

Notes on 2 Corinthians

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Introduction

OCCASION

First Corinthians did not get rid of the problems in the church at Corinth completely. While it resolved some of them, opposition to the Apostle Paul persisted, and Paul's critics continued to speak out against him in the church. One man in particular seems to have been the ringleader of the opposition (10:7-11). He had rallied the support of a significant minority. The issue was Paul's apostolic authority. His critics were claiming equal authority with Paul. This was in effect a claim to apostolic authority on their part and a denial of the full apostolic authority of Paul.

News of continuing problems in Corinth reached Paul in Ephesus during his prolonged stay there on his third missionary journey. He then made a brief visit to Corinth from Ephesus. However his efforts to resolve the conflicts proved unsuccessful (2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). Paul apparently suffered insult and he lost face during that visit (7:12). Consequently that was a painful visit for Paul. He then returned to Ephesus.

Paul's next step in dealing with the situation in Corinth was to send a severe letter from Ephesus by the hand of Titus and another unnamed Christian brother (2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). He apparently directed this letter, which is now lost, at the party that was opposed to him, and particularly its leader. Some commentators believe that 2 Corinthians 10 through 13 contains part or all of this letter, but the evidence for this is not convincing.¹

Paul evidently intended to receive Titus' report concerning the effects of this severe letter in Ephesus. However persecution there made it expedient for Paul to leave that city earlier than he had anticipated (Acts 20:1). He found an open door for the gospel to the north in Troas. Eager to meet

¹See Richard Batey, "Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1985):139-43.

Titus, who was taking the land route from Corinth back to Ephesus, Paul moved west into Macedonia (2:12-13). There Titus met him and gave him an encouraging report (7:6-16). Most of the church had responded well to Paul's directives, and the church had disciplined the troublemakers (2:5-11). Unfortunately some in the congregation still refused to acknowledge Paul's authority over them (10:1—13:10).



UNITY

Many scholars have tried to explain the different subject matter and tone of chapters 10 through 13 as compared with chapters 1 through 9. Some believe that chapters 10 through 13 were a separate letter, specifically Paul's severe letter. Others argue that these chapters were originally part of 2 Corinthians and that Paul wrote the whole book at one time. Some scholars believe that chapters 10 through 13 were originally a different letter from both chapters 1 through 9 and the severe letter. This would have made them a fifth letter from Paul to the Corinthians. Perhaps the best explanation is that chapters 10 through 13 were originally part of 2

Corinthians but that Paul wrote these chapters after he had written chapters 1 through 9 and after he had met Titus.¹

In chapters 10 through 13 Paul rejoiced at the repentance of the majority in the church. However his concern for the unrepentant minority, and his desire to pick up the money that the Corinthians had begun to collect for their poorer brethren in Jerusalem, led him to write 2 Corinthians. Along with these primary motives Paul also felt compelled to refute the charge of fickleness that had been leveled at him by his critics. He had changed his travel plans and had not come to see them as he had originally said that he wanted to do. This situation provided him with an opportunity to clarify the nature of Christian ministry. Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians is an "occasional" letter: one occasioned by specific circumstances.

DATE

Paul wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians from Macedonia—perhaps from Philippi, Thessalonica, or Berea—probably in the fall or winter of A.D. 56. A date a year earlier or later is possible.

Some commentators believe that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians after his painful visit and after he wrote the severe letter. Others, and I, believe it is more probable that he wrote 1 Corinthians before these two events. It is very difficult to reconstruct the details of Paul's activities since the data available to us is incomplete.

PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CONTACTS							
<i>Paul's first visit</i>	His former letter	Their letter to him	1 Corinthians	<i>Paul's painful visit</i>	His severe letter	2 Corinthians	<i>Paul's future visit</i>

¹See Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 430-36. See Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, pp. 209-11, for further discussion of the unity of the epistle.

Another view is that the former letter is 1 Corinthians and the person who offended Paul (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12) is the incestuous man referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1.¹

"According to this view, there was 'no painful visit,' for the word 'again' in 2:1 does not necessarily mean that Paul made a visit between writing First and Second Corinthians. It simply means he did not want to return 'in sorrow.' The reference in 12:14 and 13:1, 2 to a 'third time' does not mean Paul was coming for his third time; it simply means that he was 'ready' to come for a third time. He had planned to come (see 1 Cor. 16:5-9), evidently was ready to come (12:14), and then did not actually make the trip (1:15-17, 23)."²

PURPOSE

Paul's immediate purpose in writing 2 Corinthians was to combat the influence of Judaizers who promoted legalistic teaching. These teachers were evidently Jews, mainly from Judea, who claimed to be Christians. They may have been unbelievers or misguided believers, but they claimed to be Christians. Acts 15:1 refers to them. God's larger purpose in inspiring 2 Corinthians was to make the gospel crystal clear.

Kenneth Hanna noted five purposes: to console and encourage the majority in the church, to restore the disciplined member of the church, to complete the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, to vindicate Paul's apostleship in view of criticisms, and to prepare for Paul's third visit to Corinth.³

J. Sidlow Baxter observed that Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians follow the order of 2 Timothy 3:16: Romans dealing mainly with doctrine, the Corinthian letters with reproof, and Galatians with correction.⁴

¹E.g., J. H. Bernard, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:3-18.

²*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1942.

³Hanna, pp. 215-16.

⁴J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:127.

CHARACTERISTICS

"While the epistle to the Galatians is the defence [*sic*] of the doctrine of the Gospel against false teachers, the second epistle to the Corinthians is the defence of his [Paul's] own personal character, his apostolic authority, his motives and his ministry."¹

"It was written with a quill dipped in tears, from the apostle's 'anguish of heart,' and contains more of human pathos than any other of his letters."²

"2 Corinthians is very different from the letters between which it was written, 1 Corinthians and Romans. Whereas each of those letters is, in its own way, systematic and orderly, 2 Corinthians is, on the face of it, uneven and digressive. It is no surprise, therefore, that many scholars have suggested that 2 Corinthians is really a collection of letters put together later as a single letter."³

"Second Corinthians presents many inspiring texts and passages to the reader and teacher of God's Word. A quick survey reveals approximately eighty individual verses lending themselves to extended meditation and exposition, apart from the sixty or so constituent paragraphs of the letter. This letter is a rich lode for the edification of God's people."⁴

"In Second Corinthians Paul bares his heart and his life as he does in none of his other letters. This lends a special value to the letter."⁵

¹Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:2:149.

²Baxter, 6:121.

³Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 15. Cf. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. xiii.

⁴Barnett, p. 47.

⁵Richard Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 804.

"Of all the Pauline epistles, 2 Corinthians is probably the one which presents most problems to the interpreter."¹

C. K. Barrett called 2 Corinthians "... surely the most difficult book in the New Testament."² He meant the most difficult to interpret.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-11
 - A. Salutation 1:1-2
 - B. Thanksgiving for comfort in affliction 1:3-11
 1. Thanksgiving for comfort 1:3-7
 2. Thanksgiving for deliverance 1:8-11

- II. Answers to insinuations about the sincerity of Paul's commitment to the Corinthians and to the ministry 1:12—7:16
 - A. Paul's defense of his conduct with regard to his promised visit and the offender 1:12—2:17
 1. The postponement of the intended visit 1:12—2:4
 2. The treatment of the offender and the result of the severe letter 2:5-17

 - B. Paul's exposition of his view of the ministry 3:1—6:10
 1. The superiority of Christian ministry to Mosaic ministry 3:1-11
 2. The great boldness of the new ministers 3:12—4:6
 3. The sufferings and supports of a minister of the gospel 4:7—5:10
 4. The life of a minister of Christ 5:11—6:10

 - C. Paul's appeal for restoration of the Corinthians' confidence in him 6:11—7:16

¹Editor's preface to the second edition of Philip E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. xi.

²C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. v.

1. An appeal for large-heartedness and consistency 6:11—7:4
 2. The encouraging response of the Corinthians so far 7:5-16
- III. Instructions concerning the collection for the poor saints in Judea 8:1—9:15
- A. The example of the Macedonians 8:1-7
 - B. The supreme motive for giving 8:8-15
 - C. The delegates of the churches 8:16-24
 - D. The anticipated visit of Paul 9:1-5
 - E. The benefits of generous giving 9:6-15
- IV. Appeals concerning Paul's apostolic authority 10:1—13:10
- A. Replies to charges made against Paul 10:1-18
 1. Reply to the charge of cowardice 10:1-6
 2. Reply to the charge of weakness 10:7-11
 3. Reply to the charge of intrusion 10:12-18
 - B. Claims made by Paul 11:1—12:18
 1. Paul's reasons for making these claims 11:1-6
 2. Freedom to minister without charge 11:7-15
 3. Paul's service and sufferings 11:16-33
 4. Special revelations Paul received 12:1-10
 5. Paul's supernatural miracles and paternal love 12:11-18
 - C. Exhortations in view of Paul's approaching visit 12:19—13:10
 1. Paul's concerns 12:19-21
 2. Paul's warnings 13:1-10
- V. Conclusion 13:11-14
- A. The exhortation 13:11-12
 - B. The salutation 13:13
 - C. The benediction 13:14

Wick Brommall's simple, memorable outline is worth noting:¹

- I. The conciliation 1:1—7:16
- II. The collection 8:1—9:15
- III. The credentials 10:1—13:14

So are Hanna's main divisions: consolation (chs. 1—7), solicitation (chs. 8—9), vindication (chs. 10—13):²

Baxter's outline is a bit more expanded:³

Introduction 1:1-2

- I. Paul's account of his ministry chs. 1—5 (Explanation: Paul the minister)
 - a. As to the motive chs. 1—2
 - b. As to the message chs. 3—5
- II. Paul's appeal to his converts chs. 6—9 (Exhortation: Paul the father)
 - a. Concerning things spiritual chs. 6—7
 - b. Concerning things material chs. 8—9
- III. Paul's answer to his critics chs. 10—13 (Vindication: Paul the apostle)
 - a. The critics and their pretensions
 - b. The apostle and his credentials.

Conclusion 13:11-14

¹Wick Broomall, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1262-63.

²Hanna, p. 207.

³Baxter, 6:126.

MESSAGE

The subject of 2 Corinthians is ministry, specifically the church's work of service in the world. This is the central concept that Paul dealt with in this epistle.

What did he say about Christian ministry? He spoke about two aspects of ministry: the nature of Christian ministry, and the practice of Christian ministry.

I will comment first on what Paul revealed about the nature of Christian ministry, what ministry is in and of itself. This is what Paul spoke of most often in 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians there is more emphasis on the practice of ministry than on the nature of ministry. In both epistles Paul dealt mainly with the doctrine of ecclesiology: the church.

Paul had a lot to say about the authority of the church's ministry. Jesus Christ is the church's authority. He is the One who assigns each believer his or her particular ministry within the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 28; Eph. 4:11-13). The Corinthian church had a major problem because some in its company were failing to accept Paul's appointment by Christ as an official apostle—and their own appointment as non-apostles. This was a practical repudiation of Jesus Christ's authority in the church. We must bow to the authority of Christ in the church by recognizing and responding appropriately to those whom He has appointed to various roles in the body. We identify these people by their gifts (divinely-given abilities) and by their offices (divinely-given positions). But we must beware of leaders and churches that claim authority over us yet base their claims on misinterpretations of Scripture (e.g., the Roman Catholic claim to be the one true church, and the Pope's claim to be the supreme authority, under Christ of course, for Christians).

Paul also had a lot to say in this epistle about the resources of the church's ministry. He emphasized three resources primarily:

One important resource is the encouragement of God. Paul spoke of this in the first part of the epistle especially. We read "comfort" in many English translations, but the Greek word *paraklesis* means comfort through encouragement. The same Greek root describes the Holy Spirit as our Helper, Comforter, Advocate, or Intercessor in John 14—16. Paul both taught and demonstrated in this letter that God's encouraging comfort

always exceeds our discouragement and distress in ministry. The secret to finding it sufficient is taking God's view of how our ministry is really proceeding. This viewpoint Paul revealed too.

A second resource is divine revelation. Paul did not preach himself or a message that he had concocted. He preached what God had revealed. Thus revelation constituted both Paul's public message and his personal encouragement. We Christians too have received the same message to communicate as ambassadors of Christ. It is a message of reconciliation, and it is the source of our encouragement.

A third resource is the prayers of the saints. Paul called for, and counted on, the prayers of God's people to bring God's power into play through him as he ministered (1:11a). He realized that his own prayers would not move God to work as well as the concerted prayers of many of God's children (cf. James 4:2). Lack of prayer is often a sign of confidence in self more than confidence in God.

In addition to the authority and resources of Christian ministry, Paul also had a lot to say in this epistle about experience in ministry. Three features mark experience in ministry:

First, one thing that marks ministry is tribulation. Paul spoke extensively in 2 Corinthians about the afflictions that he experienced during his ministry. Furthermore he revealed that these are part of ministry, anyone's ministry who is carrying it out as God has directed. Some people do not welcome the gospel. To them it is as distasteful as the smell of a dead body. We should expect to experience tribulation in ministry. Almost all Christians who share the gospel with others have experienced this to some extent.

