferings—things which come upon the apostolic band—there was Paul’s suffering in regard to the Corinthians church and his ‘severe letter’.

<sup>6</sup> See my little book *The Fellowship of Suffering* (NCPI) where the matter of suffering is more fully worked out

12:10. Suffering is not without point on any score for in Philippians 1:29 it is a gift, and in I Peter 4:13 believers are enjoined, ‘rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed’. Suffering ultimately results in glory.

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

First the point of suffering is the comfort and salvation of the Corinthians. ‘Comfort’ as we have seen is the strengthening of believers, and salvation precedes this, but here salvation is also used in the sense that it is found in Philippians 2:12—the pursuance of present salvation working out what has been inworked by God, so that it is a process following the crisis of conversion to salvation. Here, too, the suffering is spread across the church, and the suffering of the whole is a fellowship<sup>7</sup>: those who suffer can teach and help others who suffer and together all learn patient endurance. In Romans 5:5 ‘suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character’; James 1:2 ‘the testing of your faith produces steadfastness’; in I Peter 4:14 it is because of suffering that ‘the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you’.<sup>8</sup> It is a comforting knowledge to the Corinthians to know that the suffering they endure is not peculiar to them. Peter (I Pet. 5:9) says, ‘the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world’.

Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Paul now is assured—despite the rumours that had come through concerning the Corinthian church that they too are not only set for suffering but will benefit by it, and that as the Pauline apostolic band has received comfort—solace and strengthening—so will the Corinthian church follow suit.

1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 1:9 Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; 1:10 he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

***For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.***

The facts of this passage—verses 8–10—are that the Pauline band had suffered deeply. For Corinthian triumphalists—if there were really any such—this would be wholly unacceptable (cf. 2:14). How deeply they had suffered does not seem to be known to Paul’s readers, but the fact that they had was certainly known. News would be brought to them. Paul had not mentioned the suffering in the first Letter so that it must have been of recent happening. ‘Utterly, unbearably crushed’ are strong terms and many are the conjectures. What is noteworthy is that the sufferings Paul describes in chapters 6 and 11 have *already happened*. Many of those sufferings are not recorded in the Book of Acts, so it could be any of them. Paul does not disclose what happened, but he does speak of the intensity and almost lethal nature of it.

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<sup>7</sup> See Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24; cf. I Corinthians 12:26.

<sup>8</sup> IN the NRSV it is translated ‘the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you’.

***but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead;***

Humans try to rely on themselves, and even believers attempt to do the same. In this case—in Asia—it had to be God who rescued them, and so it brought them into reliance upon Him. So must the Corinthians learn this lesson—time and gain. Only God raises—can raise—from the dead.

1:10 he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

These things can happen—almost certainly will, but the experience of deliverance builds solid hope for future deliverance.

1:11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers.

**Paul** was a man with a rich intercessory ministry, speaking many times of his prayers for others (cf. Letters to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians) and many times asking for their prayers. He knew he needed that ministry, and that God had made such intercession as part of His plan to fulfil His will and intention. When answers to prayers are seen there will be great thanksgiving.

1:12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.

Paul's boast is in a true conscience.

Conscience is a prominent subject in the Epistles, especially those of Paul and the writer of the Hebrews. Paul keeps his conscience intact (cf. Acts 24:16), warns against rejecting conscience, thus making shipwreck of one's faith (I Tim. 1:19). In 4:2 of this present Letter he says, 'by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'. He has acted on the will of God towards the world and towards the church. At the back of his mind are two things (i) what the apostolic band has just suffered and (ii) the problems he faces at Corinth, and he wishes it to be known he does all with a clear conscience, thus asserting his apostolic authority in all purity. His use of with ***holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God*** reminds us of his first letter, and undoubtedly he is inviting them to compare others with him.

1:13 For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully, 1:14 as you have understood in part, that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus.

The integrity of which he has spoken regarding himself he claims is present in his writing and in his life—as they have previously acknowledged. He trust they will go on acknowledging these things, and learning more of them, for Paul and his helpers represent true glory, and desire that they also will represent glory on the great day—the day of Christ.

1:15 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure; 1:16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. 1:17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? 1:18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. 1:19

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. 1:20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God. 1:21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; 1:22 he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

This whole passage is written to set the minds of the Corinthians at rest. Having claimed his integrity he is now answering any who might have accused him of being vacillating. Had he been a vacillating person, then they could—and would—have doubted his other claims and action. By his coming he wanted them to have *a double pleasure*, or ‘a double benefit’, as he had been *sure of this*, i.e. that he and the Corinthians were one in their integrity, he was coming to them. We have seen that Paul’s movement about that time were somewhat puzzling<sup>9</sup>, and it is certain he could not visit them. He asks them whether they think him to be worldly man with a double mind. ‘Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this?’

***Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? 1:18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No.***

But this was not Paul! Not Paul of the clear conscience who disliked earthly wisdom. He could not ‘make my plans like a worldly man’: he was always led by the Spirit (cf. Acts 16:6–10; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16ff.) As an apostle there was no place for fickleness or he would have been ‘a pedlar of God’s word’ (2:17). That God is faithful is an ancient tenet of the Jewish and Christian faith (cf. Exod. 34:6–7). So are His servants trustworthy.

1:19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes.

How could Paul—along with the faithful Silvanus and Timothy<sup>10</sup>, for they were all in it together—preach ‘the Son of God, Jesus Christ’ with insincerity as vacillating persons? Impossible because of the significance of their Lord and Master.

1:20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

So Paul brings a grand message. In the Old Testament so many promises had been given regarding Jesus Christ, as ‘the seed of the woman’, ‘the Son of man’, ‘the seed of David’, ‘The Davidic king’, ‘the Messiah’—and so on—that, had they not been fulfilled, both the Promiser and Jesus would have been nothing. This one embodied all that God had ever promised so that in him *all the promises of God find their Yes in him.*, i.e. ‘their *Amen*’<sup>11</sup> hence the believers can always trust what they say—because of what God has said—to be true. Jesus often used the ‘Amen!’ ‘Amen’ before making a special announcement, and was indeed himself called in Revelation ‘the faithful witness’, ‘the Amen, the faithful and true witness’ (1:3; 3:14). See I Corinthians 14:16 for the use of the word in the early church. So then, Paul can say his ‘amen’ with sincerity, affirming that what God says is true in Christ—*That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God.*

<sup>9</sup> We will not here seek to trace those movements.

<sup>10</sup> These two men—Silvanus and Timothy—are both worthy of study themselves. Silvanus (Silas) was a leader of the church at Jerusalem appointed to accompany Paul to Antioch to report on its findings. Timothy we have discussed in our Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Amen’ was a word used by God’s people from early times (cf. Deut.27:15ff.; I Chron. 16:36; Psa. 106:48; Jer. 28:6; Neh. 5:13; 8:6, etc.). Tracing the use of it throughout Scripture would provide a serious and profitable research. On the night of his betrayal Jesus said they were to ask in his name: he was to be their ‘Amen’.



1:21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us;

Now Paul claims that he is not a vacillating person working according to the flesh. It is God who has not only made *him* firm, but *the Corinthians* also—along with the apostolic band. In this stability they are one, but it is all ‘in Christ’—the ‘Anointed One’. Moreover there is a commission, and it is out of this—and this alone, cf. Romans 10:14—that one dare minister, and one dare not *not* minister.

1:22 he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee

The word and character of the apostolic people, then, cannot be questioned. They are the sealed people—sealed of the Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30), and will be claimed by Him at the last day, but the seal is not apart from the Spirit<sup>12</sup>. The person of the Spirit is the gift of God (Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:5; II Tim. 1:14; cf. Acts 11:16–17). This Spirit is in all the hearts of His people and he is the guarantee—the *arrabon*—and is a pledge (cf. Gen. 38:17f.), but more than a pledge, for the Spirit brings, now, the ‘first fruits’ (Rom. 8:23) so the Spirit as *arrabon* in eschatological (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30).

1:23 But I call God to witness against me -- it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth.

Paul is now explaining why it was—how it was—that he refrained from coming to Corinth. It is a solemn moment when he invokes the name of God—but then it is an invocation ‘not in vain’. It was *to spare you*, i.e. not subject them to pain before the proper moment. We need to learn from this the patience that suffer until the ripe moment when true discipline can be exercised in love.

1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

Here Paul speaks of the limits that even an apostle has. No one—not even an apostle—can *lord it over your faith*; for none one lives under the domination of another. So see Matthew 23:8–12 and I Peter 5:2–5. Perhaps this why Paul will not have a novice as an elder, I Timothy 3:6–7. This is not to say there is not a valid leadership (I Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17, etc.). All authority comes from being under authority, and authority is indispensable. Paul talks of working for *your joy* and joy is one of the keynotes of the faith. (See the many mention of ‘joy’ and ‘rejoicing’ in Philipians and Galatians 5:22). *your faith*; is what they have come to know both as the gospel (doctrine) and their way of life—*praxis*. Paul affirms that they stand firm in this—it is not this about which he speaks, and which he needs to correct.

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<sup>12</sup> Some scholars see the Spirit himself as the seal, the living seal (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30).

## CHAPTER TWO 1–17

2:1 For I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. 2:2 For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? 2:3 And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. 2:4 For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

This passage should be taken together as one unit, and its meaning is something like this, ‘As I have said (1:23–24), I deliberately refrained from coming to you. Had I come there would have been the matter of necessary discipline<sup>13</sup>, and that would have caused pain, though there would have been no ‘lording’ which would cause it. It was not the moment to come. so I wrote to you, and that seemed to cause pain (cf. 7:12)<sup>14</sup>, so if I were to have come ‘out of season’, i.e. not at the right moment, then I might have caused distress. There is a pain that comes which can in fact bring gladness—if the one reading the letter were to respond to the pain caused by my ministry.<sup>15</sup> So then my strong letter was to give you time for thought and for your response which would have brought you joy and so finished both your and my pain. Whatever you may think of that letter, the motivation for writing it was love. For my part I suffered much pain and distress of spirit, but it was to bring you through to joy. I had anguish of heart and tears of eyes, but it was for you.’

It is here we see the apostle’s identification of love with his Corinthian family. It is his being as a father and a nurse (I Thess. 1:7–12) that he regarded them, and regards them. The trouble in the church causes great distress.

2:5 But if any one has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure --not to put it too severely -- to you all. 2:6 For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough; 2:7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 2:8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. 2:9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. 2:10 Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 2:11 to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Again, this section needs to be treated as a whole. ***But if any one has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure --not to put it too severely -- to you all.*** Someone—we are not told whom—has caused pain, and it is obvious that the Corinthians decided this person had caused pain to Paul. It is held by some commentators that it was the incestuous man spoken of in I Corinthians 5:1–5., but since the incestuous man did nothing against Paul it is doubtful that he is the one in question. It seems here in II Corinthians 2:5–11 that the person has done something against Paul, hence Paul ought to

<sup>13</sup> We use the word discipline for 10:5–6 and 12:20–21 it is clear that Paul does not give up this right and duty to put the church in order—as an apostle, *its* apostle.

<sup>14</sup> II Corinthians 12:14, and 13:1 make it clear there had been some visit to Corinth. Some think the second visit was really one via his ‘sever letter’. Possibly these two things were connected, but there had been a second visit of which Luke makes no mention in Acts.

<sup>15</sup> This is definitely the case in 7:9–10.

be pained. Well, that may be so, but Paul suggests all the Corinthians felt pain about what the person had done, and so it was really a sin against them, as much as against Paul. The whole community by their being grieved have indeed brought enough punishment to the offender—*For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough*—so now they ought to forgive and comfort him, his punishment being enough; *so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 2:8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.* The tenderness of the apostle is here seen, as is also his wisdom hence the advice ‘forgive’, ‘comfort’, ‘affirm your love’. *For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.* Paul had written to test out how they would treat—perhaps discipline—the person concerned, for although—as in 1:24—Paul does not have dominion over their faith, yet he was the apostolic leader, and they needed to obey what he demanded regarding the offender (cf. 7:12; 10:6). *Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.* Forgiveness is part of the life of the new community (cf. Ephes. 4:32; Col. 3:13) so that their forgiving anyone will be as though Paul were present, forgiving. He takes their judgement as his own for he is confident regarding them. Just as in I Corinthians 5:3–5 discipline was exercised, in the same manner, now, it is the exercise of love. And there is a good reason for this—the man may be ‘overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, so that forgiving and loving is *to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs:* Paul is saying that believers know how Satan works, and they ought to use this knowledge wisely. The New Testament has many references to the ways in which Satan works, e.g. II Corinthians 10:4–5; 11:3, 12–14; Ephesians 6:11; James 4:7; I Peter 5:8; Revelation chs. 12ff. In this case the person might be crushed and come under the accusation and domination of Satan. Paul always has the ‘weaker brother’ in mind—weak in faith and weak in conscience (cf. Romans chs. 14–15; I Cor. 8).

2:12 When I came to Tro'as to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; 2:13 but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedo'nia.

It would seem that Paul had sent Titus to Corinth with the so-called ‘severe letter’ and was anxiously awaiting news of its reception, as also the reception of Titus (see 7:5–16). Arriving in Troas he could not rest as his mind was on the sensitive matter. *When I came to Tro'as to preach the gospel of Christ,* Paul was always urgent in his matter of preaching the gospel, and it is surprising that his feeling for the church at Corinth weighed so much on him. What is more the opportunity he sought was given him *a door was opened for me in the Lord* yet he could not take it *but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.* He was waiting to see Titus and hear the news. Not finding Titus, and perhaps knowing he might meet him in Macedonia *So I took leave of them and went on to Macedo'nia* he ‘took leave’, i.e. had to refuse ‘the open door’ opportunity to come to peace regarding the church at Corinth. This tells us something of the heart of the apostle, his love for his converts and his concern for the ongoing of the gospel.

2:14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 2:15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 2:16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

In one way what Paul says in these last verses of chapter two are a digression, and he does not resume until 7:5, but the ‘digression’ is triggered off by his relief in getting news from Titus. Hence his *But thanks be to God*, is for the good news received. It is thanksgiving and doxology, which is always the context of truth perceived clearly and communicated richly. It is God who *in Christ always leads us in triumph*—the picture being of the conqueror returning to his capital city, leading his successful army who participate in his triumph. Some see this as Christ leading us—his captives of love—as prisoners, just as in Romans 1:1 Paul is a ‘slave of Jesus Christ’, but the context does not seem to assert this, for God *through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*, and surely Paul is saying that this is His triumph even at Corinth. More generally it refers to the preaching of the gospel. The passage which says *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 2:16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life*. must be understood in the light of the great incense platforms on which were the thurifers of sweet-smelling odours which were the scent of triumph to the conquerors but of death to the captives who might be put to death in the vast amphitheatre, or might be made slaves for ever. They would hate the fragrance that the triumphant revelled in.

When, then, Paul asks he is saying that no credit can come to the preachers of the gospel; Christ’s is the triumph, and of course that refers back to the basis and origin of the gospel, namely the events of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension. The power lies in the message and does derive from the messengers, but there are also false messengers—those who ‘peddle God’s word, *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ*. Such existed in Paul’s day. They were vagrants, itinerant preachers who gathered disciples to themselves, or taught for ‘gain of filthy lucre’ and their word was not to be trusted. The apostolic triumph could only come from preaching the true word sincerely.

## CHAPTER THREE 1–18

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

*Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?* Paul is saying, ‘In the face of those who criticise me, am I justifying myself? His answer is, ‘No!’. Because some were ‘peddlers of the word of God’ he was not. He had founded the very church, so needed no commendation. His question *Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?* has an obvious answer. Others might need such letters but not he.

3:2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; 3:3 and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

*3:2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation.* Their being, their life, their witness were all a recommendation of him, the founder. *written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men;* Some manuscripts have ‘on our hearts’ i.e. you are living epistles to be read on our hearts, but they are the ones who commend him to others who see their lives and so see the fruits of the Pauline ministry.

*3:3 and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.* What would letters written on parchment really tell when it came to the pinch? Anyone can write anything. They derived their new life from Christ and the gospel, and not even from the law—once written in ink. In that sense they are letters Christ has made, but which were delivered by the apostolic band. They are ‘living letters’ for the Spirit has written upon their hearts, i.e. effected them deeply as we saw in I Corinthians 2:14f. Jeremiah 31:31-34 illustrates this, as we will have reason to see throughout the chapter, for it is grace and not law of which Paul speaks.

3:4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 3:5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 3:6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

*Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.* Our confidence is based upon what we have said—the work of Christ and the Spirit in founding the church. *Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God,* Paul does not mean he has any ability of his own to accomplish that has been—or will be—accomplished. I Corinthians 1:26–31 shows that. That is why he is content to claim the work has come from Christ and the Spirit. *who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant,* At the same time Paul has not been as ‘a chip on the ocean’, tossed to and fro. He actually has a commission from God which cannot be gainsaid. He and the others of his band have been equipped by God to do the work commanded them. Without being made ‘competent’ the task would be utterly

impossible for if Israel scarcely could comprehend the Mosaic covenant, how could listeners comprehend the new covenant, since it was a mystery, made by the Spirit and could only be revealed by the Spirit for only he can get to the minds and hearts of sinners (I Cor. 2:6–16). The covenant of which Paul speaks is *a new covenant*,—as against what was in the past—the Mosaic covenant. This is *not in a written code* i.e. is not the law as written down (Exod. 24:7; cf. Col. 2:14 ‘the handwriting of ordinances that was against us’), each detail of which had to be obeyed under pain of punishment, but *in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life*. That is, the new covenant comes through the Spirit. The written code is unto death, but the Spirit is unto life (see the comparison in Romans 7:1–7). This is clearly seen in Romans 8:1–3; cf. 8:10, for it does not mean the law of itself is death-dealing, but the covenant had to be obeyed.<sup>16</sup> The Spirit gives life because He brings the gospel of the new covenant to the hearts of the hearers—see Ezekiel 36:24–28; 37:1–14; cf. Psalm 104:29–30; Job 33:4.

3:7 Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendour<sup>17</sup> that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, 3:8 will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendour? 3:9 For if there was splendour in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendour. 3:10 Indeed, in this case, what once had splendour has come to have no splendour at all, because of the splendour that surpasses it. 3:11 For if what faded away came with splendour, what is permanent must have much more splendour.

*Now if the dispensation of death*, that is, the covenant which spelled death, *carved in letters on stone*, i.e. ‘the written code, in a permanent fashion’ *came with such splendour*—i.e. it seemed to be all glory, yet a fearsome glory (cf. Hebrews 12:18–21) *that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness*, i.e. was given in a situation of supernatural splendour (cf. Deut. 33:1–5), and the glory of the covenant God was reflected in the face of Moses who stayed on the mountain (Sinai) for forty days, yet the glory *fading as this was*, was but a transient glory (Exod. 34:33f.), wonderful as that fading glory was. Paul asks a superb question—one of comparison—*will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendour?* to which the answer must be a vehement, joyous, ‘Yes!’<sup>18</sup> The very term *dispensation of the Spirit* is remarkable one. In verse 6 Paul has said ‘the Spirit is life-giving’<sup>19</sup>. This ‘ministration of the Spirit’ is something that came into full-bloom at Pentecost and so this is ‘the era of the Spirit’ (cf. Acts 2:17–21). The Spirit and the gospel are at one (Rom. 8:1–4). The term *dispensation of the Spirit* is referring to the new age of grace, the grace of the gospel. There was a certain glory in the giving of the law as we have seen, especially in Moses’ face *For if*

<sup>16</sup> Note in Romans 8:1–4 that it is not ‘the just requirements of the law’ have been abrogated by the death of Christ, but that having dealt with their *condemnation* through the Cross, God now gives power to obey them through the Spirit. Such obedience does not justify a person, for he—or she—has been justified. To obey the law is the way of life, rather than a means to it. So the new covenant—according to Jeremiah 31: 31–34—writes God’s law *in the heart*. Paul may not be saying this in our verse above, but it is nevertheless true.

<sup>17</sup> The word translated ‘splendour’ in the RSV is really ‘glory’ i.e. *doxa*. It is a word with a long history, and is very rich. See my books, *Great and Glorious Grace* (NCPI), *God’s Glory: Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI) and *The Gory of God, Man and Creation* (LFS 47, NCPI), or any Bible or Theological Dictionary on the article ‘Glory’

<sup>18</sup> The entire Book of Hebrews is virtually given over to showing the transient nature of the Mosaic covenant, proving how the new covenant utterly transcends it, and indeed outmodes it. So much so, that to persists in it knowingly brings great judgement.

<sup>19</sup> A valid translation of Romans 8:10 can be, ‘But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are doomed to death because of sin [cf. Rom. 5:12ff.] yet the Holy Spirit life-giving because of—and through—justification’.

*there was splendour in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendour.* Condemnation could only be the case when the law was broken, but justification in the new covenant is the new order, hence it is far more glorious. Justification (cf. Rom. 3:19–24) is what liberates and glorifies sinful man who believes. By comparison the old covenant as though it had no glory worth mentioning—*Indeed, in this case, what once had splendour has come to have no splendour at all, because of the splendour that surpasses it.* Also the former covenant was transitory—never intended to be permanent (Heb.7:20; 8:6–7). So Paul concludes logically, *For if what faded away came with splendour, what is permanent must have much more splendour.*

3:12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, 3:13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendour. 3:14 But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 3:15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; 3:16 but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold*, that is, because the dispensation of glory is permanent, so our hope is properly based.. As to being *very bold* Paul has already this thought—though not this word—in verse 4—but the boldness is for the glory of the permanent dispensation (the gospel) which will never fade—*not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendour.* What hope could be perpetual when the glory was only transitory? Paul is saying that the primary purpose of Moses putting the veil over his face was not so much that they were dazzled (Exod. 34:32ff.) by it, but that it was not permanent<sup>20</sup>. Paul is obviously doing here what the writer of the Book of Hebrews was doing throughout his epistle—showing how the new covenant transcended the former one. The imperfect tense in the Greek of Moses masking his face indicates he was habitually doing this.

*But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.* Moses kept the veil off whilst he was speaking the word of God so that it was testimony to its Divine origin, but in another sense the veil was over the heart of the listeners. *But their minds were hardened;* is a statement which takes us into a whole world of what happens when the word of God is rejected (cf. Isa. 6:9–10; Matt. 13:13–15). There was an act of God comparable with ‘God hardened Pharaoh’s heart’ and ‘Pharaoh hardened his heart’. Hebrews 3:13 teaches this principle—the sin has deceit which hardens. See Deuteronomy 32:5; 15:18; Psa. 78:7f., 17–20; 32ff.; 106: 13ff.. In Romans 11:1 ‘this very day’ shows Israel’s temporary hardening is still proceeding. See Romans 11:7, 25. *when they read the old covenant*, really means ‘when they read the Law (Torah)’. *old* is contrasted with

<sup>20</sup> P.E. Hughes in his commentary (ad. loc.) says, ‘It is unfortunate that the rendering of Ex. 34:33 in the AV (“And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face<sup>Æ</sup>) has given rise to a general misconception of what actually took place. The text of this version would lead one to conclude that Moses covered his face with a veil while he was speaking with the people of Israel. The correct rendering of the Hebrew original is given, however in the RV: “when Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil over his face”; that is, it was not during but *after* his speech with them that he covered his face.

‘new’ not because the other has faded, but because it is different (cf. Heb. 8:13).<sup>21</sup> Law then establishes the veil of ‘not understanding’, but grace—not actually mentioned in this chapter—takes away the veil. It is of course grace that takes the veil away. Even so it is only *when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed*. We would understand this as repentance and faith in action.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* This is the verse that has caused much debate. If we take Exodus 34:34 then the LORD (Yahweh) is the Spirit. In II Corinthians 3:6 two ‘dispensations’ or ‘ministries’ are mentioned—one of law which brings death, and one of the Spirit which gives life. In verses 14–18 ‘the Lord’ is Christ, i.e. he ministers life. Elsewhere Christ is never thought of apart from the Spirit who is ‘the Spirit of Christ’, ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ and the ‘Spirit of [the] sonship’, and also ‘the Spirit of His Son’. Thus here it is Christ who ministers life, and yet this is through the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1–3). Christ and the Spirit are as one in the ministry of the new covenant. *there is freedom* shows that—as in Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1; Galatians 4:4–6; Romans 8:14–17—that the freedom of the gospel comes through the word (gospel) and the Spirit who reveals it (I Cor. 2:4<sup>o</sup>15; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another;* This last verse is capable of various meanings, but must be seen in the light of the argument above. As against the Jews who have a veil over the heart when they hear the old covenant as law (*torah*), the veil is taken away and all believers behold with great boldness the Lord. *beholding the glory of the Lord*, The Lord here is Christ, who is the Son, by whom the Father and His glory are seen and known (John 1:14; 18; 14: 6–9; 17:22; cf. Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15; II Cor. 4:4). As in Hebrews 12:2 (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; Mark 9:2) the looking is continual and purposeful. John speaks of an immediate and total transformation of us when we eventually see the Lord (I John 3:1–3), but here it is a looking which brings change after change, transformation from one stage of glory to another. See II Corinthians 4:16–18. As in Colossians 3:10 the true image of God in Man is being renewed to its fullness, so here, yet not by Man but by the Spirit, *for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*. The Holy Spirit in one with the Lord and shows him (John 16:12–15), and by so doing continues the transformation which began when the grace of God in Christ first met us, but here it is a looking which brings change after change, transformation from one stage of glory to another. See II Corinthians 4:16–18. As in Colossians 3:10 the true image of God in Man is being renewed to its fullness, so here, yet not by Man but by the Spirit, *for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*. The Holy Spirit in one with the Lord and shows him (John 16:12–15), and by so doing continues the transformation which began when the grace of God in Christ first met us.

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<sup>21</sup> The whole principle of reading law as law needs to be seen. Romans 7 is a fine exposition of the psychological nature of law-demands, and way sin uses the law to incite to sin and hardening of the heart.



## CHAPTER FOUR 1–13

4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 4:2 We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. 4:5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 4:6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

**4:1** *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.* The ministry of course, is that of the new covenant, of grace, of the full glory as against the 'fading glory'—the killing 'letter of the law', i.e. the law's condemnation. I Timothy 1:13, 16 show Paul's ministry was by mercy and grace. If this is so here, then ministry should be seen as a great gift. If mercy refers to the strength and ability to minister (verse 2ff.) then ministry is nevertheless a gift of mercy and grace. Of course, the fact that it is 'of greater splendour' than the former covenant is a powerful constraint and motivation. *we do not lose heart.*: in this whole chapter—especially verses 7–18—the reasons for fainting are many: ministry is not easy. The we here means the apostolic band, but is a word to all readers: they need not faint in the ministry given to them.

*We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Paul is obviously comparing the apostolic band with others who proceed differently in their ministry. This links with 2:17—those who are 'peddlers of God's word'. Would this be the 'super apostles' of whom he speaks later in chapter 11:13–15? Whoever others may be and whatever they may do, Paul refuses to do whatever he may have done in the days prior to his conversion, and even then there would have been no deliberate deceit in him—only ignorance (cf. I Tim. 1:13). It may that he has been accused of deceit (12:16). *renounced* here is an aorist tense and means he made a decision once for all. The use of deceit and altering the word by tampering with it, to suit a kind of gospel which is no gospel—cf. Galatians 1:6–10—is foreign to the apostolic preachers. No Jew would willingly tamper with the word of God since it was sacred: for Paul *the open statement of the truth* is itself a witness to the purity of their gospel. The word *conscience* is first used in 1:12—'the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved . . . with holiness and godly sincerity'. He who has a conscience void of offence before God and man (Acts 24:16) witnesses to the truth.

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.* Was Paul's gospel really veiled? Teachers of the word know their proclamation often

bewilders people—see I Corinthians 2:14—but they know they are speaking plainly to their listeners. *those who are perishing*. are those ‘on their way to perdition’ (cf. 2:15; I Cor. 1:18; John 3:16). They are deliberate unbelievers (cf. II Thess. 1:8; Rom. 10:16). *Their minds have been blinded*. The god (*archon*) of this world—*kosmos*—(cf. John 12:31; 16:11) is certainly Satan who ‘goes out to deceive the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9; 20:7). Satan keeps the world-system—in which he has entrapped humanity (cf. II Tim. 2:26)—fascinated by his brilliance and seeming power so that they have no mind for other than him and his system.

*to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God*. Once seen that light will enlighten the beholder. The *light of the gospel of the glory of Christ* we have already seen in (a) the new covenant, (b) in Christ himself (3:18). Christ himself is *the likeness of God*. Man was created to be that likeness (Gen. 1:26f.; I Cor. 11:7), but even before creation the Son ‘reflected the glory of God and bore the very stamp of His nature’ (Heb. 1:3). Paul had been commissioned by that very glory of Christ when on the road to Damascus ‘to open their eyes [i.e. of the Gentiles] that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God’ (Acts 26:18). Satan’s seeming glory is pallid—and horrible—in the light of the Christ of grace.

*For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake*. The gospel is proclaimed by someone, but the proclaimer does not intrude himself into the gospel. The *for* links what has been said in verse 4—the *glory of Christ*. Romans 10:9 shows salvation came by confessing Christ as Lord, associated with his resurrection from the dead. Here Christ is *Lord* as against *the god of this world*. and this is the great proclamation of the gospel, i.e. the *man* Christ Jesus is Lord by his victory over *the god of this world*. This is significant for all history—none reigns but Jesus Christ, under the Father. *with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake* is a statement on being ministers or servants; in fact here as *douloi*—slaves. We remember 2:24—‘Not that we lord it over your faith’. All are involved in ministry, i.e. servanthip (Ephes. 4:12). It is for **Jesus’ sake** primarily and so for theirs.

*For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*. There can be no boasting in ministry, no proclamation of one’s self, since God has initiated the light that has come to the human heart. As in Genesis 1 there was darkness, and God commanded light to shine, so *in our hearts*—by sin and rebellion—there is darkness only, and into this has come the light of God. Paul saw that light on the road to Damascus, and was actually blinded by it, necessitating a later release from it, but the brilliance of that light testifies against the murkiness of evil. John said, ‘God is light’, so it is God Who shines. The light is *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*, Moses face shone with reflected glory but of a lesser covenant. This light in verse 6 is the light of the brilliant covenant, yes, and of the covenant-God Himself, now revealed in His Son. *in the face of Christ means* it is a glory manifested in human form (cf. John 1:14, 18), so that it is intelligible to us—as humans—even though it is the very glory of God Himself. In Exodus 34:6–7 God disclosed His glory to Moses by means of intelligible words. II Corinthians 3:18 and Hebrews 12:2 both make us realise we can know God’s glory through Christ—a point brought out beautifully in Colossians 3:10. The *knowledge of the glory of God* is no less than the knowledge of God Who is His own glory.