Second, another thing that marks our ministry as Christians is hope. God has revealed the end of our ministry. Faithful believers will all stand before Jesus Christ and receive rewards one day (5:10). This hope is a certainty. The Christian who loses sight of his or her hope is going to drift and suffer discouragement rather than pressing on toward the goal (Phil. 3:14). The end of our ministry is constantly in view in this epistle.

Third, another component of Christian ministry is triumph. Paul revealed and illustrated, by his own attitude, that no matter how the response to our ministry may appear to us, our ministry is always triumphant. The reason for this is that God is always at work through His ministers. One of

the problems that Paul's critics in Corinth had, and that we sometimes have, is that they were evaluating ministry superficially rather than realistically. We need to evaluate ministry on the basis of what God has revealed is really happening, not what appears to be happening.

Paul not only revealed much about the nature of Christian ministry in 2 Corinthians, but he also revealed a lot about the practice of ministry by the church in the world. Three emphases predominate:

First, Paul revealed what the message of the church is, namely, the revealed Word of God. Ours is a ministry of the Word. In his day, God's Word consisted of the Old Testament Scriptures plus the revelations that he and the other New Testament prophets had received that were for all Christians. Paul contrasted his message, and ours, with the message of Moses, and he rejoiced in its superiority. We can now see God's glory clearly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 1).

Second, Paul revealed the church's equipment to carry on its ministry to the world. We are ready to minister only when we separate from the world's sins and conform to God's will. Paul contrasts with his critics in this letter in both of these respects. As these characteristics mark us, we too, will be ready to minister.

Third, Paul revealed the exercise of the church's ministry to the world. In exercising its ministry, the church does three things, according to this epistle:

First, it exercises discipline to restore the erring brother to effective ministry. Paul's great concern in this epistle was the restoration of the rebellious critics in the Corinthian church, restoration to unity and usefulness.

Second, the church also is to give no occasion of stumbling to others. Paul's concern was that the behavior of the Corinthian Christians would be an encouragement to other believers and a base from which the gospel could proceed even farther into unevangelized regions beyond Corinth.

Third, the church exercises the grace of giving. It seeks to facilitate the principle of equality that God has demonstrated throughout history, namely, that those who have should share with those who have not. This applies not only to the gospel message but also to the physical necessities of life (chs. 8—9).

From these emphases the message of the book emerges: The church needs to submit to revealed authority, to draw upon supernatural resources and equipment, and to experience triumph through tribulation as it executes its mission. As it does so it will effectively carry out its ministry of proclaiming the message of reconciliation to the world.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:131-47.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-11

Like most of Paul's epistles, this one begins with a salutation to the recipients. Then words of thanksgiving to God for His encouraging comfort follow.

A. SALUTATION 1:1-2

This salutation contains the three elements common in all of Paul's epistles: the writer, the addressees, and a greeting.

"This salutation exhibits undoubted resemblances in form to secular letters that have come down to us from the same period. But the differences are greater, and that in three respects. There is the firm assertion of Apostolic authority, the clear indication that those whom he addresses are not ordinary people but a consecrated society, and the spiritual character of the good wishes he sends them."¹

1:1 Students of Paul's epistles have suggested various explanations of why the apostle preferred to use his name "Paul" rather than his name "Saul." Some say that he did so to mark the spiritual conquest of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12). Others claim that he did so to show himself the least of the apostles, since "Paul" means "little" (cf. Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15). The meaning of "Paul" has led some to think that he was small in physical stature. Perhaps he did so because the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Saul" was objectionable, since it was identical with an adjective that meant effeminate. He may have done so simply because it was customary for Roman citizens to have a Roman name as well as one that reflected their own nationality.² Since Paul's ministry was among Gentiles, he may have preferred to use his Roman name rather than his Jewish name.

¹Plummer, p. 5. See also W. G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, pp. 21-47.

²See Hughes, pp. 1-2.

Paul's use of the term "apostle" (lit. one sent forth with orders) so early in this salutation sets the tone for the entire epistle. It is largely a vindication of his apostleship. He claimed apostolic authority at the very beginning of this letter.

Often Paul mentioned his apostleship in his epistles in order to lend authority to what he wrote, especially when that authority was being challenged by some of his readers. But Richard Lenski insisted that Paul's purpose was primarily to express his own consciousness of bearing a heavy responsibility with regard to his readers.¹ Probably Paul had both purposes in mind.

The Lord's title is also significant though not unusual. Paul called Him "Christ" (God's Anointed One sent forth as *the* apostle from heaven; v. 20; cf. Heb. 3:1; John 20:21) and "Jesus" (God in action delivering His people from their sins, Savior; 5:19; cf. Matt. 1:21).

Paul claimed that his apostleship came to him "by the will of God," not by his own or any church's initiative (cf. John 1:13; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 2:8). The gift and office of apostle were special in the early church. Only 12 individuals plus Paul were official apostles (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 1:21-22; 9:15). However the word "apostle" occurs elsewhere in the non-technical sense of anyone sent on God's great mission of spreading the gospel (cf. 8:23; Acts 14:4, 14; Phil. 2:25; et al.).

The recipients of this epistle knew "Timothy" well (v.19, Acts 18:5). He had come to faith in Christ perhaps through Paul's ministry in Lystra in Asia Minor (Acts 14:8-20; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). He had accompanied Paul on his journeys from the second missionary journey on (Acts 16:1-3), and he had gone to Corinth as the apostle's representative (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10).

Paul noted in passing that the "church" (Greek *ekklesia*, lit. called out ones, in this case the company of Christians) belongs to God. Even though it was at Corinth it was God's

¹Lenski, pp. 806-7.

church. It did not belong to the Corinthians or their teachers. Therefore its primary allegiance had to be to Him.

"Corinth" was an important commercial center. The city may have contained over a half-million inhabitants at this time.¹ It stood on the narrow land bridge (isthmus) that connected the southern part of Greece (the Peloponnesus) with the northern part. The southern part and some of the northern part comprised the Roman province of "Achaia," while the province of Macedonia lay immediately to the north of Achaia. Corinth was not only the chief city through which land commerce passed north and south, but it was the center for sea commerce and travelers going east and west.

To the east the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea brought ships to Corinth. From there stevedores transferred their cargoes overland a few miles to ships in the Corinthian Gulf of the Ionian Sea. This shortcut saved merchants the long trip around the southern coastline of Greece. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and the headquarters of a Roman proconsul (governor). It had been the notorious center for the immoral worship of the goddess Aphrodite, and its population was cosmopolitan, consisting of Romans, Greeks, Orientals, and Jews.

Paul and his missionary band had established a church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Jews and Gentiles comprised it. Paul had labored in Corinth a year and a half then. Due to the influence of its culture, as well as that of false teachers, the church experienced many temptations and difficulties. I outlined Paul's dealings with this church, following its founding, in the introduction to this exposition above. In summary, Paul seems to have visited Corinth three times, and the New Testament refers to four letters that he wrote to this church.²

¹Homer A. Kent Jr., *A Heart Opened Wide*, p. 27.

²See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:48-61; Plummer, xiii-xix; Hughes, xvi-xix; and Batey, pp. 143-6.

Paul called the addressees "saints" (Gr. *hagioi*, lit. holy ones, those set apart for God, cf. 1 Cor. 1:2).

"All Christians are 'holy' in virtue, not of their lives, but of their calling; they are set apart in a holy Society as servants and sons of the Holy God."¹

Paul intended that the Corinthian Christians would read this epistle to the church, but he also wanted all the Christians in the province of Achaia to read it. We know that at this time there was another church in nearby Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1) and there may have been one in nearby Athens (Acts 17:34).²

1:2 This greeting expresses Paul's wish that God's "grace" and "peace" would be his readers' portion. He named these benefits in the introductions to each one of his epistles. He meant sustaining grace rather than saving grace, and the peace of God rather than peace with God.

"'Grace to you' means: May God and the Lord give you an abundance of their undeserved gifts."³

"In the protocol of salvation, recognized even in a salutation, *grace* always precedes *peace*. The former is the basis and foundation of the latter; therefore, the order cannot be changed. No man can have peace who has not previously experienced divine grace (cf. 8:9)."⁴

"*Grace* and *peace*, the favour of God and its fruits, comprehend all the benefits of redemption."⁵

The combination of grace and peace in Paul's greeting, both here and elsewhere, unites Greek (*charis*) and Semitic (*shalom*) terms to form an unconventional greeting (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor.

¹Plummer, p. 3.

²Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

³Lenski, p. 810.

⁴Broomall, p. 1261.

⁵Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4.

1:3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phile. 3; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2). Though the general structure of the salutation was typical of the day, the terms that Paul used were uniquely Christian.¹

The familiar language of this verse ("from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ") implies the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is, along with God the Father, the source of grace and peace.

"This could not be so were He [Jesus Christ] a created entity and not the co-eternal and consubstantial Son."²

Furthermore Jesus is "Lord." The Septuagint translation, which uses this title to translate the name "Yahweh" in the Old Testament, may have influenced Paul to use it also for Jesus Christ.³ The contemporary religious terminology of oriental Hellenism (ancient Greek culture) also used this title to denote deity. Whatever the influences on Paul may have been, the term "Lord" undoubtedly implied the deity of Christ.⁴

B. THANKSGIVING FOR COMFORT IN AFFLICTION 1:3-11

In this pericope (section of text) Paul gave thanks to God for the comfort (vv. 3-7) and deliverance (vv. 8-11) that he had experienced recently. He wanted to enable his readers to appreciate what he as an apostle had endured for Christ and the super-abounding comfort that God supplied to compensate for all the afflictions that he had suffered for His sake.

"It [this section] is no mere amiable preamble intended only to cushion the sterner matters which the Apostle is shortly to broach. On the contrary, it is very much of a piece with the

¹See Judith Lieu, "'Grace to You and Peace': The Apostolic Greeting," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 68:1 (Autumn 1985):161-78.

²Hughes, p. 7.

³The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) that was made in the third century B.C.

⁴See J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, p. 198.

major theme of the opening portion of this epistle, namely, Paul's vindication of his own integrity."¹

Paul's main concern in this section was that his readers learn the values of his experiences, not just the facts concerning what had happened to him. Consequently he dealt with these first. He shared the effects of his experiences (vv. 3-7), and then told them about one experience (vv. 8-11).

Paul's almost invariable practice of following salutation with thanksgiving in his epistles was a common feature of secular letters in his day.² Compared with his other epistles, however, there is some difference in this thanksgiving.

"St. Paul usually thanks God for some grace bestowed on those whom he addresses, and hence his omission of the Thanksgiving in the stern letter to the Galatians; here and in 1 Tim. 1:12 he gives thanks for benefits bestowed on himself. But his readers are not forgotten (vv. 6, 7); it is largely on their account that he is so thankful."³

1. Thanksgiving for comfort 1:3-7

1:3 The Greek word translated "blessed" (*eulogetos*) occurs eight times in the New Testament, mostly in Paul's writings. It always occurs with the mention of "God." It expresses both gratitude and adoration (cf. Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3).

"Adored be God! is the expression of the highest veneration and thankfulness."⁴

To Jesus Christ, God is both "God and Father" (cf. John 20:17). In His humiliation as a man, Jesus related to God as His God (cf. Mark 15:34). However within the Godhead, God was Jesus' Father (cf. Heb. 10:7). In other words, God was the God

¹Hughes, p. 9.

²Plummer, p. 5.

³Ibid.

⁴Hodge, p. 4.

of the dependent Jesus in His human nature, but He was the Father of the infinite Christ in His divine nature (cf. 11:31).

"In His eternal being, God was always His Father; in His incarnation as the Messiah, God was His God."¹

God is "the Father of mercies" in two senses. He is their source: all mercies that we enjoy come from Him. Moreover He is the Father characterized by mercy: the merciful Father. The Greek construction permits both senses, and Paul probably intended both.

"Comfort" (Gr. *paraklesis*) is the key word in this section (vv. 3-7) where it occurs 10 times as a noun or a verb. It also appears in 2:7, 8; 5:20; 6:1; 7:4, 6, 7, 13; 8:4, 6, 17; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8, 18; and 13:11. This Greek word means much more than mere sympathy. It communicates the idea of one person standing alongside another in order to encourage and support his friend. The same root word also describes the Holy Spirit who strengthens and guides Christians (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Christ too provides encouragement and support as our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and Helper (Heb. 2:18). Here it is "God the Father" who comforts and consoles the afflicted. Second Corinthians truly is a letter of encouragement.

"There are two things of which God is said to have the monopoly: He is 'the God of *all* grace' and He is 'the God of *all* comfort.' All grace comes from Him, all lasting comfort comes from Him."²

The double designation of God as "the Father of mercies" and the "God of all comfort" was very appropriate to Paul's situation. This description really sets the tone for the first nine chapters of this epistle. This verse has a chiasmic structure: God, Father, Father, God.³

¹Kent, p. 30.

²Harry Ironside, *Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 17.

³A chiasm is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

"The effect of this rhetorical device is to emphasize that the God who is here 'praised' is both (1) Father of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) Father (= source) of mercies."¹

1:4 Paul's idea here seems to be as follows: No matter what variety of affliction we may be experiencing, and no matter what its intensity, God will provide strength and encouragement ("comfort") that is adequate for our need (cf. 12:9).²

"The present tense of the verb ["comforts"] shows that this God of ours comforts us constantly and unfailingly, not spasmodically and intermittently; and He does so in all our affliction, not just in certain kinds of affliction."³

Nevertheless God does not intend for this encouragement and strength to end with our personal benefit. His further purpose is to enable us to become His agents in extending His "comfort" to others in their "afflictions." As God "comforts us in all our afflictions," we are to "comfort" others in any and every one of theirs.

"There is no exception on God's side (Ps. xciv. 19), and there must be none on ours."⁴

"That is the very genius of Christianity. Everything received is received on trust. Everything that you and I have from God we have on behalf of others—the comfort of God, the strengthening of God, the upholding of God, the revelation that God is able to make alive from the dead, and then presently salvation from that death which he [Paul] had

¹Barnett, p. 69.

²See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for a chart of the difficulties that Paul said he faced in this epistle and how he responded to them.

³Hughes, p. 12.

⁴Plummer, p. 10.

feared, on which he had looked with so much trembling."¹

"A life of ease is commonly stagnant. It is only those who suffer much and who experience much of the comfort of the Holy Ghost, who live much. Their life is rich in experience and in resources."²

Similar experiences enable us to sympathize with others and thus to become effective encouragers and comforters. Yet it would be exaggerating to say that only those who have suffered greatly know how to comfort the afflicted.

1:5 Paul personally experienced many afflictions and "sufferings," to which he began to refer here. However note that it is a particular kind of suffering to which he referred: "the sufferings of Christ" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20). These were the sufferings that Paul was experiencing because he belonged to Christ and because he stood up for Christ in a hostile environment.

"Suffering which is the consequence of disobedience and selfishness has no blessing in it and cannot possibly be described as 'of Christ.'"³

"Samuel Rutherford wrote to one of his friends, 'God has called you to Christ's side, and the wind is now in Christ's face in this land: and seeing ye are with Him ye cannot expect the lee-[sheltered] side or the sunny side of the brae [hill].'"⁴

Paul's point in this verse was this: Regardless of how great our sufferings for Christ may be, God will not only match them but exceed them with His comfort, strength, and encouragement.

1:6 Later in this letter we shall see that the Corinthian Christians lacked appreciation for the afflictions that Paul had been enduring in his ministry for them. Some of them had even

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 228.

²Hodge, p. 5.

³Hughes, p. 14. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:20.

⁴William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 190.

concluded that such experiences were not appropriate for one who was an apostle. They believed that their participation or association with Paul's afflictions and sufferings somehow made his apostleship open to question. Since he suffered as they did, he must not be in any way superior to them. Therefore Paul began to deal with this unsympathetic attitude and the incorrect thinking behind it.

Paul had endured sufferings for the "comfort and salvation" (deliverance) of his brethren in Corinth. These sufferings enabled him to comfort them better so that they would patiently bear up under their afflictions for Christ's sake. They could do so until God would grant them deliverance. Paul absorbed the many sufferings that he did so that the Corinthians might not have to endure them.

1:7 The attitude of the Christians in Corinth could have caused Paul to despair, but he said that he was confident ("our hope for you is firmly grounded") that they would continue to function and grow as genuine fruits of God's grace (cf. Phil. 1:6). The basis for his confidence was the fact that they were suffering for Christ like he was ("you are partners of our sufferings"). They were representing Christ in the world. More than that they would flourish because God's super-abounding comfort (encouraging strength) would cause them to stand firm and to withstand patiently the affliction that they were experiencing.

2. Thanksgiving for deliverance 1:8-11

Paul's thanksgiving continues, but its focus shifts from the reason for thanksgiving to details of the situation that provided the occasion for it.

1:8 We cannot identify with certainty the precise "affliction which occurred in Asia" to which Paul referred. This text, and others in the New Testament, do not give us enough information. The fact that Paul did not explain exactly what caused his affliction is significant. Evidently he wanted the Corinthians to focus on the intensity of the affliction as he was feeling it. This is what he emphasized here rather than the specific cause of his suffering. He spoke of his affliction as though the Corinthians

knew about it, so probably they had more information about it than we do.

Commentators have guessed what the specific problem may have been and have come up with many different possibilities. Perhaps Paul was referring to fighting "wild beasts" (1 Cor. 15:21) at Ephesus during the uproar there that Demetrius instigated (Acts 19:23-41), or to some other outbreak of hostility against him at Ephesus. Paul may have had in mind various unspecified trials and plots against his life, a succession of persecutions in Asia, or an attempt to lynch him. Perhaps Paul was referring to a shipwreck, followed by a night and a day in the sea, anxiety over the state of the Corinthian church, a deadly sickness,¹ or Paul's thorn in the flesh.² What we can say for certain about Paul's "affliction" is that the Corinthians failed to appreciate its intensity.

"Hence Paul writes to tell them not *what* it was, but *how* it had oppressed him beyond endurance."³

Whatever his "affliction" was it occurred in the Roman province of "Asia," and it would have been a fatal affliction had God not intervened ("we despaired even of life"). Furthermore it was a suffering connected somehow with Paul's ministry to the Corinthians (v. 6).

"Whatever this *thlipsis* [affliction] may have been, he hints that it was far worse than what the Corinthians had to endure."⁴

1:9-10 "The sentence of death" that Paul felt upon him was the conviction that he was going to die as a result of this affliction.

"The great lesson of this overwhelming affliction which had befallen him was that he (and all who

¹Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 2:2:629; Harris, p. 172.

²See Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 164-74; Hughes, pp. 17-18, for evaluation of some of these theories.

³Hughes, p. 16.

⁴Plummer, p. 17.

are Christ's) should trust, not in self, but in God, 'the Raiser of the dead.'"¹

"The resurrection is a common theme in 2 Corinthians (2:16; 4:7-14; 5:1-10; 13:4)."²

"... in the wake of this trying experience that was tantamount to death there followed a further experience that was tantamount to resurrection."³

"This is, indeed, a theme which provides a key to the whole epistle. Is Paul assailed by anguish of spirit? It is God who always leads him in triumph in Christ (3:13ff.). Do we have the treasure of divine glory in earthen vessels? It is that it may be seen that the exceeding greatness of the power is of God, and not of self (4:7ff.). Is the Apostle always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake? It is that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in his mortal [perishable] flesh (4:10ff.). Is the outward man decaying? Yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16). ... The climax is reached in the twelfth chapter where Paul explains how through the endurance of a 'thorn in the flesh' he was taught that God's grace is all-sufficient and that His power is made perfect in weakness (12:7ff.). This was a principle to which even our Lord submitted in providing our salvation, for He was crucified through weakness, but is alive through the power of God (13:4). It is a theme, therefore, which points to the unity of the epistle, and which in particular links the concluding to the opening chapter."⁴

¹Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 322.

²Dwight L. Hunt, "The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:770.

³Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 322.

⁴Hughes, pp. 20-21.

Some translations (e.g., AV, NKJV) render verse 10, "delivered ... does deliver ... will yet [or "still"] deliver" (past, present, future).¹ The better rendering (e.g., NASB) is, "rescued ... will rescue ... will yet deliver" (past, future, more distant future; see also NIV, ESV).² In either case the meaning is clear: God delivered Paul from this past affliction, He would continue to deliver him from the same or similar afflictions in the future, and He would always and forever deliver him in the far future.

"He says [literally] 'death' rather than 'peril [or "danger"] of death,' because he had regarded himself as a dead man."³

"When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and His eye on the thermometer (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Peter 1:6-7)."⁴

Paul teaches us then that affliction does four things for us: (1) It makes us more sympathetic. (2) It gives us a greater appreciation for God's super-abounding comfort and encouragement, which He brings to us with the affliction. (3) It causes us to trust in God more. And (4) it gives us greater confidence in God's power and therefore greater "hope" for the future.

1:11 Paul seems to have had no doubt that his brothers and sisters in Corinth would continue to pray for him.

"... the Apostle is as secure of the intercession of the Corinthians as he is of God's protection, and the one will contribute to the other."⁵

"Join in helping" is the translation of a Greek word used only here in the New Testament: *synypourgounon*. It consists of

¹AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, and NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

²NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, and ESV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

³Plummer, p. 19.

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:630.

⁵Plummer, p. 20.

three words meaning with, under, and work. It paints a picture of laborers bowed down under some heavy burden that they are working hard together to lift.

"Intercessory prayer has great power, otherwise Paul would not so often solicit it on his own behalf, and enjoin the duty on his readers."¹

"There is no limit to the power of intercessory prayer; and though the display of God's mercy does not depend on it, we may be sure that He desires nothing more than that His people should be united in mutual intercession offered in the name of His Son. When such prayer is answered, it results in an outburst of praise and thanksgiving which redounds [contributes] greatly to God's glory."²

"In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence."³

"My heart always rejoices when anyone writes or says to me, 'I am praying for you,' for I need to be prayed for. I am so forgetful about prayer myself; so many times when I should be praying I am busy at something else, and often if there is any power at all in my messages I know it is because somebody at home or in the audience is praying for me. One owes so much to the prayers of God's beloved people."⁴

"Persons" (Gr. *prosopon*) is literally "faces." A literal rendering presents the attractive picture of "many" faces turned upward toward heaven offering thanks to God for His answers to the united prayers of Paul and his readers. This is doubtless the picture that Paul wanted us to visualize in this verse.

¹Hodge, p. 12.

²R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 44.

³Hughes, p. 23.

⁴Ironside, pp. 33-34.

From this introduction hopefully we have learned a greater appreciation of the encouraging comfort of God, which more than compensates for the afflictions that He allows us to experience in our service for Him.

"In this beautiful introduction Paul found occasion to be thankful in the most trying circumstances. Even suffering has benefits. It provides the occasion to experience God's comfort, to watch Him answer prayer, and to observe how believers can be strengthened in their Christian walk and witness by another's circumstances."¹

"The Arabs have a proverb, 'All sunshine makes a desert.'"²

"Comfort is the great word, comfort from God, comfort for others. So he prepared for whatever he had to say presently of rebuke, by a revelation of great tenderness. He called them to sympathize with him, and he assured them that God had sympathized with him, and that He would sympathize with them as they are asked to sympathize with him. It is the sympathy of sharing the activity of God, Who is the God of all comfort."³

II. ANSWERS TO INSINUATIONS ABOUT THE SINCERITY OF PAUL'S COMMITMENT TO THE CORINTHIANS AND TO THE MINISTRY 1:12—7:16

Second Corinthians is a rather difficult book to outline because it is a very personal letter that flowed from Paul's heart. Even though the development of Paul's thought is traceable, he made many digressions and personal references.

"Traditionally, Paul's two letters to Timothy and one to Titus are called 'the Pastorals.' But 2 Corinthians has a strong claim to be recognized as the Pastoral Epistle *par excellence*,

¹Kent, p. 34. See also Stanley D. Toussaint, "Suffering in Acts and the Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 184-88.

²Barclay, p. 192.

³Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 229.

because it contains not 'pure' but 'applied' *pastoralia* [things having to do with pastoral work]."¹

The same has been said of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul's purpose in writing was not to teach doctrine primarily, though he did so to a considerable extent. It was primarily to answer the criticisms of opponents who were seeking to undermine his ministry, especially in Corinth.

"Here it is his strong feeling rather than any deliberate arrangement that suggests the order of his utterances. Nevertheless, although exact analysis is seldom possible owing to digressions and repetitions, yet some divisions are fairly clear, and the letter becomes more intelligible when they are noted."²

A. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS CONDUCT WITH REGARD TO HIS PROMISED VISIT AND THE OFFENDER 1:12—2:17

In 2 Corinthians Paul was addressing a situation in which his own children in the faith doubted his sincerity and motives. He too had doubts—about their commitment to Jesus Christ and to himself as the Lord's apostle. At the same time Paul also voiced some strong convictions in this epistle, and he sought to move his doubting readers to a condition of greater faith. This section of the epistle introduces this tension.

"Part of the achievement of effective communicators lies in their persuading their audiences that stepping-stones (warrants) do exist by which they can move from doubt to conviction."³

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 314.

²Plummer, p. 22.

³David M. Hay, "The Shaping of Theology in 2 Corinthians: Convictions, Doubts, Warrants," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 137.

1. The postponement of the intended visit 1:12—2:4

In the present section (1:12—2:4) Paul sought to clarify the motives that led him to change his plans to visit the Corinthians. He did so in order to refute false accusations concerning him that were circulating in Corinth.

The sincerity of Paul's conduct 1:12-14

In this first sub-section, which is transitional, Paul's intention was to convince the Corinthians that his recent actions arose from proper motives.

1:12 He first claimed, generally, that his actions did not arise from the motives that drive unbelievers, namely, self-serving ambition ("fleshly wisdom"). Self-serving ambition seems wise to the carnal mind, but Paul's motives resulted from God's "grace" at work in his life. He viewed all of life from the perspective of God's grace and sought not to advance himself but the cause of Christ. He could say what he did unashamedly (with legitimate "proud confidence") and with the testimony of a clear "conscience."