4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

4:8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 4:10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 4:11 For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 4:12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. 4:13 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

***But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.*** The treasure is ***the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***—surely something of incredible wonder and beauty, but it must not be mistaken for the person who carries it. The ***but*** shows that by contrast the earthen vessel is frail and not a primary thing of beauty. The weakness of the human vessel shows ***the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.*** for if it is a light in a pottery lamp, then the lamp has no glory glowing of itself. If—as seems to be the better image—it is a pottery vessel containing great treasure, then the pottery will never be mistaken for the glorious treasure. So then, it is God's power, but the marvel is that the treasure is in the human vessel! Paul now proceeds to show how weak the vessel is, and yet how that weakness actually shows the power of God.

***We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*** Paul is now showing the way of ministry. Whilst 'all men who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (II Tim. 3:12), yet the adverse things happening are the way the gospel is proclaimed. The persecution, therefore, does not depress or destroy the proclaimer. To the contrary: he is always

***carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*** The ***death of Jesus*** here is 'the killing' (*necrosis*). In this sense The proclaimer is actually bringing the event of Calvary to the viewer-listener. He sees in the receiving of persecution the very life that Jesus manifested at the time of the Cross. The believer who has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) is now expounding in his suffering the event that happened long ago, ***so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh***, i.e. the life that gave itself in death is shown vividly. In Galatians 3:1 Paul said that through his preaching 'Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified'. What we have to understand is that just as the watchers at the crucifixion were enraged by Christ, so they are now enraged by these who show forth that death, particularly in its significance, for the Cross confronts all humanity with its own rage at the Holy One, and its own need for such a Cross, and this is the hardest blow to human pride. The rest, then, naturally follows, i.e.

***For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.*** That is that as the *necrosis* is carried about and confronts those who see and have it expounded, this rage provoked will seek to damage the 'earthen vessels'. Yet this is not 'a useless being given up to death' for it is a dynamic and vivid portrayal of Calvary and the saving event which brings life to the hearers who will receive it. So the suffering is not useless but life-giving, although it is death to those who oppose the death of Christ (cf.

2:14–16). Without it, the Cross could not be truly expounded, and as the word of the Cross is the power of God (I Cor. 18; Rom. 1:16–17), then the priceless treasure within the earthly vessels is displayed, and indeed the treasure requires the *earthen vessel* in order to be expounded. That *mortal flesh* can be the agent of life coming to those who hear the gospel is a remarkable thing.

## CHAPTER FOUR 13–18

4:13 Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak, 4:14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 4:15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

*Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak:* we need to read Psalm 116 to get the full import of this saying. The Psalmist has suffered greatly and has prayed for deliverance from enemies. Verse 10 (which is quoted here, though somewhat differently) says, 'I kept me faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted."' What Paul is saying is, 'My suffering did not cause me to lose faith in God. Indeed, it was in the midst and depth of that suffering that my faith was strengthened.' He is also saying, 'As the Psalmist said he believed God even more so in the suffering, so we have believed God, and it is out of that experience that we speak.' That is, when you are in the business of the gospel you speak from personal conviction and reality and cannot but speak. If speaking brings death to the mortal body it brings life to others, and that is where the reality of ministry is so rich.

*knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* Paul knows that death has no sting, and causes no real fear (John 11:25; I Cor. 15:55–56; Heb. 2:14–15; I John 4:18). He and his Corinthians readers will be raised by God as Christ was raised 'by the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4). So they will all come, ultimately, into the presence of God. How little powerful, then, is suffering to cause fear in the proclaiming believer. The text below amplifies this thought of Paul.

4:15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

For it is all for your sake: In verse 12 it is 'for Jesus' sake'. Here it is *for your sake*. This is the principle of Philippians 2:3–8—the considering of others before oneself. *as grace extends to more and more people:* grace is abundant (cf. Rom. 5: 17, 20, 21; Acts 4:33) and thus full in its action. The true response to grace is gratitude—indeed the return of gratitude after Man's refusal to thank God (Rom. 1: 21). *it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God:* thus the fruits of the Cross and the suffering of Christ's servants will bring great glory to God as believers make their response to 'abundant grace'.

4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. 4:17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 4:18 because we look not to the things that

are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

*So we do not lose heart.* Paul is repeating 4:1, but whereas there mercy aided him to proclaim the new covenant, here he is speaking about enduring suffering and truly preaching the gospel so that fruits ensure from it. *Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.* The **outer nature** is the ‘outer humanity, the body, the bodily humanity. It is being worn down by the suffering that comes to it as ‘mortal flesh’, and one day will die and decay. The inner nature is ‘the inner man’ (Eph. 3:16; Col. 3:10; cf. II Cor. 5:17) which the context shows is really the essence and building up that which shall appear in glory. The renewal of this inner nature is not merely keeping it at a steady level but—as in 3:18—is causing it to expand and grow ‘from one stage of glory to another’.

*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison:* Paul is saying that the present affliction believers suffer is quite light. This is, of course, *by comparison* with the **eternal weight of glory**, for glory is substantial. *Kabod* in the Old Testament carries the idea of ‘weight’ and ‘substance’. Undoubtedly Paul’s sufferings were heavy enough (cf. 11:23–27). In one sense Paul is saying (as in Romans 8:17ff.) that suffering not only prepares us for glory, but prepares glory for us. Thus glory is superlative—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the glory of the gospel, and the glory the gospel promises (cf. I Cor. 2:6–10).

*because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* The very here ‘to look’ is ‘to concentrate upon’. There is no dualism here, no putting down of what is seen as though—in the Platonic sense—it is not what matters but is only a shadow of the reality. No: he is saying that as we face the difficulties—the tearing down of our bodies because of persecution—we do not count these the abiding realities. The principle of Colossians 3:1–3 is partly found here. We are ‘citizens of heaven’ (Phil. 3:20–21) and we concentrate on the matters of eternal life, glorification, the inheritance—and so on. The present is real enough but it is the outcome of this process of the outer humanity wearing away and the inner humanity moving to its glorious completion that keeps us going in the face all pain and suffering. The even greater glory of the gospel is as yet unseen but to the eyes of the faith it is seen, and so it is on that we concentrate. Colossians 1:24–29 is somewhat of a parallel passage to our present one. The unseen—but not unknown—mystery is perceived in the reality of suffering, namely ‘the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’. Now that glory is not only future for it is present (II Cor. 3:18). It is not only present for the glory has always been since it is God’s glory. It is the past present in the now-time as also in the coming future in the sense that the sight of celestial glory has been almost wholly hidden from us—the things that are unseen’, but at times this has been manifested in such events as theophanies, the coming of angels, and heavenly announcement at Bethlehem by the angelic choir. It is that to which we are going, so that suffering is—by comparison—a light thing. The things of the *telos* will also be new and better even than what has been, since there will be a new heaven and a new earth, with all that pertains to it for the members of the great Kingdom of God. This is why now the ‘inner man’ has his being in relation to all God’s glory and is one with the ultimate *telos*. So he concentrates upon that, to the exclusion of all other things.

## CHAPTER FIVE 1–10

5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 5:2 Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, 5:3 so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. 5:4 For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5:5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* It is the *for* which links Paul's present statement with what has gone before. He said in 4:14, 'knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.' Paul has said our eyes are on the unseen things which are permanent and our entrance will be into these things. We will all go into his presence. In what manner will this be? Commentators have long pondered the meaning of this passage of verses 1–5. What is clear is that Paul is saying we have a tent (*skene*) now in which we dwell. This tent will be exchanged for a house (*oikia*), i.e. something that is eternally substantial by contrast with the present body which is temporary and 'doomed to death because of sin' (Rom. 8:10). It is the body which is being 'torn down day by day' with the persecuting pressures which come upon it because of the gospel, as well as the natural attrition of human ageing. The house is—or will be— *eternal in the heavens*. The question can be asked, 'Is the inner man in fact the new house that is being built up now, within, from 'one stage of glory to another' (3:18) as it is 'being renewed every day' (4:16: cf. Col. 3:10; 1:27)? This house is *not made with hands*, but is nevertheless the handiwork of God—made by His hands (Eph. 2:10) for Christ will make it like 'his body of glory' (Phil. 3:21) and it is *eternal in the heavens*. By this latter statement is Paul thinking of the present heavens where 'absent from the body' means 'present with the Lord' (5:8), and to die is immediately to be present with Christ (Phil. 1:23)? What is clear is that the pain, persecution and suffering spoken of in 5:7ff. 'is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in (or to) us' (Rom. 8:18ff.).

*Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked.* Paul reveals what he has shown in Romans 8:18–25 namely that the whole creation (which includes humanity) has been groaning since the fall and the imposition of the curse as it awaits the time of its glorification. Believers, no less, also 'groan inwardly as [they] we await for adoption, the redemption of our bodies'. Romans 8:35–39 speaks of the powerful forces which would separate us from the love of Christ, and we feel the tension of these things now (II Cor. 4:7–18). But is Paul saying that living in a body which is 'doomed to death by sin' means we are never entirely free in this life, and will not be until the tent falls away and the new building clothes us? Of course we are *comparatively* free in this life (John 8:36; Rom. 6:7; 8:1–3; Gal. 5:1, 13; etc.) but not until the redemption of the body will we be absolutely free in the ontological-teleological sense. Is Paul saying that there is a period following death in which the person is naked—without habitation of the new house—until the time of the resurrection when that person

will be clothed with the new house? So some have argued. Surely to die and be with Christ is ‘very much far better’ (Phil. 1:23), and surely the person is clothed with the new house at the point of death when he is immediately with Christ<sup>22</sup>. We might ask, ‘How could one be with Christ and yet be found naked, not clothed with the new house?’

*For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.* Paul is surely not saying anxiety which we now feel is lest we should be found naked, but rather it is linked with the present sufferings from which we wish to be delivered into the glory of the new life beyond death. We do not merely wish to be rid of this present tent-dwelling as though such ridding were a thing in itself, but our yearning—our sighing—is for the ultimate glory of being clothed with the permanent—eternal—building and all the glory of living linked with that reality. What an event when ‘what is mortal will be swallowed up in life’, or, as Paul says in I Corinthians 15:53, ‘For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality’. Even so, in Philippians 1:21–22 he speaks of a struggle to be away with Christ in heaven, but at the same time is sure it is better that he should remain here for the sake of his converts and the proclamation of the gospel. In Romans 8:17–25 and Philippians 3:21 he insists we are always waiting for the coming event, nevertheless it will be time enough when it is the right moment to be with the Lord!

*He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.* That is, God Himself *has* (already) prepared (*katergasamenos*, ‘having wrought’) us, i.e. we who wait with anxiety *or this very thing*—for the glorification of the body, and if God has done it then we have no need for anxiety, even though the desire may be strong. Furthermore God *has given us the Spirit* that is, the very Spirit who is already changing us from one stage of glory to another (II Cor. 3:18), and who is renewing us in the spirit of our minds (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10), and renewing in the inner man (II 4:16) whilst the outer humanity is being broken down daily. In this respect Romans 8:9–11 helps us to understand the *arrabon* or guarantee who is the very Spirit himself. In the Roman passage Paul says no one is a Christian who does not have the Spirit. A permissible translation of 8:10 could be ‘But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are doomed to death because of sin, the Spirit is life-giving because of justification’ which is why Romans 8:1–2 says, ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death’. The Spirit is present as a guarantee to the believer that he may not worry about what is beyond physical death, but rather—as the Spirit of hope encourages him—he may live without fear of a dreadful outcome. ‘The Spirit as a guarantee’—see 1:22—means an earnest or ‘deposit the full amount of which will be paid later. So then whole is assured, but since the earnest is of ‘like-kind’ with that which be claimed later, it is the same as ‘the first-fruits of the Spirit of Romans 8:23. Thus we have the internal assurance of that which is to come.

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<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly to say that the point of time of physical death and the point in time of the resurrection of the body are coincidental is to raise certain questions, such as ‘Can one have a body in the grave which yet to be raised at the resurrection, and yet, in heaven, have the body of glorification?’ Paul does not see a body in the grave so much as a seed (I Cor. 15:36). The vexing question of present time and living eternal life beyond the grave, cannot be satisfactorily answered, and has given rise to the wrong idea of ‘soul-sleep, but Jesus spoke of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as living and not dead or even sleeping, and Moses and Elijah appeared in glory at the Transfiguration. It would seem that we do indeed receive our glorified bodies when we go to be with Christ, but that in time this will be seen—as though it were then happening—at the point of the resurrection of the body.

5:6 So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 5:8 We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 5:9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

*So we are always of good courage;*<sup>23</sup> *we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,* In 4:1 and 4:16 (cf. 4:13) Paul claims ‘We do not lose heart’, and positively he now says, *we are always of good courage* because our understanding of suffering, death and the glory that follows encourages us to go on. *we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord*, that is, in this body we are content to live, recognising that for this time *we are away from the Lord* in the sense that we are not as we will one day be, but as Paul in Philippians 1:23–24 we resolve any conflict by being content to be as we are—as is His present plan. *for we walk by faith, not by sight*, meaning that the things which are unseen (4:18) are as yet unseen, although we have rich intimations of them (I Cor. 2:9–10). So it is faith in the word of God, and the internal reality of the *Arabian* of the Spirit that keep us going, even without that sight-union we will one day have with Christ and God.

*We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* Again, ‘We do not lose heart, but our faith is actually strengthened by the sufferings we have (4:13–14) and the assurance of the glory to come. Whilst we are content to live as we must here, our preference is to *be away from the body and at home with the Lord* rather than *at home in the body* here.

*So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.* Obviously we accept being ‘at home’ *here* in this body, but if we were *there* —i.e. ‘with Christ’—our attitude would be no different. We simply wish *to please him*. That is all we are about, and 4:7–15 surely testifies to that. This life, and/or the life in the future always motivates us to do the Lord’s will (cf. 5:14).

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.* The *for* links the ambition they have to please Christ, since all *must stand before his judgement seat so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body*. That is, everything we have done here in the body must be judged on the basis of our accountability. In I Corinthians 4:1–5 Paul is not concerned with what men think of him as he ministers, because ‘it is the Lord who judges me’. Paul had always trained his conscience to be void of offence before God and man (Acts 24:16) and so he had anticipated the awesome event of standing before the great throne of God (*bema*) with confidence though not with arrogance.<sup>24</sup> This throne is seen by John the Seer in Revelation 20:11–15, where the dead are judged out of the books, but where, primarily those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of life shall go into life eternal. Note in John 5:27 Jesus is given the

<sup>23</sup> The word ‘good courage’ or ‘good cheer’ (*tharrountes*) is the word Jesus spoke to the paralytic in Matthew 9:1ff. ‘Good courage’ is an attitude which springs from faith and builds up faith. See Joshua 1:7; 9, 18 where ‘Be strong and of a good courage’ relates to Joshua leading Israel into the promised land.