"A certain type of pietism tells the Christian never to boast, at least not about anything in himself. Paul is free from this inhibition. He boasts of his good conscience and his good Christian conduct; in v. 14 he makes the readers of this letter his boast and himself and his assistants in the work the boast of his readers. It is one way of glorifying God for what he has produced in us and through us. Some people are so humble that their humility fails to acknowledge with joy what God has done."¹

"Numerous times in this letter the apostle talks about boasting (2 Cor 1:12, 14; 5:12; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2-3; 10:8, 13, 15-17; 11:10, 12, 16-18, 30; 12:1, 5-6, 9)."²

¹Lenski, p. 835.

²Hunt, 2:771. Bold font omitted.

"The conscience is one's inner consciousness regarding the rightness of his actions."¹

Paul's motives had been "in holiness and godly sincerity," not a mixture of proper and improper motives. Some interpreters believe that "holiness" (Gr. *hagioteti*) should really be "simplicity in the sense of singlemindedness" (Gr. *haploteti*).² The reason for this preference is that this is the only occurrence of *hagiotetes* in Paul's epistles, so it may have this unusual meaning (cf. Heb. 12:10). In either case the point is clear: Paul's motives had been pure in his dealings with all people ("in the world"), and "especially" with the Corinthians.

"The derivation of the word *eilikrinia* [*sic*], translated here and in ii. 17 by *sincerity*, is uncertain. It may refer to the cleansing process of rolling and shaking in a sieve, so that what is purged and winnowed in this way may be regarded as unadulterated (cf. the only other mention of the word by Paul in 1 Cor. v. [*sic* 5:]8). Or it may denote what is found to be unstained when examined in the sunlight. This latter connotation would convey the suggestion in this passage that Paul's character would stand the test of the searching gaze of God."³

"What Paul means here to say is, that the virtues which distinguished his deportment in Corinth were not merely forms of his own excellence, but forms of the divine life; modes in which the Spirit of God which dwelt in him manifested itself."⁴

"We might well add a new beatitude to the list, 'Blessed is the man who has nothing to hide.'"⁵

¹Kent, p. 38.

²E.g., David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 556.

³Tasker, p. 45.

⁴Hodge, p. 14.

⁵Barclay, p. 194.

1:13 Paul seems to have alluded to a criticism of himself in this verse too. Evidently some were saying that, in order to understand Paul's letters to them, his readers had to read between the lines. They implied that he actually intended to say something different than what he had written, or that he was being deliberately obscure.¹ The apostle's claim here was that what he had intended was self-evident in his correspondence: "we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand." There were no hidden meanings or hidden messages. Paul wrote some things that were hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:15-16), true enough, and sometimes he was ironical, but he did not write one thing and mean something else.

The second part of this verse probably goes with verse 14 rather than 13. Put a semicolon in the middle of verse 13, after "understand," and a comma at the end of the verse. There was no punctuation in the original Greek text. "The end" in the text probably refers to the end of the Corinthians' lives.

1:14 Even though Paul's correspondence with them had been straightforward, they had not grasped the greatness of his love for them and how proud he was of them (1 Cor. 4:14; cf. 1 Thess. 2:19-20). They had a legitimate "reason to be proud" of Paul as their spiritual father. And he had a reason to be proud of them as his spiritual children (1 Cor. 4:15).

"This affirmation of affection not only corroborates the complete genuineness of his own attitude towards them, but attests his confidence regarding the authenticity of their profession of faith in the Gospel."²

"The day of our Lord Jesus" is the day when their joy would be complete, namely, when they saw the Lord and stood before Him (5:10-11; cf. Phil. 2:16).

¹Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 19.

²Hughes, p. 29.

The consistency of Paul's conduct 1:15-22

Having claimed singleness of purpose in his dealings with the Corinthians, Paul proceeded to help them appreciate the fact that his behavior had been consistent with his Spirit-led purpose.

"Long-range plans may need to be modified as time goes by. In Paul's case, his original plans were made in good faith with the best information he had at the time. Circumstances had altered, however, and it was necessary to revise those plans."¹

1:15-16 In 1 Corinthians 16:5 Paul had told the Corinthians that he planned to visit them after he had passed through Macedonia. Evidently he was not able to make that trip. There is no evidence in the New Testament that he ever followed this itinerary.

Here we have another plan that Paul evidently sent the Corinthians after he wrote 1 Corinthians. He says that he intended to visit Corinth on his way to "Macedonia," probably from Ephesus, which was his headquarters during this period of his ministry. He then planned to come back through Corinth as he traveled from Macedonia to Judea. This would enable him to see the Corinthians twice for a double visit and a double blessing.

Paul referred to this plan as his original intention ("I was not vacillating when I intended to do this," v. 17). This is not counting what he had written in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 through 8 his projected itinerary had been: Ephesus, Macedonia, Corinth, and then hopefully Jerusalem. However Paul was now, at the time of the writing of 2 Corinthians, in Macedonia, having traveled there from Ephesus by way of Troas, not Corinth (2:13; 7:5; 8:1; 9:2, 4).

To summarize, Paul's plans were as follows: Plan A was to go from Ephesus to Macedonia to Corinth to Jerusalem. Plan B was to go from Ephesus to Corinth to Macedonia back to Corinth and on to "Judea." What Paul actually did was to go from

¹Kent, p. 37.

Ephesus to Corinth back to Ephesus then to Macedonia and back to Corinth.¹

We can see why some of the Corinthians had concluded that, since Paul had not followed through with his plans, they could not count on his word. And so they doubted his love for them.

1:17 Both rhetorical questions in this verse expect a negative answer, as the Greek text makes clear.

"Paul finds it incredible that any at Corinth could really have thought that a change in plan pointed to a change in character."²

Paul claimed that he had not vacillated or followed his "flesh" (his sinful human nature), rather than the Holy Spirit, when he made his plans.

"Ancient literature regularly condemns fickleness and unreliability while praising those who keep their word even under duress."³

"The charge that he is rebutting is probably that of blowing hot and cold with the same breath, and always having a retraction of what he says in reserve. ... St. Paul contends that, though his plans changed, yet his principles did not; he was always loyal to the Gospel and to his converts."⁴

"There is a strong likelihood that Paul was actually quoting some of the phrases used against him. The articles with 'lightness' ["vacillating"], 'yes, yes,' and 'no, no' can be understood as 'the lightness of which I am accused,' and 'the contradictory yesses and nos which you fault me for.'"⁵

¹Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 195.

²Hughes, p. 34.

³Craig S. Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 159.

⁴Plummer, p. 34.

⁵Kent, p. 41.

"Preaching is always 'truth through personality.' And if a man cannot trust the preacher he is not likely to trust the preacher's message. Amongst the Jewish regulations regarding the conduct and character of a teacher, it is laid down that a teacher must never promise anything to a class which he cannot or will not do. To do so is to accustom the class to falsehood."¹

1:18 Paul associated himself with God to reinforce his argument: "as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no."

"The argument is one from 'ethical congruity.' God is faithful in the fact that the Gospel which is proclaimed by His messengers is not a Gospel of duplicity, full of misleading statements and of promises which are not fulfilled."²

"When God speaks His positive does not carry a hidden negative. And so it is also with His chosen Apostle: his word to the Corinthians is not a mixture of yea and nay at the same time, but a faithful yea—sincere, honest, unambiguous."³

"Apparent inconsistency or fickleness may be consistency on the highest level."⁴

1:19 Consistency is not only a trait of God the Father but also of God "the Son."

"The truth asserted is that Christ, the Son of God, had not been manifested among them, or experienced by them to be unsatisfying or uncertain; but *in him* was *yea*. That is, he was simple truth. *In him*, i.e., in Christ, was truth. He

¹Barclay, p. 197.

²Plummer, p. 35.

³Hughes, p. 35.

⁴Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 230.

proved himself to be all that was affirmed of him."¹

"Nothing could be more incongruous than to suspect of insincerity the Apostle whose entire being was dedicated to the service and proclamation of Him who is the Truth and the Same yesterday, today, and forever."²

"Silvanus" was another name for Silas, who, along with "Timothy," had joined Paul in Corinth shortly after his arrival there and had helped him found the church, along with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 17:14-15; 18:1-2, 5).

The movements of Silas and Timothy prior to joining Paul in Corinth seem to have been as follows: They were together with Paul in Berea, but Paul then went to Athens and left Silas and Timothy behind (Acts 17:14-15). Timothy (and perhaps Silas) later joined Paul in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1-2). Timothy then returned to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2) and Silas returned to Macedonia (probably including Philippi; Acts 18:5; Phil. 4:15-16). Paul then moved from Athens to Corinth (Acts 18:1) where Silas and Timothy rejoined him from Macedonia (Acts 18:5).

1:20 God is completely trustworthy—not 90 percent or even 95 percent reliable—and He fulfills His "promises." Therefore "the promises of God," as well as the character of God (v. 18) and the Son of God (v. 19), demonstrate consistency. Paul claimed that his word was as reliable as God's promises (cf. v. 18).

In view of the faithfulness of God, the only proper response is "Amen!" (Let it be so!). The early Christians commonly spoke this word in unison in their meetings in order to affirm the truthfulness of what someone had said (1 Cor. 14:16). They addressed God "through" (in the name of) Jesus Christ.

"How illogical, then, while by their 'Amen' attesting the trustworthiness of God, to suspect

¹Hodge, p. 21.

²Hughes, p. 35.

the trustworthiness of the apostle who taught them to do so! Any charge of inconsistency must be leveled at them, not him."¹

"In short, Paul has argued in vv. 18-20 that as God is faithful, so, too, is Paul's 'word.' His personal 'word' is subsumed within his kerygmatic [preached] 'word.' God's faithfulness is to be seen (1) in the Son of God preached in Corinth as God's unambiguous, unretracted, and now-eternal 'Yes,' and (2) in the fact of all the promises of God having been kept in the Son of God, as proclaimed by the apostles. Likewise 'faithful' is the 'word' of Paul, the minister of the God who speaks unambiguously (cf. 1:13) and who keeps his promises. Their very existence is predicated on it."²

1:21-22 The corporate vocal "Amen" (v. 20) draws attention to the unity of believers with one another as well as with God. Paul had previously developed the idea of sharing with the Corinthians in order to help them appreciate God's consistency—as well as his own consistency in harmony with God's (vv. 3-7). Now he did so also to stimulate their own consistency to be in harmony with his and God's consistency.

God had established Paul and the Corinthians together "in Christ." The phrase "in Christ" expresses, perhaps, the most determinative element in Paul's theology.³ Paul cited three evidences of their spiritual unity: First, they had experienced anointing, as had Christ (the Anointed One). This took place when they trusted in Christ as their Savior. God had poured out the Holy Spirit on them ("anointed" them) equipping them to serve acceptably to the glory of God (1 Cor. 12:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²Barnett, p. 110.

³See James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*.

Second, they had all experienced sealing. A seal in the Roman world signified ownership, authentication, concealment, distinction, attestation, confirmation, and security.¹ Here the idea is primarily ownership and security. God stamps His own invisible mark on every believer (i.e., the Holy Spirit) and thus guarantees his or her preservation as God's child and servant (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; cf. John 6:27). The seal of God, in addition to the promises of God that He will never disown us or allow us to perish (John 10:28; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.), guarantees the believer's eternal security.²

Third, they had received "the" Holy "Spirit" as a down payment of the inheritance that God has promised believers. The "pledge" was earnest money, put down as a deposit, that guaranteed the consummation of a transaction (cf. Gen. 38:17-18). The Greek word translated "pledge" (*arrabona*) also occurs in the Greek papyri (all kinds of common contemporary non-biblical writings in New Testament Greek) and refers to an engagement ring. Such a pledge guarantees that the marriage will take place.³

These three acts of God, which unite believers "in Christ," build to an emotional climax, and they reinforce the solidarity that we believers have with one another and with our consistent God.

"We should not overlook the references to the Trinity in 1:18-22: (1) the certainty given by God (v. 18); (2) the centrality found in Christ (vv. 18-20); (3) the certification established by the Spirit (vv. 21, 22)."⁴

By way of review, Paul's point in this section (vv. 15-22) was that Christians normally behave like Christ. Yet we all know Christians who do not behave consistently. Why did Paul think that this appeal would make the Corinthians conclude that he had been consistent? He was not relying

¹Lenski, p. 855.

²See Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63.

³Tasker, p. 49. See also Barclay, pp. 197-98.

⁴Broomall, p. 1265.

on this argument alone but was simply affirming his own consistency and showing it to be in harmony with the character of the One who had appointed him as an apostle.

"Paul has been showing how the accusation of insincerity and fickleness is entirely incompatible with the Corinthians' own personal knowledge of him and his word, as well as with the character of one to whom God has given stability, anointing, sealing, and the earnest [down payment] of the Spirit. Now he explains why it was that he had found it desirable to make an alteration in his plans: it was to spare them—and the explanation is fortified by a solemn oath."¹

The loving motivation of Paul's conduct 1:23—2:4

1:23 Paul's use of an oath ("I call God as witness to my soul") should not disturb us.