<sup>24</sup> John also speaks of such confidence in I John 4:17–18 where the idea of ‘no condemnation’ (cf. Romans 8:1–2; John 5:24) is present. The ‘no condemnation’ means ‘no judgement for eternal life or eternal death (cf. John 5:28–29).



prerogative of judgment, as also in Acts 10:42 and 17:31, even though in Romans 14:10 the judgement seat (*bema*) is said to be ‘of God’. *each one may receive* carries with it the idea of ‘receive back’ and fits with Galatians 6:8—what we sow is what we reap. See also Romans 6:13, 19; 8:13 and I Corinthians 3: 5–10; 6:13ff.; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:25. *in the body* must mean, ‘Here, in this life’ the things done in this body are the things for which we must be judged.’ Romans 12:1 speaks of the body being used as a holy instrument of the person. What the body does is true worship—or otherwise! The questions raised are, ‘Is Paul speaking of believers rather than unbelievers?’ ‘Is the judgement seat of Christ (*bema*) to be identified with ‘the great white throne’ (*thronon megan leukon*) of Revelation 20:11ff. and is there in fact a judgement here for those whose names are written in the book of life. The best we can say is that there no judgement for eternal life for believers, since they already have it (John 5:24, cf. Romans 8:1). Any judgement of works done by believers (cf. I Cor. 3:5–10) must be for ‘losses and rewards’.

## CHAPTER FIVE 11–21

5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 5:12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart. 5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

***Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.*** We are faced in 5:11–15 with three motives or constraints, (i) fear of the Lord (v.11), (ii) the love of Christ (v.14) and (iii) living unto him who for our sake died and was raised (v.15.) The first—***knowing the fear of the Lord*** is a holy and not a slavish fear (cf. Rom. 8:15; Psa. 130:4). Is this the fear Paul has towards God—the awe and soberness of the commission given to him—or is it that which will cause listeners to fear God when they hear his message? Opinions differ, but the first is generally favoured. There is a fear that the messenger has that he will not correctly and fully deliver the message given to him. After all, the commission is a command, although—as we see—it is delivered out of the constraint of love (v.14). ***we persuade men;*** does not mean ‘we threaten men’ but that ‘we appeal (*peithomen*) to them’. ***but what we are is known to God,*** this seems to be saying that—as against the accusations at Corinth by the ‘super apostles’ Paul’s preaching is proper and impeccable. He has already said in 2:17 and 4:2 that he properly preaches the gospel. ***I hope it is known also to your conscience*** must mean, then, that to those to whom he preaches, as well as the Corinthians his preaching is true. It also gives us the insight that the consciences of the people of God (cf. 4:2) are trustworthy in their conclusions—in sensing the sincerity of Paul. Paul’s opponents would seize upon any claim made by him which seemed to be boastful.

***We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart.*** Paul is saying plainly that his preaching of the gospel—out of ‘fear of the Lord’ cannot be attacked as boastful or arrogant by those who are his enemies. Rather, he is giving material into the hands of his Corinthian converts to refuse wrong charges made against him. Only those ***who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart*** are incapable of properly judging the true servant of God. See 11:18, ‘who boast of worldly things.’ The ‘super-apostles’ are looking for worldly recognition, but the Corinthians truly know Paul’s heart (cf. 6:11). Notice the ***us*** is a reference to the whole apostolic band, and not to Paul alone. i.e. ‘our heart’<sup>25</sup>. It seems unbelievable that men and women should use the Christian fellowship—the church—to make something of themselves.

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<sup>25</sup> F.F. Bruce in his commentary on II Corinthians comments that whilst some of the Corinthians may have criticised him, and whilst he spoke plainly to them, face to face, yet he bosasdted of them to others—as in 1:14; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2f.

***For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*** The little word *for* links this statement with what has gone before, i.e. whatever Paul and the little apostolic band does *it is for you*. *beside ourselves* can mean ‘in ecstasy’, i.e. the gospel is of such a nature that it must be proclaimed with great joy and delight—how else would it appear to be ‘good news’? It may have been that Paul is speaking of visions (cf. 12:1ff., which is unlikely), but just as Festus exclaimed that Paul must be mad from his learning (Acts 26:24) so some may have thought the apostolic message was beyond mental grasp, although that is unlikely. It may well be that Paul’s critics—the ‘super apostles’ mentioned in chapter 11—may simply be trying to discredit Paul. Paul has answered such arguments in I Corinthians 1:17–31, i.e. by ‘the wisdom of God’ which is in the person of Christ. ***if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*** this shows that Paul *reasoned* the gospel with them (cf. Acts 17:2–3; cf. 17:11–12; Eph. 3:3–4), but then as the wisdom of God. Even if in ecstasy he still *reasoned* it.. The critics must see that Paul could be in an ecstasy and yet be rational, and so reason the gospel.

***For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.*** Now Paul shows the source of his ecstasy and his well-reasoned gospel, namely the very gospel which is his source of truth, and itself the power which controls him in whatever state he is in. The great truth of the gospel is here contained in this one sentence. ***one has died for all;*** is certainly the representative ministry of Christ, for when he died ***all have died.*** That is, all died in Christ when he died, and so their death has been completed. This representative nature of both Adam and Christ is shown in Romans 5:12–21 and I Corinthians 15:22. Galatians 2:20 makes it more than only representative, by show that co-crucifixion happened at Calvary. Romans 6:1–10 also shows that baptism into Christ means sharing in his death and resurrection. So then, Christ’s death was theirs, and there is no need for them to die again (Rom. 6:10). It is this gospel which *is* the love of God (cf. Rom. 5:5–11; I John 4:7–19), and this love (*agape*) is the controlling, constraining and motivating force of all that we do.

***And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*** Now the fruits of this death are shown, namely that whilst Christ’s resurrection was representative, we were also intimately one with him, as he with us, and so we have risen from the old life to the new (cf. Eph. 2:4ff.; II Cor. 15:3; Rom. 5:6, 8; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1). In fact, what happened at the Cross is really the reverse of the fall where we died to God and came alive to ourselves. So the effects of the Cross are ethical, in the sense of a new kind of living (cf. Col. 3:1–5; Rom. 6:12–23). here we have—as in Romans 4:25) the fact that the Cross and the Resurrection were for our sakes, and in fact, it is here we see the fruits. It is *his* risen life we share (Gal. 2:20)

5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. 5:17 Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. 5:18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 5:19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 5:20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.

Is Paul returning to his own vindication as against the objections to him by his critics? Are they judging him ‘from a worldly point of view’? It may well be so, but he is stating a general and immutable principle. Without revelation (I Cor. 2:14; Gal. 1:11–16) one will always judge by human (NEB, ‘worldly’) standards, i.e. ‘after the flesh’ (*kata sarka*). for ‘those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh’ (Rom. 8:5). What others can be used if one lives horizontally without the vertical dimension? Paul—prior to his meeting with Christ on the Damascus road—had a ‘human’ view of him. It went against his Judaistic theology. New birth (*regeneration*) is required to *see* the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–6; Titus 3:5–7) and so to *enter* it. Paul had mistaken Christ when ‘in the flesh’. We can mistake any person. We can certainly mistake another believer! So then, that kind of judgement is finished. Paul is saying implicitly, ‘We now judge (assess) people ‘after the Spirit’ (*kata pneuma*).

***Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.*** The *therefore* of the previous verse links it with verse 15. So here: because the love of Christ has wrought the change, anyone who is *in Christ*, is a new creature. That is ‘a new creation’—an accordance with verse 15. One would not wish to judge such a person after the flesh, and the person certainly would not do so. Strictly speaking the verse says ‘old things have passed, behold, *they* —’the old things’—have been made new’ (gegonen kaina). They are not new as in ‘different’ but new as in ‘renewed’. This we see in Revelation 21:1 (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22). We are creations of the new age as against ‘the present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4; cf. Eph. 1:21). It means something like Isaiah 1:18—the old has been changed into the new, the crimson sins into snowy white elements. In the Cross—when ‘all died’—the old things of sin and guilt were wholly destroyed. The text following in this chapter indicates this. Forgiveness, purification, and reconciliation have achieved this. Participation in it all is ‘by faith’ (5:10), for what is yet to come us now unseen, but—in another sense—is already present (cf. 3:38; 4:16).

***All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;*** the statement *All this is from God* means ‘All these things are of God by Christ, and His free gift’ (Chrysostom: quoted by P.E. Hughes, *op. cit*), that is, the radical change from the old creature to the new creature is by the action of God in grace, and cannot be from man and his endeavours. ***who through Christ reconciled us to himself*** shows the way in which God has done this. ***Reconciliation*** is a remarkable thing, meaning that man who was at rebellion with God from the fall (Rom. 1:30; 5:10; Col. 1:20) has come to peace with Him ‘through the blood of the cross’ (Eph. 2:15–17, Rom. 5:1, 11), i.e. ***through Christ***, God being the Initiator and Christ the Mediator (Heb. 12:2; I Tim 2:5). To the apostles a commission was given—***gave us the ministry of reconciliation***—i.e. the ministry of ‘publishing peace’, as in Isaiah 52:7 cf. Romans 5:10; Acts 10:36; Ephesians 6:15.

***that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*** The way in which God could reconcile us by his work *in Christ* was through ***not counting their trespasses against them***. 5:21 explains how God could refuse to count their trespasses against them (cf. Psa. 32:1–2; Rom. 4:6–8). Only when Christ became Man’s sin, could the imputation

of sins be removed from Man to Christ. Thus the penal death he died for all meant all died in him (v.14). This was the message entrusted to the apostles—and now, to us all. Having this entrusted to the apostles they can say, *So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* By *ambassadors* they mean they bring the King's pardon or amnesty. Doubtless Paul's readers were already reconciled to God, but faith feeds upon such a pronouncement, and is strengthened. There may have been readers who needed to know this reconciliation—those who had joined the Corinthians but had not realised the wonder of reconciliation. Perhaps some had declined in knowing the glory of it. Certainly Paul is making an appeal *on behalf of Christ* that those yet unreconciled now come to peace with God.

***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

Perhaps one of the most potent verses of all that are linked with the death of Christ, this statement takes us to the heart of the means of reconciliation, of 'not counting their trespasses against them', mainly. It is argued by many that *made him to be sin* (*hamartian epoiesan*) is the same as 'for sin' (*peri hamartias*) as in Romans 8:3 and Isaiah 53:10—'an offering for sin'. Thus the latter is a sin-offering which is a sacrifice, but the former has the meaning that Christ is actually made the sin of Man. This latter means he was involved in the guilt of Man, although himself *one who knew no sin*. The sin-offering in the Old Testament was accepted for the sins of the offerer, but it is difficult to know how Christ could simply be an offering *without being involved in the actual sins of Man*. What form would the offering take? Does a sacrificial death *per se* not involve the whole of the victim, and is this not his total identification with the sinner, and so with the sin, i.e. *becoming sin*? As in I Peter 2:24 Christ *bore* the sins in his body, so here he—*who knew no sin*, i.e. was not a sinner, and had never sinned—actually becomes the sin of Man himself. Of course this may well have been the idea of the original sin-offering, but the way it works out in 5:14 is for Christ to die the penal death of all, and surely *to be made sin* is actually the experience of Man's sin, i.e. a recapitulation of it all—with its guilt—in *himself*. All of this is just that—utterly suffering the guilt, judgement, and punishment of sin—*we might become the righteousness of God in him*. That is, we might be declared righteous, might be justified, before God. Paul may mean even something more, since in I Corinthians 1:30 he says he says that God has made Christ to be 'our righteousness' (cf. Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15–16). Philippians 3:9 and Romans 5:12–21 gather together two things (i) justification which is imputed righteousness, and (b) Christ's righteousness and obedience which is accorded to the believer. In Titus 2:11–13—as in other places—the Cross does not simply save a person from the consequences of sin, but plans him—or her—firmly in true righteousness. James Denny at this point comments, 'It is not the puzzle of the New Testament, but the ultimate solution of all puzzled; it is not an irrational quantity that has to be eliminated or explained away, but the key-stone of the whole system of apostolic thought. It is not a blank obscurity in revelation, a spot of impenetrable blackness; it is the focus in which the reconciling love of God burns with the purest and intensest flame.'<sup>26</sup> Verse 21 should be read in its parallel of I Peter 2:24. where the righteousness of God in and for man is the outcome of the word of the Cross.

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted by P.E. Hughes in his *International Commentary* on II Corinthians (p.216).

## CHAPTER SIX 1–18

6:1 Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.

6:2 For he says,

"At the acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and helped you on the day of salvation."

Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

***Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.***

Paul may be saying (i) ‘You and us (the apostolic band) working together’, or (ii) ‘We, the apostolic band working together’, but in the light of 5:20 ‘we are ambassadors’, and ‘we beseech you’, it seems best to use the latter. In I Corinthians 3:9 (cf. I Tim 3:2). Paul said ‘we are God’s fellow workers’, and as such they have an authority to speak gravely to their readers. In other words the apostolic band is still entreating the Corinthians to a certain course of action.. It is true that they have believed in Christ and are members of his body, but because of the confusion the ‘super-apostles’ of chapter 11 have brought with them, Paul is seeking to make things clear. ***we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.*** Why does Paul ***entreat*** them? Because the phrase ***in vain*** points to a grave danger that is always with believers, let alone non-believers. Grace is humiliating to the human spirit because it leaves it with nothing of which to boast (Eph. 2:8–10).

When we ask ‘How can one receive the grace of God in vain? we need to see the meaning of the phrase ***in vain***. (*eis kenon*) can mean ‘to no purpose’, ‘in a way which is fruitless’, ‘in an empty way’. This is seen in Galatians 2:20 ‘I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose. See also Galatians 3:1–5 and 5–3–5. ***In vain*** then can mean (i) ‘You have not received the grace of God at all’, (ii) ‘You have received the grace of God in a deficient way’, and (iii) ‘You have received the grace of God but not gone on it since you are fruitless.’ In the light of 5:10—‘the judgement seat of Christ’ they have not lived under grace. In the Acts it is ‘the word of grace’ is the power by which God’s action happens (4:4:33f.;11:23;6:8), by which people are saved (20:24) in which the church lives 13:43), to which people are commended (15:26) and which is able to build them up since it is able to build them up. Undoubtedly they have been listening to the ‘super-apostles’ in which there was not grace. So see Galatians 1:5ff. All heresies arise from a deficient view of grace. Titus 2:11–14 gives the proper view of grace and its effects.

For he says,

"At the acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and helped you on the day of salvation."

Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

The background to this passage is Isaiah 49:8 and context, where the servant of God (49:1–7) is to bring restoration to His people so that people is to see the special moment of this work is presented and must be taken *at this season*. In one sense the exhortation is given to believers, but then believers who need renewal in grace. In a way they are pointed *back* to the event of faith repentance and justification when the power of grace

transformed them (5:17), and to come afresh to grace and live in it. So then it is *the day of salvation* which means it is ever the operation of grace in which they should live.

6:3 We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 6:4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 6:5 beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; 6:6 by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, 6:7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 6:8 in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 6:9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 6:10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

*We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way:* This statement takes us back to 2:17; 4:4:1–3; 5:11–14, i.e. his refuting of the criticisms of the ‘super-apostles’. Paul’s apostolic authority has been questioned, his motives impugned and his ministry called in question. Paul surely had in mind 5:10—that the judgement seat of Christ would find him vindicated. Meanwhile he can point to the *realities* of his ministry. Whilst it is written in first person plural, and whilst many of these experiences may have been those of the apostolic band—*as servants of God*—yet surely they are primarily all his *personal* experiences. 11:21–33 seems to confirm this.

through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

*through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; through great endurance:* many of these statements need no explication, especially as they are mostly described in the book of the Acts. Even so, concentration on them with a view to our own ministry is highly profitable. Regarding verses 4–5 F.F. Bruce in his commentary in the *New Century Bible* series says the statement of nine sets of suffering strife into three sections, ‘(a) general suffering (*afflictions, hardships, calamities*), (b) sufferings endured at the hands of men (*beatings, imprisonments*, riotous onsets). (c) sufferings endured by way of self-discipline (*labours*, wakeful nights, fastings)’. The *hunger* here may be ‘fastings’ but Paul else where speaks, ‘Not that I complain of want; for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content’ (Phil. 4:11), and knows that all his *needs* will be supplied. Paul refers well to his sufferings in chapters 4, 6 and 11 of this book, but the opening passage of 1:3–10, is clear enough. The believer—as we have seen time and again in this Epistle, does not escape suffering (II Cor. 4:7ff.; 11:22–28; II Timothy 3:12); *by purity*—insistence on holiness of life (I Thess. 2:10; 4:7; 5:23); *knowledge* of God, of the truth, (Col. 2:3, 9, 10)—without which we are ignorant on those levels required of us; *forbearance*, i.e. long-suffering which does not react to enmity, persecution, criticism; *kindness*—one of the fruit of the

Spirit, God being kind to us (Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4) and so we being kind to others; *the Holy Spirit*—the one who not only gives revelation but assists us in having these other qualities Paul nominates in the section (cf. Rom. 15:19; etc); **genuine love** (*agape*) i.e. as against ‘imitation love’—love unfeigned’—knowing that everything must be done by and in love (I Cor. 13:1–3; 16:14); **truthful speech** may be linked with ‘truthing it in love’ (Eph. 4:15), i.e. truth which comes from God, and is His word (Heb. 4:12), but includes not being ‘pedlars of God’s words’ (2:17), not conniving; **the power of God** which is known in human weakness (I Cor. 1:17–23; 2:3–5; 12:8–9), which to Paul is the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18); **with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left**; this would include the armour (see Rom. 13:12; Eph. 6:10–17), and the weapons of II Corinthians 10:3–5) **for the right hand** possibly meaning for attack, **and for the left**; meaning for defence, that is the Christian is not without effective weapons to *overcome* all attackers; **in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute** this takes up the fact of the lying that always comes against them, but also the wonderful vindications God gives, from time to time. **We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything**; again, these contrasts are shown in the seeming paradoxes which are self-evident, especially as we have the material of the first four chapters of this Epistle.

6:11 Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. 6:12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 6:13 In return -- I speak as to children -- widen your hearts also.

*Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians*; i.e. we speak freely (3:12; 4:2; 5:11) and honestly because *our heart is wide*, i.e. we have no false motivation in seeking your best and your love. We speak from a heart that has been enlarged by genuine love—by God (cf. Psa. 119:32), for ‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). *You are not restricted by us*, takes us back to 1:24—‘we do not have dominion over your faith’—so that if the Corinthians feel they are wrought upon by Paul and the apostolic band then that is not the case. *but you are restricted in your own affections*, that is any restraint they feel is from them—perhaps because they have been listening to the critics and have been affected by them. *In return -- I speak as to children -- widen your hearts also*. Paul as a spiritual father is urging them to have familial affection—above any prevailing spirit of suspicion, any narrowness of understand the love of the fatherly writer.

6:14 Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 6:15 What accord has Christ with Be'lial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 6:16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will live in them and move among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

6:17 Therefore come out from them,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch nothing unclean;  
then I will welcome you,



6:18 and I will be a father to you,  
and you shall be my sons and daughters,  
says the Lord God Almighty.”

The warm appeal, of 6:13—‘Widen [open] your hearts also,’ is repeated in 7:2–4, but before that Paul makes an appeal in order to ensure that he should not be thought to have an open heart to any sin that may be in the midst of them—e.g. mismating, accord with powers of darkness, idolatry, and uncleanness. If they are going to have an open heart to him, then it must be a clean one, as his is towards them. So he begins this section which some have thought to be an interpolation from elsewhere. It certainly does not have to be that! Paul is ever anxious light has no fellowship with darkness. Only then can mutual open-heartedness have its true fullness.

***Do not be mismated with unbelievers.*** Probably a quote linked with Deuteronomy 22:10, ‘You shall not plow with an ox and ass together’. Already in I Corinthians 7:12–15 he has spoken of the marriage of Christians with non-Christians, and certainly Israelites were forbidden to marry outside Israel except where the person was a proselyte, in which case that one would be included in Israel. In I Corinthians 5:10 Paul has said believers may surely mix with unbelievers, but then not on the mating basis, and not on the basis of incorporating their forms of darkness, idolatry and uncleanness, of course. The reason for not having mismating is shown in the questions Paul asks, ***For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*** The questions are self-answering, and they explain what Paul is talking about. ***What accord has Christ with Be'lial?***<sup>27</sup> In this statement is the contrast between those who lead light and darkness. Christ we know but ***Belial*** is the name for the prince of darkness. The ***mismating*** is evil—it is ***partnering*** iniquity, it is ***having fellowship*** with darkness,<sup>28</sup> ***agreement*** with idols.<sup>29</sup> Israel has had enough of these elements of in its history to call for special explanation. The sad episodes where marriages had to be undone, where evil came from fellowship with Gentile nations, where idolatry destroyed the very fabric of the holy people are all too well known to Paul’s readers. It is also interesting to note the antitheses for these are found time and again in the history of Israel.

***For we are the temple of the living God;*** Paul is asking ***what agreement has the temple of God with idols***, and we know the thought is abhorrent. God is holy, and the idols demand they be accorded that holiness of God as though it were their own. The holy anger against idols brought Israel almost to total destruction by judgement, many times. The whole system of idolatry (see Exod. 15:11 Rom. 1:22–25) was pitted against God as Creator and Redeemer. In I Corinthians 3:16–17 Paul has already taken up the fact of the church being the temple of God, ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.’ I Corinthians 6:19 speaks of the body of each believer being a temple of the Holy Spirit, and in Ephesians 2:18–22 and I Peter 2:4–

<sup>27</sup> This word Belial has a history which is quite complex. In Deuteronomy 13:13 we have the term ‘base fellows’, and the meaning of the word develops from the ideas of *death* and *Sheol* (cf. II Sam. 22:5f.; Psa. 18:4f.) until—through its use in some of the Jewish books it develops into the idea of the arch-enemy of God and then in the New Testament we see it as the personalisation of evil, and here equivalent to Antichrist.

<sup>28</sup> See the New Testament teaching on ‘light and darkness’ in Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8–14; Colossians 1:12f.; I Thessalonians 5:2–8; John 1:5; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:4f.; 12:35f.; I John 1:5–7; 2:8–11.

<sup>29</sup> Paul has much to say about idols in I Corinthians chapter 8; 10:14–33, and of the demonic associations of idols and the occult. The theme was strong in Paul’s time, but no less in ours.

10 the fact of the church being the new temple is established. *as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* The indwelling of God amongst His covenant people is a continuing theme in both Old and New Testaments (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; 37:27b; cf. Rev. 21:3) and His dwelling amounts to their being *the temple of the living God*. The term *living God* has a powerful history, meaning 'the God who acts' but it also catches up the idea of all God's Being and His holiness. So there ought to be awe and even holy dread in His presence, in having Him amongst them. So they must be holy (Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5–6; Matt. 5:8;; I Pet. 1:15).

*Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord God Almighty.*" The quote is from Isaiah 52:11 (cf. Jer. 51:45, 'Go out of the midst of her my people') 'Depart, depart, go out thence, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord.' In Ezekiel 20:34 (cf. 36:24) God had said, 'I will bring you out from among the peoples.' *touch nothing unclean;* On all scores Israel is to be pure, so too must be the church. *then I will welcome you,* God will restore that which refuses idolatry and uncleanness (Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; Zeph. 3:20). *and I will be a father to you,* God's Fatherhood in the Old Testament is a strong theme, although mentions of it are somewhat limited in comparison to those in the New Testament (see Deut. 14:1; 32:6; II Sam. 7:14; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9; Mal. 2:10). *and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord God Almighty.* This is a quote from Hosea 1:10—a quote of great importance as can be seen from Romans 9:26. The word *daughters* is not in the Hosea quote, but is in Isaiah 43:6. Paul's readers would be familiar with the fact of God's adoption of Israel (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:13–15; Rom. 9:4; cf. Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5f.). *says the Lord God Almighty* (*kyrios pantokrator*) Paul closes with the strong title of God which is the equivalent of 'Lord of hosts' as in Romans 9:29 (*kyrios sabaoth*). Paul, then, has shown the Corinthians that they must attend to holiness of life as the people of God since they are the temple of God and the children of Him as Father.

The passage of 7:1 is part of Paul's continuing argument and exhortation, but we will deal that under that chapter heading.

## CHAPTER SEVEN 1–40

1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.

2 Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 I have great confidence in you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. With all our affliction, I am overjoyed.

*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.* We have dealt with the principle involved in this verse since the theme of it follows from 6:14, and is one piece. It shows the principle of the will refusing to have anything to do with evil, (a) abstinence from evil (cf. II Tim. 2:22), and (b) the principle of mortification, i.e. killing anything that tries to capture the mind and spirit, and putting off things which—like barnacles on a ship) may have accumulated (cf. Col. 3:5; Rom: 8:13). We ought not think that by the statement *body and spirit* Paul means other than ‘the whole person’. Likewise to *make holiness perfect* does not mean we will not sin, or ever have flaws, but it means holiness will be allowed to have its complete work as we are in Christ. *In the fear of the Lord* means ‘The fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.’ This is a holy fear such as Paul speaks of in Philippians 2:12–13.

*Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.* 6:13 shows that this threefold denial of having dealt falsely with the Corinthians is correctly based. See 6:11 where Paul claims the largeness of his love and heart towards them. 4:2 and 5:11 shows no dishonesty was ever used: Paul had always acted with integrity towards them. Perhaps this could be said of ‘the super apostles’ who probably were making such charges against Paul. *I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.* Paul is not accusing them, getting them under condemnation, but—as he said in 6:11—he has only love for them. The latter part of the sentence must mean, ‘whether we die or live we are loving you—you and I are one, together’. *I have great confidence in you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. With all our affliction, I am overjoyed. I have great confidence in you*—that is ‘I have great boldness—openness—towards you. *I have great pride in you*—See Paul’s basis for pride in persons in 1:14 and 5:12, only on the basis of sincerity and honesty. *I am filled with comfort*: comfort is a special word in this epistle (cf. 1:3–7) and below Paul shows the comfort has come from knowing all is well between the church at Corinth and himself. So he says ‘*I am overjoyed*’. The afflictions are mainly to do with the seeming division between him and the church, but there are always the afflictions of the ministry, e.g. see 1:4ff.; 4:7f.; 6:4.

5 For even when we came into Macedo'nia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn -- fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

*For even when we came into Macedo'nia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn -- fighting without and fear within.* We go back to 2:13 and it as though we resume the narrative here. In 2:13f. Paul could find no rest, not even when a door opened had opened to him! *afflicted at every turn* could mean the conflicts that go with the gospel. It is even thought that it may have been linked with Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', but it seems it was the question of the Corinthians church that was unsettling Paul—so deep and genuine was his love towards them. *fighting without and fear within.* This seems a strange statement for Paul regarding himself and the apostolic team, but it is helpful to see. It could mean 'outward conflicts which came upon us—we had adversaries', and the inward fears which were there regarding the relationships of Corinthian church and himself. We draw comfort for ourselves since we experience the same fears as the great apostle. *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. the downcast* are 'the humble' (*tapein*: 1:3, 4). *comforted us by the coming of Titus*, i.e. Titus brought the wonderful message Paul longed to hear. and not only by his coming but also *by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.* His personal coming was a comfort but his news was so rich! Titus had personally been received well (13–15) but *your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me* was so encouraging. *Longing* was to see Paul and assure him of their love. *Mourning* was because of estrangement that had come, and *zeal* was theirs to straighten out the whole matter, and to put right what Paul had seen as wrong. Because of this *Paul rejoiced still more.*

8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it), for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

**For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it).** The meaning is self-evident but we learn that we can sometimes regret something we do not need to regret. *for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.* If they had been fighting Paul their grief would have been anger. It was not so: their grief was *only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us* The quality of their grief was pure, i.e. not remorse but repentance. Such cannot bring permanent loss.

10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your zeal for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. 13 Therefore we are comforted.

*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.* Here Paul can either mean 'You had a godly grief concerning the matter I spoke of, and that turned out to salvation in the event,' or he can mean 'I had a godly sorrow regarding the matter I spoke of so that it—my godly grief—

has effected you and worked out for salvation in this event.’ Whilst a general principle exists that godly grief brings repentance and so leads to salvation, yet here neither the salvation of Paul or the readers of his letter is in question. Thus in Philippians 2:12–13 Paul talks of his readers working *out* their own salvation, he is not saying working *at* their salvation, since it has already come. Likewise in Philippians 1:19 Paul talks of a happening which will ‘turn out for my salvation’ (AV) or ‘deliverance’ (RSV). ***worldly grief produces death***. Here it is in order to look the difference between remorse and repentance. In I Samuel 15 we have a picture of remorse. Saul sees no disobedience in what he has done. Forced to do admit he is at fault he first blames the people, and then, secondly, asks to be honoured in the eyes of his nation, no matter how much he has sinned against God. Remorse is thus regret at having been found out, but not actual contrition for the nature of the sin. Psalm 51 shows the repentance of David, a heart broken and contrite before God because he has seen the dreadful nature of his sin. ***For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!*** ‘Look!’ says Paul, ‘See what fruits of repentance were produced in you (cf. Matt. 3:8f.; Acts 26:20).’ ***What eagerness to clear yourselves!*** That is, by taking the action Paul desired, stirring to amend what they had left defective; ***what indignation***, i.e. at the whole matter of the evil done, and their neglect of discipline. ***what alarm***, i.e. fear of Paul and perhaps fear of God for such neglect. ***what longing***, i.e. for all to be cleared and for them to meet Paul again, with a pure conscience. ***what zeal***—to have all things done properly. ***what punishment*** or avengement, making sure that discipline was properly administered in the case in point. So then ***At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter***. This is self-obvious, concluding the operation.

***So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your zeal for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.*** This can mean either the one who suffered the wrong was Paul—misjudged by the Corinthians—or the father of the offending incestuous son. In any case Paul is not out after redress, but is out to help them to see that they had great affection for him—Paul—and this is shown by their zeal to right the wrong and to show their love for Paul. It is only natural that Paul then should say ***Therefore we are comforted***, showing that he is relieved and at peace about the whole matter.