"Our Lord's prohibition of swearing in Matt. 5:33ff. is directed against the casuistry [clever but unsound reasoning] that was prevalent among the Jews of His time, in accordance with which not only was swearing frequent in ordinary speech, but also oaths were regarded as not binding provided the Divine Name had not been invoked and even lies were condoned if unaccompanied by an oath. Such a situation was a grave scandal in the name of religion and truth."²

Swearing in the Bible refers to uttering an oath, not to using profanity, vulgarity, or "dirty" words. Paul staked his "soul" (his life) on the truthfulness of his claim here. He made the decision to postpone his visit to Corinth because he believed that a visit right then would not have been in the Corinthians' best interests.

¹Hughes, p. 46.

²Ibid.

"The gravity of his words indicates that Paul's absence from Corinth remained a matter of deep hurt."¹

1:24 The preceding statement (v. 23) indicates that Paul took on himself much of the responsibility for the Corinthians' welfare. He hastened to clarify that it was as an apostle ("workers with you"), not as their lord, that he regarded himself and behaved toward them as he did (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1, 3). Paul recognized that they needed no human lord because they were comparatively solid in their "faith." The word "joy" (Gr. *chara*) occurs as often in this epistle (1:24; 2:3; 7:4, 13; 8:2) as it does in Philipians (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1).

2:1 This chapter division is artificial. Chapter divisions do not appear in the ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts. Paul now clarified what he meant in 1:23: "to spare you ... I did not come again to Corinth."

"Here is food for thought for all ministers. What grief do they experience over deplorable conditions in their congregations? How many grieve only over what they must personally suffer? How many just settle down to the bad conditions, heave a sigh, adjust themselves, and let it go at that? How many thus become a worse cause for grief than their congregations with their grievous conditions?"²

When had Paul come to the Corinthians "in sorrow"? There is no valid basis for describing his first visit to Corinth, during which he established the church, as a sorrowful one. He had experienced some hard times during the 18 months (Acts 18:11) that he lived there, but generally this visit was pleasant. Paul later referred to his next visit to Corinth as his third visit (12:14; 13:1). Consequently we have reference here to a second visit not recorded in the Book of Acts. The commentators disagree over whether it took place before or

¹Barnett, p. 114.

²Lenski, p. 866.

after the writing of 1 Corinthians. I believe the evidence indicates that it took place after that writing.¹

Note that Paul "decided" "not to come" to them "in sorrow again." This is not the language of a vacillator.

2:2 Who could make Paul "glad" if he came to them and made them "sorrowful"? No one could. The Corinthians certainly could not since he would have made them sorrowful. Paul's point was that, if he came to them and made them sorrowful again, he himself would be sorrowful—since they were his source of joy. Consequently he had decided to postpone his visit. Evidently if Paul had come to them as originally planned he would have had to severely rebuke and/or discipline them for some situation that existed in the church. Instead of doing this, and producing "sorrow" in them, he decided to wait and give them an opportunity to deal with the problem themselves.

2:3 Now Paul referred to a previous letter in which he said he had told them that he would not come to them in "sorrow" again: "the very thing I wrote you." Is this a reference to 1 Corinthians? Some commentators believed that it is.² Nevertheless the lack of an explicit reference to not coming to them again in sorrow in that epistle throws some doubt on this interpretation.

Consequently other commentators have proposed the existence of another letter, and this seems to be the best option. They believed that it was similar to the former letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9, in that it is no longer in existence, and that Paul referred to it here.³ This missing letter is a fairly recent suggestion by the commentators. Traditionally interpreters have understood the reference to be to 1 Corinthians. However, the problem with that view, as mentioned above, is significant (cf. 7:8).

¹Cf. F. F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 183-84.

²E.g., Bernard, 3:47; Hughes, p. 56.

³E.g., Tasker, p 51; Harris, "2 Corinthians," pp. 5-6, 311; Barnett, pp. 10-11; Martin, p. 36.

A third view is that the letter referred to here is actually what we now have in 2 Corinthians 10 through 13, which, it is argued, was originally a separate document.¹

The identification of the unknown letter referred to here does not affect the interpretation of Paul's words here, however important it may be for other reasons. His reference to this former letter ("I wrote you") simply strengthens his point made in verse 2, that when he came to visit them again, he wished to be a source of their "joy," not their and his sorrow. He wanted them to make him joyful too.

"This does not mean merely that it would give them pleasure to see him happy, but also that obedience on their part, and the consequent purity and prosperity of the church, were as necessary to their happiness as to his."²

2:4 Paul's "much affliction" was probably what referred to above (1:8-11). His "anguish of heart" doubtless arose from both his affliction and the condition of the Corinthian church. This verse is one of several in this epistle that gives us a window into the heart of the great apostle. As noted above, 2 Corinthians is one of the most personal of Paul's epistles.

"The chief element of value in this ep. [epistle] is the revelation it gives of the apostle himself."³

Clearly Paul claimed that "love" for the Corinthians moved him to write the severe letter. He wanted to make them repentant and consequently joyful, not oppressed and sorrowful. He wept over them ("I wrote to you with many tears"). Doubtless he wept again when he learned that his readers had misunderstood his best intentions.

"This passage, as Denney says, 'reveals, more clearly perhaps than any passage in the New Testament, the essential qualification of the

¹E.g., Plummer, pp. 44, 49-50.

²Hodge, p. 33.

³Shaw, 2:720.

Christian minister—a heart pledged to his brethren in the love of Christ. ... Depend upon it,' he counsels, 'we shall not make others weep for that for which we have not wept; we shall not make that touch the hearts of others which has not first touched our own.'"¹

"When the offender is made to feel that, while his sin is punished, he himself is loved; and that the end aimed at is not his suffering but his good, he is the more likely to be brought to repentance. Every pastor must see in the apostle's love for the Corinthians, and in the extreme sorrow with which he exercised discipline, in the case of offenders, an instructive example for his imitation."²

"In a manner that calls to mind Jesus' forgiveness of those who caused him pain at the time of the crucifixion (Luke 23:34), Paul responded with a deep expression of overflowing love for those who had failed him."³

Paul had a special affection for the Corinthian believers ("the love which I have especially for you").

"His love for them was more abundant, or greater, than that which he had for any other church. This view is borne out by numerous other passages in these two epistles [i.e., 1 and 2 Corinthians], which go to show that Paul's love for the Corinthian church was, for some reason, peculiarly strong."⁴

Paul's example helps Christian leaders learn how to rebuke when they must. He used severity and rebuke very reluctantly. When he did rebuke, he did it without domineering. He did it

¹Hughes, p. 54. He did not give the source of this quotation.

²Hodge, p. 33.

³Barnett, p. 122.

⁴Hodge, p. 34.

with love in his heart and a desire to see the best in those whom he rebuked.¹

It is often difficult to give up our plans, especially if much prayer and deliberation have gone into making them. What makes this even harder is the possibility of our being misunderstood by others when we make changes in plans that we have announced. But God often leads us just one step at a time, so we must be willing to alter our plans if it is in the best interests of others and the gospel's to do so.

"If you live to please people, misunderstandings will depress you; but if you live to please God, you can face misunderstandings with faith and courage."²

2. The treatment of the offender and the result of the severe letter 2:5-17

In this pericope Paul explained his perspective on the encouraging and discouraging experiences of his recent ministry. He did this in order to let the Corinthians know how he felt about them and to encourage them to adopt his attitude toward ministry. "Ministry" was a favorite term of Paul's. He used it 51 times in its verb and noun forms in his epistles, and 20 of these occur in 2 Corinthians. Its six appearances in chapters 8 and 9 refer to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, which was a particular form of ministry. So its precise meaning is not uniform wherever it occurs.

The treatment of the offender 2:5-11

"Particularly apparent here is Paul's sensitivity as a pastor: He avoids naming the culprit (vv. 5-8); he recognizes that Christian discipline is not simply retributive but also remedial (vv. 6, 7); he understands the feelings and psychological needs of the penitent wrongdoer (vv. 6-8); he appeals to his own conduct as an example for the Corinthians to follow (v. 10); and he is aware of the divisive operation of Satan within the Christian community (v. 11)."³

¹Cf. Barclay, pp. 199-200.

²Wiersbe, 1:634. See also Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 2: "Misunderstanding: Paralyzing Sting of Humanity," pp. 25-34.

³Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 328.

2:5 The person who "caused sorrow" to Paul and the Corinthians seems to have done so by insulting Paul, either when Paul had last been in Corinth or since then. This seems clear from the context of this verse. He was probably either the incestuous person referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1 through 8,¹ or, more likely I think, he was someone who had been rude to Paul, probably by challenging his apostolic authority.² It was probably out of consideration for this man's feelings that Paul did not name him ("if anyone").

2:6-8 Paul commended his readers for disciplining the offender, warned them against overreacting, and urged them to convince him of their "love" for him. He urged this action ("I urge you," v. 8), rather than ordering it, because true Christian love must be spontaneous and unforced or it ceases to be what it professes to be: love. "The majority" (Gr. *hoi pleiones*, v. 6) apparently refers to the greater part of the whole church. The minority may have held out for more severe discipline of this person.³ Or the minority may have favored no discipline. Thus Paul threw the whole weight of his apostolic authority behind forgiving, as he had previously thrown it behind disciplining.⁴

"The apostle combined, therefore, the strictest fidelity with the greatest tenderness. As long as the offender was impenitent and persisted in his offence, Paul insisted upon the severest punishment. As soon as he acknowledged and forsook his sin, he became his earnest advocate. ... Undue severity is as much to be avoided as undue leniency."⁵

¹Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 232; Lenski, p. 876; Hughes, pp. 63-64, 70.

²Plummer, p. 54; Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 328; idem, *The Second ...*, p. 227; Tasker, p. 52; Barnett, p. 124; Kent, pp. 46, 115.

³Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 229.

⁴See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:12:8-9.

⁵Hodge, p. 37.

By accepting the offender, after he repented, the church would be confirming the Lord's forgiveness of him (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Luke 17:3; John 20:23).

"Discipline which is so inflexible as to leave no place for repentance and reconciliation has ceased to be truly Christian; for it is no less a scandal to cut off the penitent sinner from all hope of re-entry into the comfort and security of the fellowship of the redeemed community than it is to permit flagrant wickedness to continue unpunished in the Body of Christ."¹

2:9 This action ("reaffirm your love for him," v. 8) would also show that the church accepted Paul's apostolic authority. This was a "test" of their obedience to his authority ("whether you are obedient in all things"). The reference to a previous letter ("I also wrote") seems to be another allusion to the severe letter (vv. 3-4).

"Obedience to legitimate authority is one of the fruits and evidences of Christian sincerity. A rebellious, self-willed, disobedient spirit is a strong indication of an unsanctified heart."²

2:10-11 Paul united in spirit with his readers. Indeed, he had taken the initiative and "forgiven" the offending Corinthian even before the other Corinthian Christians had. Paul deliberately understated the seriousness of the offense so that no one would imagine that he considered himself virtuous for granting forgiveness readily.³ This is the strongest evidence that the offense was not incest (1 Cor. 5:1), which is a very serious offense.

Paul had forgiven the offender "in the presence of Christ," namely, with the awareness that Jesus Christ was observing him. Jesus had taught that forgiveness of one another is a condition for receiving forgiveness from the heavenly Father

¹Hughes, pp. 66-67.

²Hodge, p. 39.

³Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 329.

within the family of God (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35; cf. Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32). The apostle had also forgiven this person in order to preserve the unity that he enjoyed with this church ("for your sakes"). He had also forgiven the offender in order to frustrate Satan's desire to create discord in the church ("we are not ignorant of his schemes," v. 11) and between the church and Paul ("that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan," v. 11). Note that "Satan" is a personal being. What are Satan's "schemes"?

"His devices are, first, tolerate sin, and then if you won't do that but you deal with sin in discipline, then never forgive."¹

The major emphases in these verses are: unity, moderation, and encouragement in the face of the offender problem.

Paul's recent journey to Macedonia 2:12-13

The reason that Paul included the information in these transitional verses appears to have been in order to help his readers appreciate his anxious concern for their welfare, which "Titus" was going to report to him. It was, further, in order to explain the reason for his movements. Paul did not leave "Troas" because he was acting on the emotions of the moment but because he had a deep concern for the Corinthians. This is the last of Paul's explanations of his recent conduct in this epistle.

Paul had returned to Ephesus from Corinth following his painful visit to the Corinthian church. He then dispatched Titus to Corinth with the severe letter. Paul may have originally left for Troas because of the riot that Demetrius provoked in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). Evidently he had planned to leave Ephesus anyway, since he had arranged to meet Titus in Troas or Macedonia. Paul left Troas and then moved west into the province of Macedonia, because he felt distressed over the opposition in Ephesus, the situation in Corinth, and his concern for Titus (7:5-7).