And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by you all.<sup>14</sup> For if I have expressed to him some pride in you, I was not put to shame; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting before Titus has proved true. <sup>15</sup> And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, and the fear and trembling with which you received him. <sup>16</sup> I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you.

***And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by you all.*** In verse 6 Paul had said, ***But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus*** and now he is repeating the relief they all found from the visit of Titus to Corinth. So he speaks of Titus’ mind being *set at rest* and ‘set at rest’ can be translated ‘his spirit was refreshed’. All had received him so the joy of the Pauline apostolic band was inspired. ***For if I have expressed to him some pride in you, I was not put to shame; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting before Titus has proved true.*** 1:14 speaks of Paul’s pride in the Corinthians, and

he is justified in such pride. What Paul had said has now been verified amply. Titus' hope that he would find them as Paul had said he would has been vindicated. *And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, and the fear and trembling with which you received him. I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you.* We see three parties, Paul, the Corinthians and Titus, and it is now well with them all. The Corinthians had received Titus *with fear and trembling* both as the apostolic delegate and as a person. This shows the humbled spirit of them, and the innate authority of Titus.<sup>30</sup> We conclude the chapter seeing Paul and the apostolic band at rest about the church at Corinth. This leaves Paul free to enter into the great theme of giving in the next two chapters of the Epistle.

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<sup>30</sup> An interesting set of character studies would be to take both Timothy and Titus and see the differences in the two men. Timothy was conscious of his young, needed much exhortation from Paul to go on with the good work. Titus was sent to Crete, a place notorious for its rough inhabitants. Both at Corinth and Crete Titus shows the character of a strong man.

## CHAPTER EIGHT 1–13

1 We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedo'nia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints -- 5 and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work. 7 Now as you excel in everything -- in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us -- see that you excel in this gracious work also.

*We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedo'nia.* Paul is now speaking of 'the collection' (cf. I Cor. 16:1–4) or contribution that the churches can make to the poor at Jerusalem. The problems written in Paul's letters and added to by Titus' coming would have taken the minds of the Corinthians off this important reality of giving. Paul has to state the matter delicately because he wants the Corinthians to be generous, yet does not want them to feel conscripted into giving. The church would recognise that Paul was not out to be supplied by them and he had said, 'And when I arrive I will send those who you accredit by letter to carry your gifts to Jerusalem'. Elsewhere Paul speaks of not having received help from the church at Corinth (11:7–11). Here *the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedo'nia.* means that God's saving and sanctifying grace has so worked in the churches of Macedonia (such as at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea; cf. I Thess. 1:5–10) that they have given liberally, thereby magnifying not themselves but the grace of God. *for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part.* 7:5 shows there were conflicts in Macedonia and in any case the church has started amidst such affliction even *a severe test of affliction.* This, however, has not deterred the churches there from giving liberally. Although living in *extreme poverty* they have an *abundance of joy* which they are inspired by for it is the joy that comes from the gospel, from their salvation, their fellowship and their love of God. It is difficult for us who have become accustomed to the gospel to know what it means when it comes freshly to a group of people. The words *overflowed in a wealth of liberality* (see 9:11; Rom. 12:8) are not intended to chide the Corinthians, but rather to show them they can do every bit as well. *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will.* For one to give according to one's means is not making any special demand: one can afford that. To give beyond one's means is to risk impoverishment in order to suffer with and for others, and to help them. All this was *of their own free will*, i.e. they have not even been urged to do it, though doubtless the need was laid before them. *begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints*. In fact their yearning to help was so strong that they were *begging us earnestly*, i.e. with entreaty, seeing it as a favour to be allowed to give. All of this is astonishing in the natural, but not under grace, since grace inspires grace. What was in mind was for *the relief of the saints* since the plight of the saints at Jerusalem was a dire one. *and this, not as we expected, but first*

*they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.* In 5:15 Paul has already said that the effect of the Cross is now for a converted person to live wholly to Christ and not to himself. Whilst Paul was astonished at the liveliness of their giving he is showing it came out of the event of their redemption so that whilst all was given to Christ it was now given—in this instance—to and through the apostolic band—*to us*. This alone makes their giving understandable and Paul is conveying this principle of true giving to the Corinthians—for their consideration and action. *by the will of God.* explains that the true action of the church is never apart from the will of God. It is not an autonomous decision and action. *Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work.* It now follows that Paul should act with the Corinthians as he did with the Macedonians, for they had revealed the principle of giving by their voluntary and involuntary action. Titus was the one to begin and follow through such a work. Notice that it is called this *gracious work* for as with the Macedonians so it must be with the Corinthians, by nature of the case: it must all be *by* and *of* grace. *Now as you excel in everything -- in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us -- see that you excel in this gracious work also.* The Corinthians lack nothing that the Macedonians have: perhaps they have even more for they excel in everything since in I Corinthians 1:4–7 they have ‘all speech and all knowledge’ and are ‘not lacking in any spiritual gift’. Those things—*faith* (I Cor 13:2), *utterance* (I Cor. 1:4), *knowledge* (I Cor. 13:2) and *earnestness* (7:11) and *love* for Paul and the band—enable them now to excel in *this gracious work* of giving.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire, 11 so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. 13 I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, 14 but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. 15 As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

*I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.* *your love is genuine* is a theme often pursued by Paul. As with John’s writing, love can *seem* to be love—love that is in thought and word but not in deed (I John 3:18)— so in Romans 12:9, I Corinthians 13:1–3 (cf. I Cor. 16:14) all must be done in genuine love. If the love of the Macedonians for the Lord and Paul is genuine, then their love for the poor at Jerusalem will also result in generous giving. *by the earnestness of others* is referring to the earnestness of the Macedonians in their giving out of love. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* Paul is now speaking of something even greater than what the Macedonians had been doing. It was right for them to do so, but the great *example* and *principle* of Christ’s grace is what the Corinthians must look to. This must be their constraining and motivating drive and force. The aim Paul has for the poor saints is that they might become rich as all God’s people are rich through his life, death, resurrection and ascension. At the same time his aim is that the Corinthians might become poor as Christ became poor, for such poverty was the very



essence of the nature of the Son, and indeed the very Godhead. Ephesians 5:2 shows us the *manner* of Christ's giving of himself, i.e. walking in love, 'as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'. So, to John 1:14 and Philippians 2:6–11 show us 'the mind' of Christ in all this action. As to 'the poverty' of Christ it was not in the fact of his *incarnation*, but in the degrading horror and pain of his saving work—his becoming sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), his bearing our sins (I Pet. 2:24), and in his becoming *as* unjust (I Pet. 3:18) and thus in his bearing of the Father's wrath in the atonement (Rom. 3:24f.; I John 4:9–10). That was when 'he descended to the lower parts of the earth'. The enrichment of us was that he took us out of the death of sin into the righteousness of life, and into the abundancy of the new life, giving us great hope of our inheritance (cf. II Cor. 12:9; Rom. 5:1ff.; Ephes. 1:3f; 1:17f.; 2:4ff; Phil. 4:11–13; 18f.; I Pet. 1:3f; 1:13f.).

***And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire;*** the verse is linked with verse 8—resuming the matter of giving, i.e. ***not as a command but to prove that your love also is genuine***—for just as Paul would not 'lord it over their [your] faith so he will not lord it over their giving, so he now gives his advice or opinion (cf. I Cor 7:25), namely that they complete getting together the collection. The giving will show their loving for love gives (cf. John 3:16; I John 3:16, etc.). ***what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire;*** shows that giving was no imposition laid upon them, but—like the Macedonians—they had a desire to show their love to the poor saints at Jerusalem. ***so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not*** simply confirms the fact that their true desire not has its practical outcome—the actual giving. In using the words ***For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not*** Paul is simply saying that like the first endeavour of the Macedonians (v. 3a) so they will give. He is not here asking 'beyond their means' for that is matter of personal motivation and conscience of love. ***I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, 14 but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*** It now becomes clear that Paul is not asking the Corinthians to impoverish themselves in order to help the poor saints, but that both may equally share what is available, without detriment of the one to the other. The quote in verse 15 is from Exodus 16:18 referring to the Israelites' daily gathering of the manna. Is there a hint here of the fact that those who stored up manna for themselves beyond what they needed for the day discovered that the extra manna 'bred worms and became foul'?

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel;19 and not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which we are carrying on, for the glory of the Lord and to show our good will. 20 We intend that no one should blame us about this liberal gift which we are administering, 21 for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of men. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more

earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in your service; and as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

*But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.* Paul urged Paul to return to Corinth to complete the important work of the collection. Titus needed no forcing for the importance of the collection—the Corinthian’s act of love—made it necessary, but also because Titus had come to love the Corinthians and wanted to be with them. Of course, Titus would also bear the present letter. *With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel;* Who is the *our brother*? We do not know definitively. Names have been conjectured but there is no proof for any. The closest some have come is to identify this person with Luke because the first of the ‘we’ sections of the Acts begins and ends in Acts 16:16–18. The next ‘we’ section is found in 20:4ff. and in this Luke is one who could possibly be named amongst those who were going with the collection to Jerusalem. Nowhere is it indicated that Luke was famous for his preaching. The one who seems to be **famous among the churches for his preaching** was surely Apollos, but he appears later. The names of Timothy, Sopater of Berea and Secundus of Thessalonica, Mark, or even a literal brother of Titus, but there is no proof for any of these, so we must leave the matter. The point is that he was a trustworthy person. *and not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which we are carrying on, for the glory of the Lord and to show our good will.* So the appointment of this one assures the purity of the giving, receiving and transmission of this gift so that it will be to God’s glory, showing the genuine love of the Corinthians. Paul is insistent there shall be no breath of scandal— *We intend that no one should blame us about this liberal gift which we are administering, for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of men.* What may understood to be *in the Lord's sight* may often not appears to be so *in the sight of men*.. Again, we have yet another brother—*And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.* Who this second brother is we do not know, but it is interesting to know Paul tested out the calibre and character of his fellow-workers. Paul then sums up the three who will carry the collection—*As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in your service; and as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men*—Titus is highly commended in working with Paul, and the two messengers are accredited by the churches. Hence Paul can exhort regarding the giving of the Corinthians, and the proof of their genuine love for the poor at Jerusalem is assured in these men’s hands—*So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.*

## CHAPTER NINE 1–15

9:1 Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the offering for the saints, 9:2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedo'nia, saying that Acha'ia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 9:3 But I am sending the brethren so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; 9:4 lest if some Macedo'nians come with me and find that you are not ready, we be humiliated -- to say nothing of you -- for being so confident. 9:5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren to go on to you before me, and arrange in advance for this gift you have promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift.

Paul continues his briefing regarding the offering, saying that he knows *your readiness* and *your zeal* are what have **stirred up most** of the Macedonians. The Corinthians must substantiate Paul's confidence in them and boast of them. Titus and the two messengers of the churches must then be received and the offertory be collected so that the apostolic band will not be humiliated. So Paul has *thought it necessary to urge the brethren to go on to you before me, and arrange in advance for this gift you have promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift*. This whole passage is self-explanatory, but the point in verse 5 is worthy of comment—*so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift*. As in chapter eight so here: Paul is not commanding the offertory. It is a matter of the will of their love. In the next passage he expands this thought. We will miss the whole point if we do not keep in mind the factor of 8:1ff. i.e. that it is 'the grace of God' which was seen in the churches of Macedonia Paul meant there the grace that saved the hearers and then inspired them to giving out of that grace.

9:6 The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 9:7 Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 9:8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. 9:9 As it is written,

"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;  
his righteousness endures for ever."

9:10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 9:11 You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; 9:12 for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. 9:13 Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; 9:14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you. 9:15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Here to *give* is to *sow*! Niggardly sowing determines niggardly reaping, so—*The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or*

*under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written,*  
*"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;*

*his righteousness endures for ever."* The matter is clear to those who do not think of legal demand, but love-compulsion. One does not lose by sowing, but loses by not sowing sufficiently. Reluctant giving kills the reality of love. God loves a cheerful giver is a remarkable statement for it displays the nature of God: He is the hilarious Giver. ***Cheerful giver*** is in Greek—*hilaron doten*—and is the opposite to *ek lutes*—'out of grief' or 'grudgingly'. 'God so loved that he gave' is the hallmark of joyful love: hilarious giving is an adventure. One need not be alarmed that it will impoverish the giver: rather, the contrary is the case for *God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work*,<sup>31</sup> that is, that not only will he supply your needs, but enable you to supply the needs of others. The biblical support for this is Psalm 112:9 quoted here as, *As it is written,*

*"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;*

*his righteousness endures for ever."* spoken of 'the man who fears the Lord', which takes on to the next section, *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God*; so that He will not only see you have sufficient, but your resources (cf. I Cor. 3:21–22; Eph. 1:3f.) will increase and also *the harvest of your righteousness* which is what Psalm 112:9 states as 'his righteousness endures forever', that is, the righteousness of the man who gives. To give *is* righteousness! The thought of verse 8 is somewhat repeated in the statement, *You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God*; that is, 'Your generosity will not impoverish you but enable you to give even more, and by that produce thanksgiving in the beneficiaries of your generosity'. For thanksgiving *to God*; see 4:15. So Paul adds, *for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God*, thus underlining the desired end or outcome of giving which is *many thanksgivings to God*. This comes out of the 'genuine love' of 8:8. So Paul proceeds, *Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others*; Here thanksgiving to God is added with glorifying God. The NRSV gives the sense somewhat more clearly, 'Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God through your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others'. Note that *the test of this service* is really 'the test of your love'. The poor saints at Jerusalem will see this as the true outworking of the gospel of Christ. Hilarious givers powerfully testify to the heart of the gospel—*agape*, Divine love. So then, *they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you*. They put your action down to *the grace of God in you* which comports with the opening verses of chapter 8 that the giving of the Macedonians was the result of God's grace amongst them. The term (*hyperballousan*

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<sup>31</sup> The more literal rendering is, 'And God is able to cause to abound towards you all grace, in order that having all sufficiency you may abound (have abundance) for every good work.'

*charin*) is a rather wonderful one, i.e. ‘super-grace’ or ‘excelling grace’. Grace needs no such adjective, but nevertheless it underlines what seemed wonderful in the Corinthians.

***Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*** is a wonderful way of closing off this section. It, of course, refers to God’s gift of His Son (cf. Rom. 8:32) as that redeems man and gives him the gift of life (Rom. 6:23). It is the supreme gift, for it is the gift which inspires giving in the recipients of it.