Thanksgiving for a share in Christ's triumph 2:14-17

"The passage that follows (2:14—7:4) is the longest coherent [unified and reasoned] section within 2 Corinthians and is,

¹Ironside, p. 59.

arguably, the centerpiece of the entire letter. Nonetheless, it is not freestanding, but continuous with what precedes it."¹

Paul's recollection of his happy reunion with Titus in Macedonia, and the good news that his "brother" (v. 13) had brought from Corinth, triggered the following so-called "great digression," which was "a noble digression of irrepressible gratitude."² The Corinthians, Paul learned from Titus, had responded favorably to his severe letter. The apostle viewed their response as a divine vindication of his apostleship and a triumph of divine grace in the Corinthians' hearts.

"... 2.14-7.4 is a lengthy digression on Paul's part, caused by the contrast between the agitation of mind which he has just described and his present sense of relief and rejoicing."³

"... one thought leads on to another in an outpouring of spiritual wealth unsurpassed in any other of his epistles."⁴

2:14 Paul's outburst of praise ("thanks be to God") sprang from his deep-seated conviction that God's working in and through him, regardless of the appearance of the set-back just mentioned, proceeded on triumphantly. This viewpoint is one of the great emphases of this epistle. Jesus Christ is, without exception, continuing to advance His work. He is building His church and the gates of hell are not prevailing against it (Matt. 16:18). Because Paul and the Corinthians were "in Christ," they shared in this triumph.

"The major objection to the hypothesis that 2 Cor. 2:14 is the beginning of a new letter, one of several said to have been combined to create 2 Corinthians, is the fact that such a letter has no clearly defined ending."⁵

¹Barnett, p. 137. See also Carson and Moo, pp. 436-38.

²Plummer, p. 67.

³Bruce, p. 187.

⁴Hughes, p. 77.

⁵Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Paul and Macedonia: The Connection Between 2 Corinthians 2.13 and 2.14," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985):99.

"The thesis of this article is that it was the resonances of the term 'Macedonia' in 2.13 that switched Paul's thoughts into the channel evidenced in 2.14-17."¹

Paul compared the irresistible advance of the gospel, in spite of temporary setbacks, to a Roman "Triumph."

"In Paul's mind there is the picture of a Roman *Triumph* and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honour which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph. Before he could win it he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war. In an actual Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First, there came the state officials and the senate. Then there came the trumpeters. Then there were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shew-bread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then there came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the wretched captives, the enemy princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to

¹Ibid., p. 100.

be executed. Then there came the lictors [minor judicial officials] bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres. Then there came the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. And then there came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at the top of it, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him there rode his family, and finally there came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *lo triumphe!* their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the shouting, cheering crowds, it was a tremendous day, a day which might happen only once in a lifetime. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He sees the conquering Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in that conquering train. It is a triumph which, Paul is certain nothing can stop. We have seen how in that procession there were the priests swinging the incense-filled censers. Now to the general and to the victors the perfume from the censers would be the perfume of joy and triumph and life; but to the wretched captives who walked so short a distance ahead it was the perfume of death, for it stood for the past defeat and their coming execution. So Paul thinks of himself and his fellow apostles preaching the gospel of the triumphant Christ. To those who will accept it, it is the perfume of life, as it was to the victors; to those who refuse it, it is the perfume of death as it was to the vanquished. Of one thing Paul was certain—not all the world could defeat Christ. He lived not in pessimistic fear, but in the glorious optimism

which knew the unconquerable majesty of Christ."¹

"... during a triumph, sweet spices were thrown about or burnt in the streets ... As the fact of the triumph, or approach of the triumphal procession, was made known by these odours far and wide, so God diffuses by our means, who are the materials of His triumph, the sweet odour of the knowledge of Christ (who is the Triumpher, Col. ii. 15)."²

"The metaphor is at the same time triumphal and antitriumphal. It is as God leads his servants as *prisoners of war* in a victory parade that God spreads the knowledge of Christ everywhere through them. Whereas in such victory processions the prisoners would be dejected and embittered, from this captive's lips comes only thanksgiving to God, his captor. Here is restated the power-in-weakness theme (cf. 1:3-11) that pervades the letter."³

2:15-16 Paul also compared the apostles to the "fragrance" of the incense. Those who preach the gospel are pleasing to God ("a fragrance of Christ to God") regardless of the response of those who hear it. "From death to death" (v. 16) probably means from the death of Christ, that the apostles preached in the gospel, to the eternal death of those who reject it. "From life to life" (v. 16) probably means from the resurrection of Christ, that they preached in the gospel, to the eternal life of those who believe.⁴ The role of herald of Christ is a high calling, and no one is "sufficient" in himself or herself for this task. We all need the grace of God.

¹Barclay, pp. 204-6. See also Josephus' description of the Triumph of Vespasian and Titus in Rome after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, in *The Wars of the Jews*, 7:5:4-6.

²Alford, 2:2:640.

³Barnett, p. 150.

⁴Ibid., p. 154.

"Christ undertook a battle not rightly his; we share in a triumph not rightly ours."¹

The day of Christ's triumph that Paul envisioned was His return to the earth at His Second Coming. After the Roman Republic ended and the Roman Empire began, in 27 B.C., only emperors received triumphs.²

2:17 Many itinerant teachers and philosophers in Paul's day peddled the Word of God. That is, they proclaimed it for what they could get out of doing so. This involved watering it down and changing its meaning for personal reasons. All was not well in Corinth in this respect.

"Here we have for the first time in the Epistle a passage that is manifestly polemical [i.e., involving strongly critical speech]."³

Nevertheless Paul claimed absolute "sincerity" (cf. v. 12). His only desire was the glory of God, the advancement of the gospel, and the progress of His people. The proofs of his sincerity were his divine commission, his sense of divine dependence and responsibility, and his divine authority and power. Like a spiritual physician Paul did not dilute or add other ingredients to the medicine that brings life, the Word of God.⁴ He gave it out full strength.

"... adulterating ... originally signifies any kind of huckster or vender, but especially of wine,—and thence, from the frequency of adulteration of wine ..."⁵

"How is Paul able confidently to attribute such negative motives to these men, while expecting his own claim 'of sincerity' to be accepted? It appears that he is appealing to the known fact

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 332.

²Keener, p. 164.

³Plummer, p. 73.

⁴Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 332.

⁵Alford, 2:2:641. Bold type omitted.

that these men have received some material benefit from the Corinthians (cf. 11:20), whereas Paul deliberately refused payment from them (11:7-12; 12:13-16)."¹

We must grasp today Paul's perspective on the unfailing success of God's work in the world and of those of us who participate in it. We must do so in order to view life realistically and to avoid the discouragement that is caused by the apparent failure of many of our best intended activities (cf. Isa. 55:10-11).

B. PAUL'S EXPOSITION OF HIS VIEW OF THE MINISTRY 3:1—6:10

The apostle proceeded to explain his view of Christian ministry further so his readers would appreciate and adopt his viewpoint and not lose heart.

1. The superiority of Christian ministry to Mosaic ministry 3:1-11

Paul contrasted the ministry of Christians with the ministry of Moses. He did so to enable his readers to understand and appreciate the glory of their ministry and its superiority over that of the Mosaic economy.

"The countermissionaries in Corinth are, in some significant way, exponents of the Mosaic ministry. They are, to use the term imprecisely, 'Judaizers.'"²

Testimonial letters 3:1-3

3:1 The preceding verses could have drawn offense from the Corinthians because Paul told them things about himself that they already knew and should have remembered. He mentioned these things as though they were new. He explained that his intention was not to introduce himself to them again in a self-commending fashion. "Letters" written with pen and ink for this purpose were superfluous since they had already

¹Barnett, p. 157.

²Ibid., pp. 160-61.

received a much better letter "of commendation": He had lived his life among them like an open book.

"Evidently one of the charges brought against him was that he was always asserting himself and singing his own praises,—of course because nobody else praised him. A man who has often to speak with authority is open to this kind of criticism, and there are passages in I Cor. which would lend themselves to such a charge: ii. 6-16, iii. 10, iv. 3, 14-21, ix. 1-6, xi. 1, xiv. 18."¹

Representatives of the Jewish authorities in Judea carried "letters of commendation" (letters that recommended them) to the synagogues of the Dispersion (cf. Acts 9:2; 22:5).² The early Christians evidently continued this practice (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1). Paul contrasted himself with the legalistic teachers of Judaism and early Christianity who believed that observance of the Mosaic Law was essential for justification and sanctification (cf. Acts 15:5).

3:2 The Corinthian Christians themselves were such letters ("You are our letter") that God had written ("in our hearts"). "Our" probably refers to Paul and his fellow missionaries.

"A thing is said to be written in the heart when it is a matter of consciousness [cf. Jer. 31:33; Rom. 2:15; Heb. 8:10] ... Any thing of which a man is certain, or of which he has a conviction founded upon his inward experience, may be said to be written on his heart [cf. Rom. 10:8]. ... Any thing also that is very dear to us is said to be written on the heart, or to be in the heart [cf. 7:3]."³

God's method of commending the gospel to others is through the supernatural change that He writes on the lives of believers by His Holy Spirit. In this instance the transformation of the Corinthians' lives was the strongest proof of the genuineness

¹Plummer, p. 76.

²See Barclay, p. 207, for a secular letter of commendation from this time.

³Hodge, pp. 50-51.

of Paul's apostleship. That transformation was obvious to everyone. For Paul to ask for other letters commending him was unnecessary. What God had said about Paul—by blessing his ministry with fruit in Corinth—spoke more eloquently than any letter that he could have carried with him.

"Proof of Paul's genuineness was to be found not in written characters but in human characters."¹

"Professing Christians are the Bible that men read and know."²

"There is not so powerful a sermon in the world, as a consistent Christian life."³

3:3 Paul's ministry, and the ministry of all Christians, consists of being the instruments through whom Christ writes the message of regeneration on the lives ("tablets of human hearts") of those who believe the gospel. He does this by "the Spirit of the living God."

What makes a good letter? First, a good letter must be legible, easy to read. Living epistles of Christ should be easily read, not confusing to the "reader." Second, a good letter should contain clear, definite statements. Readers should not be baffled by the statements that the letter makes. Third, a good letter should reveal the personality of the one who writes it. Christian "letters" should also reveal the personality of "Christ," who has made them and sent them to communicate His mind.⁴

"The Corinthian church is a letter of which Christ is the author; Paul is either the messenger by whom it was 'delivered' (Gk. *diahonetheisa*, 'ministered' or 'administered') or perhaps the amanuensis [assistant] who took it down; it was

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 334.

²A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:220.

³Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1235.

⁴Ironside, pp. 72-74.

'written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.' This contrast between 'ink' and 'Spirit' reminds Paul of the contrast between the old covenant and the new, but in view of the material on which the Decalogue, the old covenant code, was engraved, he thinks not of parchment or papyrus (which would have been suitable for 'ink') but of 'tablets of stone' as contrasted with 'tablets of human hearts' (lit. 'tablets, hearts of flesh') on which the terms of the new covenant are inscribed."¹

The old and new covenants 3:4-11

3:4 "Christ" had given Paul "confidence" that the changes that the gospel had produced in the Corinthians validated his apostolic credentials. That confidence was not merely the product of Paul's imagination.

3:5 Paul did not want his readers to confuse this Spirit-inspired confidence with the fleshly human confidence that comes from feeling "adequate" or self-sufficient. Our service is actually "God" working through us rather than our independent service of Him. God is the One who makes us adequate servants (cf. 4:7-15; 5:18; 6:4; 12:7-10). Paul was contrasting God-confidence with self-confidence.

"Christianity is not the natural life lived on a higher plane. It is a divine life manifested in the energy of the Holy Spirit."²

3:6 Paul proceeded to identify seven contrasts between "a new covenant" (agreement, Gr. *diatheke*), under which Christians serve God, and the Old Covenant, under which believing Israelites served God before Christ instituted the New Covenant. Paul did so in order to heighten the Corinthians' understanding of, and appreciation for, the ministry of Christians. The other covenant in view is the Mosaic Covenant,

¹Bruce, pp. 189-90. Cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26.

²Ironside, pp. 74-75.

and the New Covenant is the covenant that Jesus Christ inaugurated with His death (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 9:21; 11:25; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 13:20).¹ Paul used the Greek word *kainos* ("new" in time and in quality) to describe the New Covenant.

The New Testament uses *diatheke* ("covenant") exclusively to describe an arrangement that one person makes—like in a last will and testament—which another party may accept or reject but cannot change. In contrast, the Greek word *syntheke* describes a mutual agreement reached between two parties.

The Old Covenant was very specific concerning human responsibilities. It was essentially an objective, external standard that God revealed for His people Israel devoid of any special enabling power to keep it. However the New Covenant rests on promises that include the indwelling and empowering presence of God's Holy "Spirit" who enables the believer to obey (John 14:17; 16:13; Acts 1:4-5, 8; Rom. 8:4). It is also more general in its demands.

The outcomes or results of each covenant differ too. The Old Covenant "kills" people in the sense that it showed how impossible it was to measure up to God's requirements. Moreover, it announced a death sentence on all who fell short of complete obedience (cf. Rom. 7:9-11; Gal. 3:10). The New Covenant, on the other hand, leads to fullness of "life" because God's "Spirit" helps the believer to do God's will (cf. Rom. 7:6; 8:3).

Paul used "Spirit" in this passage in a double sense. On the one hand, he contrasted "the letter" (exact wording) of the Old Covenant with "the Spirit" of the New Covenant. Here "Spirit" means "spirit" (true intention). On the other hand, he contrasted the non-enabling, external words of the Old Covenant with the enabling, internal Holy "Spirit" of the New

¹See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305; 608 (October-December 1995):431-56.

Covenant (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 7:6).¹ The second of these senses is more primary.

"'The letter' is a Paulinism for the law, as 'spirit' in these passages is his word for the relationships and powers of new life in Christ Jesus. Here in ch. 3 is presented a series of contrasts between law and spirit, between the old covenant and the new. The contrast is not between two methods of interpretation, literal and spiritual, but between two methods of divine dealing: one, through the law; the other, through the Holy Spirit."²

"... experience has taught St Paul that the embrace of the Law has now become deadly. It is effete [weak] and cannot adapt itself to the new conditions. It is purely external; 'Thou shalt not do this overt act,' 'Thou shalt do this overt act.' It has no power to set free and strengthen the moral elements in man. It makes heavy demands, but it gives nothing. It commands and imposes a punishment for disobedience; but it gives no power or encouragement to obey. The spirit of Christianity is the opposite of this. It is a living force. Instead of pressing the man down from without, it lays hold of him from within; it supplies, not slavish rules, but emancipating principles. It enriches and quickens those who welcome it, and it makes them both desirous and able to follow its inspirations."³

It is important to remember that Paul was speaking of the Mosaic Covenant when he spoke of the law ("the letter") here. He was not referring to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible),

¹ See Paul R. Thorsell, "The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant According to Paul," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):397-413.

² *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1254. See also Gaebelein, 3:2:162.

³ Plummer, pp. 87-88.

which Christ referred to as "the Law," which He came to fulfill and that would never disappear (Matt. 5:17-18).

3:7-8

Another contrast between the two covenants concerns the medium that God used to deliver each one to His people. He employed "letters on stone" tablets for the Old Covenant but "the Spirit" for the New Covenant. These vehicles represent the nature of each covenant: hard and unbending compared to personal and friendly.

Another contrast is the relative "glory" of the ministries that marked the divine-human economies that the covenants created. "Glory" is a key word in this section of the epistle. It occurs 19 times in chapters 1 through 8, and 15 of these references appear in chapters 3 and 4. "Glory" appears as a noun and a verb 10 times in verses 7 through 11. Both covenants involved ministry to God that resulted in glory for God.

However the glory of the New Covenant far surpasses the glory of the Old Covenant. Here Paul was thinking about the glory that appeared on Moses' face when he descended from Mt. Sinai after he had communed with God for 40 days and nights (Exod. 34:29-35). That "glory" (i.e., the manifest evidence of God's presence) was so strong when Moses reentered the camp that the Israelites "could not look intently at" his face. The evidence of God's presence was very strong during the Mosaic economy, when a covenant leading to condemnation and death (vv. 6, 9) governed God's people. How much stronger, Paul argued, would be the manifestation of God's glory in an age when His life-giving Spirit inhabits His people?

3:9

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

The purpose of the New Covenant is to produce "righteousness." The purpose of the Old Covenant was to

show that humans stand condemned because we cannot please God by obeying Him completely. Both covenants had both purposes, but their primary characteristics are what Paul contrasted here. This is Paul's sixth contrast.

3:10 The New Covenant glorifies God so much more than the Old Covenant did that, by comparison, Paul could say the Old Covenant had "no glory."

3:11 Paul's seventh and last contrast is between the temporary character of the Old Covenant and the permanent character of the New Covenant. The New will remain (cf. Heb. 13:20). The Old has faded away (cf. Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:1; Heb. 7:12). Paul compared the fading glory on Moses' face with the fading glory of the Old Covenant.¹

"These verses (7-11) show what a revolution had taken place in the mind of St Paul since he had exchanged the Law for the Gospel. Christianity is so superior to Judaism that it has extinguished it. Even in its best days, when it also was a Divine revelation to the human race, Judaism had a glory which was infinitesimal compared with that which was inaugurated by Christ."²

The New Covenant went into effect and replaced the Old Mosaic Covenant when Jesus Christ died. Some of its benefits began to bless all people immediately (vv. 6-11; cf. Heb. 10:1-18). However its other benefits, specifically those for Israel, will not take effect until God resumes dealing with Israel as a nation (Jer. 31:31-34). This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and restores Israel as her Messiah.

SUMMARY OF CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

1.	economy	(old)	new	v. 6
2.	type	letter	spirit	v. 6

¹See Duane A. Garrett, "Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:4 (December 2010):729-72.

²Plummer, p. 92.

3.	result manward	death	life	v. 6
4.	vehicle	stone	Spirit	v. 7
5.	result Godward	some glory	greater glory	vv. 7, 8, 10
6.	purpose	condemnation	righteousness	v. 9
7.	duration	temporary	permanent	v. 11
8.	symbol	veil	mirror	vv. 13-18
9.	initiator	Moses	Christ	vv. 12-14

"The thrust of these covenantal contrasts is that the New Covenant provides divine enablement and has replaced the Old Covenant. In this way Paul firmly established the superiority of his apostolic ministry over that of his Judaizing opponents."¹

Paul was not saying that the Old Covenant involved laws but the New Covenant does not. Both covenants include both laws and grace, though there were more laws in the Old Covenant and there is more grace in the New (cf. John 1:17). His purpose was to contrast the spirit, emphasis, and primary characteristics of each covenant.

"In II Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul makes the comparison between what is ministered through Moses and what is ministered through Christ. That which Moses ministered is called a ministration of death and it is specifically said to have been written and engraved in stones. The only part of the Mosaic Law which was written in stones was the Ten Commandments—that category which some designate as the moral part of the law. Thus, this passage says that the Ten Commandments are a ministration of death; and furthermore, the same passage declares in no uncertain terms that they are done away (vs. 11). Language could not be clearer, and yet

¹Randall C. Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts in 2 Corinthians 3:1-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:613 (January-March 1997):78.

there are fewer truths of which it is harder to convince people."¹

The Christian's relationship to the Ten Commandments is as follows: God has terminated the whole Mosaic Code (the Old Covenant), of which the Ten Commandments were a part, as a code. We are now under a new code (the New Covenant, also called the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), which contains nine of the Ten Commandments.² The only one of the Ten Commandments that has not been carried over into the New Covenant is the fourth commandment (sabbath observance).

2. The great boldness of the new ministers 3:12—4:6

The superiority of Christian ministry should produce great openness and encouragement for Christ's ministers. Paul developed these qualities in this section in order to enable his readers to understand his behavior and so that they would respond in like manner in their own ministries.

The openness of Christian ministry 3:12-18

"If the keyword in vv. 7-11 is 'glory,' the keyword for vv. 12-18, of which vv. 12-15 form the first part, is 'veil'; 'veil'-related words occur six times in these verses."³

3:12 The "hope" to which Paul referred was the confidence that he and the other apostles and Christians served God under a covenant that God would not supersede (set aside or replace).⁴ Another view is that Paul resumed his thought from verse 4, and that this hope is the same as the confidence that he spoke of there.⁵ I prefer the first view. The "boldness" (Gr. *parrhesia*) to which Paul referred is plainness of speech, which has within it our concept of fearlessness (7:4; cf. Rom. 1:16). The Greek word originally meant fearless candor in speech, but

¹Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):243-44. See also Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

²See also Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 68-97.

³Barnett, p. 188.

⁴Plummer, p. 95; Hughes, p. 107.

⁵E.g., Hodge, p. 64.

it came to mean confidence or openness in act as well as in word.¹ Christians can be confident and certain in our mission as well as in our message, though here Paul was speaking specifically of his speech.

3:13 One meaning of *parrhesia* ("boldness," v. 12) is barefacedness. Paul could be barefaced (without a veil) in his confidence because of the permanent character of the covenant under which he ministered. Moses, in contrast, could not. He ministered with a literal "veil over his face" much of the time (Exod. 34:29-35). He removed the veil when he spoke with the people (Exod. 34:33) and when he spoke with God in the tabernacle. But he wore it at other times, evidently in order to teach the Israelites their unworthiness to behold God's glory. Paul used this difference in ministry to illustrate the superior nature of the New Covenant.

Moses also put a veil over his face so the departure of his "fading" glory would not discourage the Israelites. The Old Testament does not say that was his reason. It implies that Moses covered his face so the Israelites would not see the glory that was there. Perhaps Paul meant that the consequence of Moses' putting the veil over his face was that the Israelites could not see the fading of his facial glory.²

"First, it might be that the people obeyed Moses out of fear because of the glory on his face, and when it began to fade, he veiled his face so they would continue to obey. Second, the Israelites expressed fear in having God speak to them (Exod 20:19), and so they asked Moses to be their mediator. The veil may symbolize this separation

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 339. See also W. C. van Unnik, "The Christian's Freedom of Speech in the New Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 44:2 (1962):466-88; and idem, "'With Unveiled Face,' and Exegesis of 2 Corinthians iii 12-18," *Novum Testamentum* 6:2-3 (1963):153-69.

²J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 4 vols., vol. 3: *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner, p. 144.

the Israelites wanted to maintain between themselves and the glory of God."¹

Paul implied that Christians can behold God's glory more fully under the New Covenant, and it will not fade away.

3:14-15 Paul said that inability to perceive God's revealed glory persists to "this very day" among the Jews (cf. Rom. 11:7).

"The Israelites' inability to see the glory shining from Moses' face, fading though that glory was, is treated as a parable of their descendants' present inability to realize the transitory character of the Mosaic order and to recognize the unfading glory of the gospel dispensation."²

"This is always the result of refusing and suppressing the revelation of divine truth. A veil of intellectual darkness hides the glory which has been deliberately rejected."³

"The old covenant" refers to the Mosaic Law in verse 14, and "Moses" (v. 15) probably refers to the whole legal system that Moses passed on to the Israelites. This use of "Moses" is a common figure of speech called metonymy, in which the name of one thing is used for that of another associated with or suggested by it—as in "the White House has decided" instead of "the President has decided." What has been "removed in Christ" (v. 15) is "the veil" (v. 16).

3:16 Only when the light of the glory of God from Jesus Christ shines on a person (i.e., when he or she receives the gospel) can that individual fully understand what God has revealed. Before God Himself removes that "veil," that person cannot understand divine revelation clearly. This applies to all people, but in the context Paul was speaking of Jews particularly. Whenever a person comprehends that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4), that one can understand that the dispensation of

¹Hunt, 2:779.

²Bruce, p. 192.

³Hughes, p. 111.

grace has superseded the dispensation of the law (John 1:17).¹ "Turns to the Lord" means places faith in Jesus Christ.

3:17 This verse explains the former one. "The Spirit of the Lord" (cf. vv. 3, 6, 8) is the member of the Trinity who enables a person to understand and believe that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. Paul here described the Spirit's function and equated Him with Christ (cf. v. 14). Believing in Jesus liberates one from sin, death, and the Mosaic Law—but not from the obligation to respond obediently to God's new revelation in Christ, of course. Even though "the Lord is the Spirit," His presence liberates the believer rather than enslaving him or her ("there is freedom," cf. Rom. 8:15).

"Christian freedom is not license; it is the free acceptance of the ties of affection instead of the enforced acceptance of bonds of fear."²

3:18 In conclusion, Paul referred to Christian experience in general. All Christians ("we all"), not just the Israelites' leader Moses, experience transformation daily as they contemplate "the glory of the Lord" revealed in His Word—and especially in the living Word, Jesus Christ. The perception of that revelation is still indirect ("as in a mirror"). Paul's point was that the "image" of God that we see in the Word accurately reflects God, though we do not yet see God Himself. What we see in the "mirror" of God's Word is "the Lord," not ourselves. We experience gradual transformation ("from glory to glory"). As we observe Christ's "glory" we advance in Christ-likeness and reflect His glory—not in our faces necessarily, but in our characters (cf. Ps. 84:7; 2 Pet. 3:18).

"You remember [Nathanael] Hawthorne's story of 'The Great Stone Face.' He tells of a lad who lived in the village below the mountain, and there upon the mountain was that image of the great stone face, looking down so solemnly, so seriously, upon the people. There was a legend that some day

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 338.

²Plummer, p. 104.

someone was coming to that village who would look just like the great stone face, and he would do some wonderful things for the village and would be the means of great blessing. The story gripped this lad, and he used to slip away and hour after hour would stand looking at that great stone face and thinking of the story about the one that was coming. Years passed, and that one did not come, and still the young man did what the boy had done, and went to sit and contemplate the majesty, the beauty of that great stone face. By and by youth passed away and middle age came on, and still he could not get rid of that legend; and then old age came, and one day as he walked through the village someone looked at him and exclaimed, 'He has come, the one who is like the great stone face!' He became like that which he contemplated. If you want to be Christlike, look at Jesus. If you want to grow in grace, contemplate Jesus. You find Him revealed in the Word, so read your Bible and meditate upon it."¹

"I recall that Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer at the Dallas Theological Seminary used to stop us when we would sing the song, 'Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord' by William D. Longstaff. He would say, 'Change that first line. Let us sing "Take time to behold Him."' Do you want to be holy? Then behold Him."²

This "glory" will not fade away but will increase over time ("from glory to glory"), if we continue to contemplate "the glory of the Lord." "The Spirit," who is one with "the Lord" in substance, power, and "glory" is responsible for this gradual transformation.³ Note the equality of "the Lord" (Jesus Christ) and "the Spirit" (the Holy Spirit) in this verse and the previous

¹Ironside, p. 92.