## CHAPTER TEN 1–18

10:1 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away! -- 10:2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of acting in worldly fashion. 10:3 For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, 10:4 for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 10:5 We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 10:6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

***I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away!*** The use of the ‘I, myself’ (*ego, autos*) now emphasises the authority of Paul. We remember that his authority—indeed his very person—has been called in question and probably by the ‘super apostles’ of 11:12ff. In all his epistles Paul states his apostleship is ‘by the will of God’. If Paul does not have such authority then chapters 8–9—to say nothing of the rest of the Epistle—are without point and untrustworthy. Indeed, chapters 8 and 9 may well be the primary treason for this letter of Paul. Yet Paul does not ‘pull rank’—so to speak. The apostles did not possess *that* kind of authority. No: Paul *entreats*, i.e. ‘appeals’. Note the fact that he does not have lordship over them. He leaves them free to respond of their own wills. Moreover, it is ***by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*** that he appeals. ***Meekness*** (*prautetos*) is what Christ claimed for himself (Matt. 11:29) and by which—he insisted—persons would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5; cf. Psa. 37:11; Gal. 5:23)). ***Gentleness*** (*epieikeias*) is ‘forbearance’ or ‘yieldingness’. Paul is not have these two elements in imitation of Christ but the very ***meekness*** and ***lowliness*** of Christ himself are in him. How powerful then to be as Christ to the Corinthians! ***I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away!*** Of course, this is said partly in irony: Paul is quoting his Corinthian detractors. In fact, he was humble (*tapeinos*; cf. Matt. 11:29, ‘lowly’) when with them (cf. I Cor. 2:3), but his critics said that his letters were very bold—‘A lamb at home and lion abroad!’—but this was not the case. Authority is not authoritarianism. ***I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of acting in worldly fashion.*** Paul is asking them not to force him to have to show such boldness as his letters convey when he is absent from them. Even they could not force him to be authoritarian, but if they persists in believing his detractors, then he will have to face both with boldness. That should not have to be. ***in worldly fashion.*** means literally ‘according to the flesh’ (*kata sarka*; cf. 1:17; 5:16). When, then, Paul adds, ***For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war,*** it can be translated ‘though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh’ (AV). To live in the flesh (Gal. 2:20) is imply to be living as humans and has no evil connotation. It means ‘living in the body’. To walk according to the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:16–18) is to be evil or as our translation here has it ***in worldly fashion.*** What then does he mean by ***carrying on a worldly war?*** In this specific (cf. 1:17; 11:4ff.) case it is a war with Paul’s detractors, but more widely it would mean all who taught an other gospel than Paul’s. ***for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*** Paul may live in the body, in the world, but his weapons are truly spiritual (of the Spirit) and not of the world. We might

say today, ‘They are non-political’. Being spiritual they *have divine power to destroy strongholds*. We saw in 4:3–4 that even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God*. When the gospel is being preached the god of this world sees to blind hearers to seeing and hearing it. Yet Paul is speaking even more of the blinding and seduction (11:1ff.) that comes from Satan. These are the strongholds of the Devil (cf. Luke 11:10–23). *Divine power* is the great means whereby the arguments of the clever opponents dissolve and made to look foolish (cf. I Cor. 3:18–19). Such *strongholds* are thereby destroyed. This reminds us there is a continuous warfare waged between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light<sup>32</sup>. So Paul can say, *We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete*. The arguments are the strongholds, and the obstacles are those things erected in the way of the gospel to prevent its power being effective. They are the things of will and intellect which oppose God, and they were present in Corinth which Jews demanded signs and Greeks that intellectual wisdom. In many of the Apostolic epistles we see the heresies and neo-spiritual obstacles perverse minds had raised up. The thoughts which need to be brought into the captivity of Christ: outward performance and observances may disguise the innermost attitudes. Paul’s ministry will uncover these, and confront all with the truth. The Pauline apostolic authority will not hesitate—*being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete*. That is, Paul, having exposed untruth and wrong attitudes will bring the members of the church into conformity with the truth.

10:7 Look at what is before your eyes. If any one is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we. 10:8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame. 10:9 I would not seem to be frightening you with letters. 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." 10:11 Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 10:12 Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

*Look at what is before your eyes. If any one is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we.* To *Look at what is before your eyes* is to look at the facts, especially concerning Paul for in the face of the critics they must realise Paul’s credentials and that he is the authentic apostle. It is a simple fact that if anyone thinks he is a true Christian he cannot be such as to deny Paul—to say he is beyond Paul, and ‘more authentic. *For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame*. Paul may seem to over-emphasise the authority given to him but since it was for building them up and not destroying them, then they should not mind his firmness about such authority. They should welcome it. *I would not seem to be frightening you with letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."* No one denied that his letters were *weighty and strong* but they denied Paul was such in his presence. Well they will see whether they can establish this idea when he comes for *Let such people understand that what we say by*

<sup>32</sup> See my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI ) to trace this warfare.

*letter when absent, we do when present.* Paul will be unremitting when he comes. His power in preaching the gospel had brought the church to birth. The word of the Cross proved to be the power of God. Why should it be anything less when coming from the lips of the returning Paul? *Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves.* As for the special critics and the ‘super-apostles’ why, they compare themselves with one another, probably one thinking he is better than another—by comparison! Paul will not get caught in this foolishness *But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.* If all comparisons are odious, then no less there. Paul rightly says that true spiritual understanding is lost in this foolish practice.

10:13 But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, to reach even to you. 10:14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. 10:15 We do not boast beyond limit, in other men's labours; but our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, 10:16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's field. 10:17 "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." 10:18 For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends.

*But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, to reach even to you.* Paul is saying that the apostolic band never over-reached itself; it never went beyond the demands set by God. *For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.* One of those demands was to preach the gospel at Corinth, the fruits of which are evident. *we were the first* tells the story for these later-comers or the self-established critics at Corinth did precede Paul and his team. Again, these are the facts! *We do not boast beyond limit, in other men's labours; but our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged,* Paul was not encroaching on other men's labours—which the visitors to Corinth were doing—but Paul is trusting that *as your faith increases,* that is as the gospel grips you more and more then you will yourselves extend the gospel, and in that the Pauline band will see the fruits of their labours. He means this by *so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's field.* He may also mean that not only by the Corinthians but by his own apostolic band the gospel may go ever further than Achaia and Macedonia. That is, they will work to the limits God has set for them. In this way Paul silences his critics, especially those who had no part in the founding or early nurturing of the church. It is they who are over-extending themselves, and not Paul! The Corinthians must then take note of Paul and not the visiting preachers, the so-called ‘super-apostles’.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN 1–33

11:1 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 11:2 I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. 11:3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 11:4 For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. 11:5 I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. 11:6 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.* To Paul *a little foolishness* is small by comparison with *the great foolishness* of those who make large claims for themselves. They indulge themselves without limit!. He is about to indulge in a little of this, but notice his same point. *I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.* A *divine jealousy* is the same jealousy God has for His people that they wholly love Him since He wholly loves them. God is jealous of other gods, for the people's love to them destroys the people themselves. Paul, as the founder of the church and the spiritual father of the people had the intention *to betroth[ed] you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.* As Israel was God's wife (cf. Ezek. ch. 16: Isa. 54:5–6) so the church is to be Christ's bride (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:21–32). Paul's point here about a *pure bride*—a virgin—is that she is not sullied by any spot of blemish which is what the intruding 'super-apostles' may well cause. Now Paul remembers the seduction of Eve from God and—virtually—from her husband, *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* The true condition of the church should be one of a *sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* This chastity and innocence of pure love can be contaminated by the teachers who have arrived in Corinth. This statement of Paul has a partial comparison in Galatians 1:5ff. and 3:1ff. Notice in I Timothy 2:12–13 that Paul; says the woman was 'beguiled'—i.e. 'deceived' (same verb—but that the man was not deceived, but knowingly transgressed. Not the *for* in the next sentence, *For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough,* since the seduction of the saints is linked with the gullible acceptance of what these flamboyant teachers say. They preach *another Jesus*; so that they must give *different spirit* for the gospel and the Spirit are one, and produce the spirit of truth in their hearers. We may suspect that the very way the super-apostles went about their teaching and ministry would raise up a different view of the same Jesus, and so a different 'spirit' or ethos would be among them all. If the super-apostles are 'power-people' then that would alter the whole community *ethos* at Corinth. The submission of the community is astonishing to Paul. This leads Paul to indulge in his 'foolishness'—*I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles.* He has every ground for this claim as we have seen time and again. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. It is to be doubted that Paul was *unskilled in speaking* since

his words had immense effect. This a little irony here, but Paul is even prepared to concede his inability to speak as do these more flamboyant intruders but as to *knowledge* he will concede nothing for he is highly skilled. Perhaps the others have made claim to a high knowledge (*gnosis*) but if so then it is not dynamic as is Paul's, bringing genuine effects as it does. The matter is self-obvious since *in every way we have made this plain to you in all things*.

11:7 Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you? 11:8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. 11:9 And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedo'nia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. 11:10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Acha'ia. 11:11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

*Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you?* Paul did not really *abase* himself, but what he did was for the uplifting of the church, i.e. he did tenting-making to keep himself and be no burden to the church as we see in Acts 18:3. *I preached God's gospel without cost to you* was for a purpose which he later calls 'love'. *And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedo'nia*. We see from this verse and Philippians 4:15 that the churches in Macedonia helped him. Paul, as an apostle was entitled to being helped (cf. Gal. 6:6; I Tim. 5:17–18) since he had founded the church. Paul had his own reasons for not burdening the church hence he says, *So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Acha'ia*. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! In the next section he tells why he insists on taking nothing from the Corinthians saints.

11:12 And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 11:13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 11:14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 11:15 So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

In I Corinthians 9:3–27 Paul speaks of the right of workers in the gospel to be supported but in verse 15 he excepts himself, especially in the case of the Corinthian church. Now he is revealed to us one primary reasons for supporting himself. *And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do*. These superlative apostles claim they are on the same level as Paul, but this they cannot rightly do when they accept support, even if that support is valid. The term *boasted mission* seems to have a touch of irony to it.. Paul's various references to 'pedlars of the word' and of 'underhanded disgraceful ways' that some use now makes a lot of sense. Paul must have had these intruders in mind. He can now say *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*. Paul is now at the root of the matter. Because he loves the Corinthians he will; not take from them. Some commentators see these *false apostles* of this verse as being the same as the *superlative apostles* of verse 5, whilst

others disagree. Perhaps the matter is not clear. We do know that these ones are partly responsible for some of the ‘arguments and proud obstacle’s that appear to be present at Corinth. Paul does not spare them: they are *deceitful workmen*, and they are *disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*. This is a strong charge, but the party spirit seen in I Corinthians 3 would easily give rise to the following of people who were ‘up-front’. That these apostles must have appeared as spiritual and to be followed is made clear by Paul’s discerning comment, *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds*. Satan was certainly once an angel of light, and as he is the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:10; 20:16) he must use the subterfuges of light and righteousness whilst his kingdom is truly ‘the kingdom of darkness’. All forms of deceit, untruth and imitation of righteousness ultimately run out of power even to deceive. So *Their end will correspond to their deeds*, i.e. the end will be the one they deserve, the lake of fire.

11:16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish; but even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 11:17 (What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; 11:18 since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast.) 11:19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 11:20 For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 11:21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

*I repeat, let no one think me foolish; but even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.* In 11:1 Paul asks latitude for his foolishness. Now he proceeds to show that in fact he is not foolish. It is only that some will *think* him to be so. The *I too may boast a little*. is leading him on to show that these other interlopers had done plenty of boasting, though without basis or true cause. The words that the translator has placed in brackets—(What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast.)—tell the story. The Lord has not told him to be ‘foolish’ and ‘boast’ but he sees that what they boast about must be shown up by the genuine things Paul ‘boasts’ about. Paul’s deliberate entreating in the ‘spirit of the meekness and gentleness of Christ’ is not lost in a crude boasting for it is no boasting at all! *For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!* Paul now goes into heavy irony mode. The Corinthians accept those *boasting of worldly things*, so they bear with fools—the kind of person who *makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face*. We wonder how they could bear such and still accept the leadership of such persons, but we see such things happen in extreme sects, and these persons must have been manipulative with their false gospel/s. So Paul becomes even more heavily ironical *To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!*

But whatever any one dares to boast of -- I am speaking as a fool -- I also dare to boast of that. 11:22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 11:23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one -- I am talking like a madman -- with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 11:24 Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 11:25 Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three

times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; 11:26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; 11:27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 11:28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. 11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

***But whatever any one dares to boast of -- I am speaking as a fool -- I also dare to boast of that.*** What Paul is doing is not boasting. He is testing out what these other interlopers really are. Would—or could—any one of them ‘boast’ the things Paul is now narrating? Could they equal these: indeed, could they equal any *one* of these?

***Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.*** This seemingly innocuous question is laden with innuendoes. In Philippians 3:4–6 Paul shows he was of the most zealous and strictest of the Jews, and that is what he is saying here. A **Hebrew** was not a Hellenist—a Jew influenced by Greek culture. The term **Israelite** seems to point to purity of stock—‘of the tribe of Benjamin’. Not all Jews could trace back their genealogies, but he can trace his back to **Abraham**. For all we know these super-apostles may not even have had Jewish origin, but Paul is not saying these things in snobbery but showing that he already had an honourable place before conversion. So much for the interlopers trying to demean him! Leaving his Judaistic background he comes to the point, ***Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one -- I am talking like a madman -- with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.*** This speaks for itself. If the super apostles or false apostles measure up against this account then it will be seen how zealous they are—are not! If we look at the remainder of the account from verses 24–27—***Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure***—we will see that Paul is telling us much more of his sufferings for the gospel than are stated in the Book of the Acts. For example in Acts there is only one shipwreck, and chronologically that has not yet happened! There are many other happenings we have not heard described. Whilst Paul in chapters 8–9 has spoken of Christians having an abundancy he has often starved and thirsted, and this cannot be put down to fasting, as some would have us wrongly believe. No: he is not foolish in his ‘boasting’. He is silencing the dangerous triumphalism and foolish boasting of those who oppose him. When he adds to all this his own yearning for the churches the identification he has with the weak such as we see in Romans 14–15 and I Corinthians ch. 8, and the anxiety he suffers for them—***And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?***—then Paul’s position as *a servant of Christ* is made very clear. Doubtless all readers remained silent on reading these words. Even so, Paul is not yet finished.

11:30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 11:31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. 11:32 At Damascus, the governor under King Ar'etas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 11:33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.* Paul has the problem before him that the Corinthians have been attracted by what we might call 'triumphalist ministry'. There is a triumph the Christian can know, and Paul has spoken of this in II Corinthians 2:14, 'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere'. This is not triumphalism but triumph—Christ's triumph and ours in him. In our present passage Paul has to teach them his weakness now that he has shown them some of his 'strengths'. So he keeps uses the verb 'to boast'. He boasts of his weakness, but we will discover the secret of this in 12:8–10. So then he unfolds the humiliating happening of being let down from the walls of Damascus in basket. In such a case he asks for attestation, *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie.* Then proceeds the account, *At Damascus, the governor under King Ar'etas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.* In Acts 9:20–25 we see it was Paul's immediate enthusiasm for the gospel which set the Jews against him. It may have been they who influenced the governor to seize Paul, but his disciples let him down in the basket. The sight of Paul being lowered in a basket is certainly ludicrous, if not laughable. Paul remembered the strange experience. He is now putting that memory to good use.

## CHAPTER TWELVE 1–21

12:1 I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 12:3 And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- 12:4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 12:5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. 12:6 Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. 12:7 And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. 12:8 Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; 12:9 but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul is continuing his argument from chapter eleven where he has spoken of ‘boasting’ namely the realities he has experienced in his apostolic ministry. This he has done in the light of the claims of the ‘superlative apostles’ and those who are false, disguised as ‘angels of light’. Closing that chapter with an example of his weakness, rather than claim he has any innate power, he now speaks of ‘visions and revelations of the Lord, something which would certainly catch the ears and attention of the ‘charismatic’ Corinthians.

*I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.* When Paul says, **I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it** he is presenting the argument which counters the claims of the ‘superlative apostles’ to have special ministry, ministry above that of Paul the apostle. He is not, in fact, really boasting. Yet, also, he is not speaking, tongue-in-cheek. He is fighting a battle *for* the Corinthians. His real boast can be seen in Galatians 6:14, where it is only in the Cross. **I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.** His opponents may have laid claim to visions but said there were better than his so that they outclassed him, or they may have said his visions were illusory and not to be trusted. **visions and revelations of the Lord** must be taken with the subjective and not objective genitive, i.e. they are visions the Lord has given to Paul: this authenticates them. When we ask about the visions and revelations we are met with many Paul had in Acts such as Christ’s appearance to him on the road to Damascus (9:1–10), of Ananias come to visit him (9:12), and others such as in 16:9f.; 18:9f.; 22:17–21; 23:11; 27:23f. Some of these had not yet happened, but there must have been many others, and one of them was pointless, the sort of thing visionaries have continually but without any great point. **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago**

**was caught up to the third heaven**—here Paul is describing a person as though just one he knows, but the narrative shows it was he, himself. As for the **fourteen years**, it could not have been on the road to Damascus because Paul often did speak of what happened there. It has been reckoned that it was about A.D. 44 when Paul was in Antioch, but we cannot be certain. Paul says, **caught up** and not ‘went up’, showing that the action was the Lord and that Paul was no mystic, bent on ‘out of the body’ experiences. For the use of the verb—*harpadzo*—see Acts 8:39; I Thessalonians 4:17 and Revelation 12:9. **the third heaven**: later rabbinical teaching spoke of seven heavens, but probably in Paul’s day I Kings 8:27—‘the heavens and the heavens of the heaven’ may have been taken to mean there were three heavens. Certainly it is equated with **Paradise** here. **whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows**. His statement **God knows** diverts us from speculation as it his state in this vision. **and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter**. What Paul **heard** in Paradise—it is not told what he *saw*—was ineffable, cf. I Corinthians 2:11. In Daniel 12 and Revelation certain intimations are to be concealed.

*On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.* Paul keeps on speaking of **this man** in the third person—**On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses**—but he is obviously speaking of himself. Now he can switch because it is the matter of his **weakness** that is in his mind (cf. 11:30f.). **Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth**. That is, we will not boast *from* himself but refer to their knowledge of him, so his boasting is ‘in the Lord’ (10:17), and this gives point to **But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me**, for that is the true test.

*And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* The **abundance of revelations** are such that their quality could bring pride to the human spirit. **Elated** is scarcely a strong enough word: ‘too proud (*JB*) is closer. a thorn was given me in the flesh. Some translate a **thorn** (*skolops*) by ‘a splinter’ and others by ‘a stake’. Many have speculated on the nature of the thorn, seeing it is a humiliating bodily ailment (cf. Gal. 4:13f.), but it was something which kept Paul weak and humble. a **messenger of Satan**, to harass me opens up a vast subject. Is the **messenger** a person or a thing? The apostles—and others—have found a persistent enemy who harasses them chronically. If ‘a thing’ then as in Job chapters 1 and 2 it could be used by Satan under the will of God for Paul’s benefit. **Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Paul, it would seem, was henceforth never free of the thorn. We could say, ‘Paul could not be trusted not to be elated and proud whenever he thought on the visions and revelations, especially the one of Paradise.’ There is a great lesson for us, even those who have not had such visions. The weakness of which Paul has spoken in both Corinthians epistles is *the innate condition of every human and no less Christians*. Paul has thus established his point—he is a weak man, and that is why he is a strong one!

*I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* Paul pursues his theme, having really won his point. He boasts of his weakness—I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses—something which nobody does! None of this is egotistical: it is **for the sake of Christ** Along with his weaknesses go **insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities**, and of these he has spoken in chapters 4, 6 and this chapter 11. The contented and secure ‘super-apostles’ at Corinth ought to have blushed to have read this. A physically weak Paul, a Paul cut of from any genuine boasting, found his continuing and marvellous strength in Christ, and in particular the grace of God. He emerges with the greatest principle for true living—**when I am weak, then am I strong.**

I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

Paul is now speaking of something powerfully significant in the early church—the **signs of a true apostle**. On the acceptance of this lies the proper outcome; Paul will be fully accredited and the ‘super-apostles’ virtually be discredited. When Paul says, **I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you**, he means that had they trusted him, loved him, received him as their spiritual father and founder and gone his way, all the time ignoring the superlative apostles, then he would never have been forced into such writing as was distasteful to him. They had forced this!. **For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing.** There may have been at the back of Paul’s mind the point he had to make in I Corinthians 15:8ff. where he maintained his apostleship. He wrote strongly to the Galatians and his apostleship had to be asserted because it was linked with his message. If he is not a true apostle then he has no authority. **The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.** If we take this verse literally, then the **signs and wonders and mighty works** were not the primary but the secondary proof of his apostleship. Had they been missing then he would not have been an apostle, but the text says *with signs* (etc.), meaning that the primary signs of an apostle were the proclaiming of the gospel with power and with its attendant conversions and the found of the church. Notice also the significant **in all patience**. Apparently this latter element was missing in the visiting preachers as we see in 11:4–5. A scanning of the Book of Acts will show us that signs were not the primary thing but were mainly confirmatory, e.g. Acts 14:3. In John 14:12 the ‘greater works’ were not necessarily ‘great signs’ although they may have included such. Jesus’ works were not all signs, though all his signs were works. When Paul adds, **For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!** he is saying, ‘No less happened in your midst when we came with the gospel. I was no less—and no more—an apostle to you than the others, with the possible exception that I did not burden your financially.’ His last statement is surely ironical or tongue-in-cheek, **Forgive me this wrong!**

12:14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents



for their children. 12:15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? 12:16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile. 12:17 Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? 12:18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

**Here for the third time I am ready to come to you.** In 13:2 Paul speaks of his ‘second visit’, and 2:1 speaks of ‘another painful visit’. The first time could have been as described in Acts 18:1ff. ad I Corinthians 2:1, but it can scarcely be called a ‘visit’, but what matters is that Paul is going to visit for a third time and does not wish it to be painful (cf. 2:1). He wants to have all things in the clear. for **I seek not what is yours but you;** That Paul seeks not what is theirs but them, is a beautiful expression. He still will not draw from them financially, thus keeping all statements about offertories in the clear. He now reinforces his arguments for not receiving their gifts by **saying for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children.** He wants to give them of his own resources, and be their resource where that is appropriate. He asks the question, **If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?** and at the same time infers that they do not respond to his love in all the fullness that he gives to them. He has indicated this in 6:11–12. Paul takes up something which might have been said of him, that he was in fact **crafty** in sending Titus and his companions to deal with the matter of the offertory. The word **crafty** is the one Paul rejects in 4:2. **But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile.** Paul refutes the charge of guile and also have having gained advantage by Titus. What advantage did Titus gain for Paul or himself? **Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you?** Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? Paul and Titus were of one mind. No: they gained no advantage; this is the plain fact.

12:19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. 12:20 For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 12:21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.

In I Corinthians 4:3ff. Paul has said he not concerned with the judgements some make of him. His conscience is clear before God. In II Corinthians 4:2 he denies connivance of any sort and says that from what he proclaims and how he proclaims it is evident to men’s consciences that he speaks the truth—the truth of the mysteries. **Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you?** No he has spoken for God, in love, in Christ and for the building up of his beloved hearers—**Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you?** Paul’s previous visit had been a painful one and he does not wish to repeat this. **For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander,**

**gossip, conceit, and disorder.** Paul does not want to come as having to discipline the people in the problems he may find when he arrives. This list looks like ‘the works of the flesh’. All these elements are concerned with relationships, and mention of all of them had been made in his first Letter. Shocking as is the list, it may have had its origin in some report Titus had made, but it would probably only concern a minority. **I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.** Should Paul come and find these things he would certainly be humbled, for the spiritual father to find his children in this way of living would be crushing. At the same time he would have to mourn, for the inference is that discipline would have to be exercised for **the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.**

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN 1–14

13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 13:2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them -- 13:3 since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. 13:4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we shall live with him by the power of God.

*This is the third time I am coming to you.* We have discussed this in 2:14. *Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses.* One thing is clear: there will be charges against those who need discipline. This is the principle of Deuteronomy 19:15 (cf. Numb. 35:30; Deut. 17:6). In the New Testament the witness issue comes up in Matthew 18:16; I Timothy 5:19 and Hebrews 10:28. Some—Calvin amongst them—think Paul; is referring to his three visits as witnesses. that is each is a ‘witness’—but it seems better to think of actual witnesses, that is, persons witnessing. *I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them.* It is evident that **those who sinned before** refers to ones he had to do with on his second visit, whilst **all the others** refers to the reports given afterwards to Paul of matters at Corinth. In all these things he is well informed. **I warn** and **I warned** both indicate that judgement has been coming to those who persist in their wrong-doing. They ought to have heeded Paul when he was present on his **second visit**. 12:20–21 indicate these were not light things. Paul says, **I will not spare them**—as against 1:23 where they criticised him for seemingly changing his plans. Behind of all of this is the question of Paul’s authority as an apostle and servant of God. **since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me.** Paul had shown remarkable restraint in not dealing with the cases of sinning Corinthians, but they had mistaken this for softness and weakness—10:1, 8–11.. Well then, they would soon see if this were truly the case. **Christ is speaking in me,** is what the Corinthians knew must be if he were authentic: well, they would now see! *He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you.* In this case it will be Christ’s discipline administered through Paul. *For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.* Paul has spoken a lot to the Corinthians in his Epistles (cf. I Cor. 1:24) about weakness, and especially about the seeming weakness in being subjected to crucifixion but this is weakness only when compared with worldly power. God has His plan in this crucifixion (Acts 2:23; 4:28) and in fact had they known the world-powers would not have crucified him (I Cor. 2:8) had they known how it would turn out. Christ *lives by the power of God.* Power was manifested in his resurrection and ascension—Romans 1:4; 6:4; Ephesians 1:19ff; Philippians 3:10. So then does Paul live this way, Christ being in him. For we are weak in him, show that Paul knew continuing weakness *of himself. but in dealing with you we shall live with him by the power of God.* To be weak in Christ is to be obedient to him, and to be strong in Christ is to be able to exercise not an innate power but God’s power in punishing the offenders. This they would dread, since such action would have no personal animus of Paul within it. It would be God’s own action through Paul.

13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 13:6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed. 13:7 But we pray God that you may not do wrong -- not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. 13:8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 13:9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement. 13:10 I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith.* These critical Christians have been demanding that Paul show proof of his ministry, but now Paul is demanding that *they* look to themselves, and at themselves. Paul has been speaking about their queries as to whether Christ is powerful in *him*, let them see whether Christ is living in *them*. The boot is on the other foot. Critics have a way of defending themselves by attacking others. So he says, **Test yourselves**. This may have been something they had never considered doing, and they may in or a shock. Paul presses his point, **Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you?** Christ's indwelling believers is a clear fact of the Epistles (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; John 14:15–23; etc.). It is such a dynamic factor in Christian living that, when considered, it is one of the greatest constraints to true Christian living. Is Paul's question rhetorical or is he confronting them? It seems from **unless indeed you fail to meet the test!** that Paul does not think they will fail, but in some cases the possibility may exist, in which case their entire criticism of Paul collapses. So Paul continues, **I hope you will find out that we have not failed.** If this be the case then the critics will be startled and discomfited and even fearful. **But we pray God that you may not do wrong -- not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.** The apostle's main aim is **that you may do what is right**. This is parallel to **that you may not do wrong**. Summed up, Paul is saying, 'May you see the situation as it really is, and if you have been critical accept my apostolic authority and the right I have to bring Christ's punishment and 'bring every thought into the captivity of Christ'. I don't want to prove you wrong but to show that you are right, that is, will be right in the end. I have no vested interested merely in clearing myself of certain unfounded charges.' **though we may seemed to have failed** means that they have thought the apostolic band has failed, when, in fact, they have not. **For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.** This comment is self-evident and the Corinthians can rest assured that the apostle has told no lies. Things are as he has said they are. **For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement.** Paul has no shame at being weak (cf. 12:9–10) and he has glad when they are strong—in Christ. When he says, **What we pray for is your improvement**, he is really praying for their amending of their ways, by coming into full restoration from wrong action and wrong judgement of Paul and his band. **I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.** So now Paul has said it all! He is giving them time to think over his letter and exhortation. He does not wish to be severe. He reiterates his apostolic authority from the Lord. It is all for building up and not for breaking down. That is the sum of the matter: the Corinthians should look to is, ponder it, and respond properly to it. This is the inference in this sentence.

13:11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. 13:12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13:13 All the saints greet you. 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

*Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.* Paul addresses them as **brethren**, thus showing he is one with them. His fondness for them is thus revealed. **Mend your ways** or ‘be perfected’ covers all the things he has been speaking about—those things which he trusts will call for no admonition when he comes. **heed my appeal** means ‘be exhorted’, ‘receive exhortation.’ Some translations have ‘be comforted’ but this is not as strong as the whole injunction suggests. **agree with one another** must mean ‘do not be at difference with one another over the various matters we have raised’. This makes sense then of **live in peace** for unity, fellowship and mutual love are often enjoined in other Epistles. **Salute one another with a holy kiss** is an injunction for a manual reception of one another, an expression of genuine love. It was a kiss or an embrace—something almost as universal as is a handshake. It was a *holy* kiss as against kisses which might not be so. It expressed actual warmth and such contact would be a blessing to the Corinthians with their tendency to be party-minded. It fits too with **and the God of love and peace will be with you**. They need this **God of love and peace** to bring these things to pass, but then as they seek them so the same God will enable them to succeed in these things. The term **the God of love and peace** is not found elsewhere in the New Testament although He is called ‘the God of peace’ often enough (Rom. 16:20; I Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; I Thess. 5:26; II Thess. 3:18). He is never called ‘the God of love’ for He—the Father—is the God Who is love (I John 4:8, 16). The ‘grace’ that follows—**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all**—is now famous, and certainly has a Trinitarian flavour and indication. There are three genitives, i.e. God’s love for us, Christ’s grace for us, and probably the Spirit’s fellowship he engenders, although we, too, are told to ‘participate in the Spirit’ (Philippians 2:1. We need to have love for God from His love to us (I John 4:19); need to live in the grace of Christ continually, and to respond to the Spirit’s fellowship and be in it as God’s people, the church. The knowledge that we are in the Triune God is of enormous comfort and encouragement, causing us to live together.

## CONCLUSION TO THE EPISTLE

We finish this Epistle with the conclusion that churches, no matter how well-founded can be faulty and open to heretical impressions and practice. We also note that at the same time the heart the church at Corinth was sound, because it had been born of the pure gospel proclamation, and was therefore subject to discipline—something we rarely see today. Whilst it had been wrought upon by interlopers yet it really listened to Paul as through Titus, and now through his words to them. The primary thing we see is the way in which a person can so be gripped by the gospel, that his whole being is given over in love to minister Christ to the world, and to the churches he has founded, in particular. The key to ministry and its wonderful criteria can be found in this Epistle perhaps more than in any other.