²J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:100.

³See Robert A Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):141-54.

verse ("the Lord is the Spirit"); they are equally God. Another interpretation is that Christ seen as Divine Wisdom is the mirror in view.¹

"Moses *reflected* the glory of God, but you and I may *radiate* the glory of God."²

"... Paul may also have in mind the Semitic idiom in which 'to uncover the face (head)' means 'to behave boldly (frankly).' If so, then 'with unveiled face' has practically the same meaning as 'with boldness' (Gk *parrhesia*) and may help to explain Paul's use of the latter expression in verse 12."³

The encouragement of Christian ministry 4:1-6

4:1 Paul now returned to the theme of being a minister of the New Covenant (3:6). Since Christians have a ministry in which the Spirit opens people's eyes and transforms their characters, we need not "lose heart." Our job is not simply to lay God's high standards on people, as Moses did, but to herald a life-giving message (the gospel) to them as the Holy Spirit's agents. Paul acknowledged that God has given us this privilege by His "mercy," not because we deserve to be the ministers of a superior covenant.

"... since the glory of the new covenant ministry 'remains' (3:11), as opposed to the old that is 'abolished' (3:11), it is appropriate that the new covenant minister 'remains,' that is, 'perseveres,' 'does not give up.'"⁴

"It is difficult to decide whether the 1st pers. plur. ["we"] Includes Timothy or anyone else.

¹Keener, p. 170.

²Wiersbe, 1:640.

³Bruce, p. 193.

⁴Barnett, p. 212.

Apparently the Apostle is thinking mainly of himself."¹

"The sense of 'mercy' received from God, makes men active for God (I Tim. 1:11-13)."²

4:2 In view of the transforming power of the gospel, Christians do not need to resort to disgraceful subtleties and subterfuge when presenting it. Paul's critics in Corinth were apparently accusing him of deceitful behavior (cf. 7:2; 12:16). He continues here his self-defense from 2:17. Paul did not need to trick his hearers because the Spirit would enlighten them concerning the truth and transform their characters. The Greek word translated "distorting" in its noun form, *dolos*, is used of bait for fish. Some of the Corinthians may have concluded that, because Paul did not require obedience to the Mosaic Law, he was thus watering down the gospel to make it more acceptable. They apparently accused him of preaching a form of "easy believism."

"In any self-defense, self-commendation must play some part. But Paul's self-commendation was distinctive. He commended himself, not by self-vindication at every point, but simply by the open declaration of the truth (in particular, the gospel and its implications). His appeal was not directed to a partisan spirit or the prejudices of men but 'to every man's conscience.' His self-commendation was undertaken with God as onlooker."³

"He who is not honest with himself will not be overhonest with the Word."⁴

4:3-4 By "veiled" here Paul meant obscure. The reason some people did not immediately understand and believe the gospel is that "the god of this world" had "blinded" their "minds." It was not

¹Plummer, p. 110.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1237.

³Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 340.

⁴Lenski, p. 955.

because Paul had sought to deceive his hearers by making the gospel obscure. "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" is obscure to the lost until the Spirit enlightens their minds (3:16-17; cf. John 16:8-11; 1 Cor. 2:14-16). Sometimes blindness to spiritual truth can be a result of demonic influence.¹

"Apparently, Paul is responding to criticism that, to some, his gospel is no revelation at all, in other words, it is 'veiled.' ... From whom, according to them, would his gospel be 'veiled'? Their reply would be, 'It is veiled from fellow Jews because Paul's message is unacceptable to them.'"²

The "god of this world [lit. age]" is not God the Father but Satan (cf. Matt. 4:8-9; John 12:31; 16:11; Gal. 1:4). He is the one whom this present world has made its god.

"During the time—believed by St Paul to be short—which would elapse before the Coming of the Lord, Satan reigned wherever there was opposition to the will of God, and this was an enormous sphere."³

"It was because they [i.e., unbelievers] refused to believe that Satan had power to blind them. They resisted the influence of light until they lost the power of appreciating it."⁴

Jesus Christ is "the image [Gr. *eikon*] of God" in the sense that He visibly and accurately represents the invisible God (cf. John 1:18; Col. 1:15). The personality and distinctiveness of God are especially in view whenever this Greek word describes Jesus in relation to God.⁵

¹Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, p. 114.

²Barnett, p. 216.

³Plummer, p. 114.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 340.

"The glorified Christ is the ultimate and eschatological revelation of God. There is nothing more that can or will be seen of God."¹

4:5 Even though Paul occasionally needed to commend himself to every man's conscience (v. 2; 6:4), he never promoted himself. Instead he preached "Christ Jesus as Lord," just like a faithful slave announces his master rather than himself. This is what he had done in Corinth. Paul and his fellow ministers did not conduct themselves as the spiritual overlords of these Christians (1:24) but as their "bond-servants on account of [or through] Jesus." A herald draws attention to himself only to promote the one that he or she announces. This is also what Jesus did in the Incarnation. Both Paul and Jesus took the role of a servant and bound themselves to fulfill God's mission for them, which involved serving others.

"What humbler view of himself could a messenger of the gospel take than to regard himself not only as a bondservant of Jesus Christ (as Paul delights to call himself; cf. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1) but even as the bondservant of those to whom he ministers?"²

"It would be hard to describe the Christian ministry more comprehensively in so few words."³

Paul in his preaching presented Jesus as the sovereign God ("as Lord") to whom everyone must submit in faith. He did not make total submission to the lordship of Christ a condition for salvation however. Voluntary submission to the lordship of Christ was a message that he reserved for believers (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2). When Paul preached Christ to the unsaved, he presented Him as God, who, by virtue of His deity, is sovereign over all people (cf. Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Col. 2:6).

"The implication here is that lordship equates with deity. 'LORD' regularly translates 'Yahweh' in the

¹Barnett, p. 219.

²Hughes, p. 131.

³Barrett, p. 134.

LXX [Septuagint], and there are numerous NT references to Jesus as 'Lord' that echo OT (LXX) passages that refer to Yahweh."¹

In order to become a Christian an unsaved person must submit to Christ's Lordship by acknowledging that Jesus is God and is therefore over him or her in authority. Trusting in the person and work of Christ is submission to His Lordship to that extent. However when one becomes a believer and appreciates what God has done for him or her in salvation, yielding every area of one's life to Christ's control becomes a voluntary act of worship (Rom. 12:1). To make what is voluntary for the Christian a necessary requirement for the unsaved in order to obtain salvation is adding to what God requires for salvation.

4:6 Why had Paul conducted himself as he did? It was because God had dispelled the "darkness" in his heart by illuminating it with the knowledge of Himself that comes through understanding and trusting Jesus Christ. Individual regeneration is a work of God as supernatural and as powerful as the creation of the universe (Gen. 1:3). Now Paul wanted to share that "light" with others. In the creation of the universe God spoke directly, but in the spiritual creation of new life He usually speaks indirectly through His servants. Nevertheless it is His Word that the Spirit uses to create new life.

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

Paul was probably alluding to his own conversion experience on the Damascus road, as well as to that of his readers, when he wrote this verse (cf. Acts 9:3, 8-9; 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13; Gal. 1:15-16). It was on the Damascus Road that the apostle saw

¹Barnett, p. 222.

²Wiersbe, 1:642.

God's glory in the unveiled face of Jesus Christ. And it was when Paul preached the gospel in Corinth that his readers saw that glory.

The sincerity, simplicity, and steadfastness of Paul that surfaces in this passage can and should distinguish all ministers of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:1-12).

3. The sufferings and supports of a minister of the gospel **4:7—5:10**

Paul proceeded to explain further the nature of ministry under the New Covenant so his readers would understand his ministry and theirs better. The nature of Christianity is paradoxical. Second Corinthians explains more of these paradoxes than any other New Testament book.

In writing this epistle Paul wanted his readers to realize that his ministry was not faulty, as his critics charged, but that it was solidly within the will of God. To do this he described his own ministry as a projection or extension of Jesus' ministry. As Jesus had died and been raised, Paul was similarly dying, but he was also experiencing some of the benefits of resurrection. He used the death and resurrection of Jesus metaphorically in order to describe his own ministry. This becomes most evident in 4:7 through 15, but also in 5:14 through 21 and in chapters 8 and 9, where the metaphor describes the ministry of giving.¹

The contrast between the message and the messenger 4:7-15

Paul presented many paradoxical contrasts involved in the sufferings and supports of the Christian in order to clarify for his readers the real issues involved in serving Jesus Christ.

"This passage, which is about suffering and death (vv. 7-12), stands in stark contrast with the theme of 'glory' so brilliantly developed by Paul in 3:7—4:6, to which he also will return in vv. 16-18."²

¹See Steven J. Kraftchick, "Death in Us, Life in You," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 156-81.

²Barnett, p. 227.

4:7 The "treasure" that every Christian possesses is "the knowledge of the glory of God" (v. 6, i.e., the gospel). Another view is that it is the ministry of the gospel.¹ I prefer the first view. Even though the gospel is what dispels spiritual darkness, God has deposited this precious gift in every clay Christian ("earthen[ware] containers"). This is a paradox.² One would think that it would be only natural to keep something valuable in an expensive container.

"... it is not impossible that here the *skeuos* ["container"] is the whole personality. It was in the man as a whole, and not in his body in particular, that the Divine treasure which was to enrich the world was placed to be dispensed to others."³

"A vessel's worth comes from what it holds, not from what it is."⁴

"The ancients often kept their treasures in jars or vessels of earthenware."⁵

God has placed the gospel in human containers so that all may see that the transforming power of the gospel is supernatural, and not just human (cf. Judg. 7:19-20).

"The pottery lamps which could be bought for a copper or two in the Corinthian market-place provided a sufficient analogy; it did not matter how cheap or fragile they were so long as they showed the light."⁶

Paul was not disparaging the human body by calling it an earthen container, nor was he saying that it is only a vehicle

¹Hodge, p. 91.

²A paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.

³Plummer, p. 127

⁴Kraftchick, p. 172.

⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 1238.

⁶Bruce, p. 197.

for the soul. Paul viewed human beings as a unity of material and immaterial parts (monism), rather than as having higher and lower elements (dualism).¹ He was contrasting the relative insignificance of the light-bearers with the surpassing value of the light (i.e., God's "power").²

"It is precisely the Christian's utter frailty which lays him open to the experience of the all-sufficiency of God's grace, so that he is able even to rejoice because of his weakness (12:9f.)—something that astonishes and baffles the world, which thinks only in terms of human ability."³

4:8-9 Paul pointed out four specific ways in which the weakness of his earthen vessel contrasted with God's power (cf. 1:5, 10). He may have been thinking of himself as a gladiator or a soldier in view of what he wrote: (1) He had been on the ropes ("afflicted in every way") but not trapped in a corner ("crushed"). (2) He was without proper provision ("perplexed") but not completely without resources ("despairing"). (3) He was a hunted man ("persecuted") but not totally "abandoned." Finally (4) he felt "struck down" but not "destroyed." In these respects his life, which represents all believers who herald the gospel, was very much like our Lord's. Paul's numerous escapes from defeat and death were signs of Christ's power at work in him.

"Whatever condition the children of God may be in, in this world they have a '*but not*' to comfort themselves with."⁴

"To be at the end of man's resources is not to be at the end of God's resources; on the contrary, it is to be precisely in the position best suited to prove and benefit from them, and to experience

¹See D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, pp. 31-44.

²Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 342.

³Hughes, p. 137.

⁴Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, pp. 1830-31

the surplus of the power of God breaking through and resolving the human dilemma."¹

"We are at our wit's end but never at our hope's end."²

"As death is the culminating moment of the Christian's weakness, so also it is the point at which the all-transcending power of God is most marvellously [*sic*] displayed."³

"Verses 8-9 represent the first of the 'tribulation lists' (*peristaseis*) found within 2 Corinthians (see also 6:3-10; 11:23b-33; 12:7-10; cf. 1:5-11; 2:14-17)."⁴

4:10 Paul summarized the four preceding contrasts with another paradox. He was in one sense "always" dying, but never lifeless. Paul's use of *nekrosis* ("dying," v. 10) rather than *thanatos* ("death") shows that what he had in mind was not our identification with Jesus in His death. Instead He meant our sharing in His sufferings by being exposed to danger and death for His sake daily (cf. 1:5-6; 1 Cor. 15:31; Phil. 3:10). The next verse makes this clearer.

"Christian, do not be afraid to suffer. Jesus said the world would hate us if we were following Him. It is wonderful to take our place with the Lord Jesus Christ in these days."⁵

4:11 Paul faced threats to his life constantly for his witness to Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:30-31). This seems clearly to be what he meant by "the dying of Jesus" (v. 10). There are three other ways that the New Testament associates us with Jesus' death, but these are not in view here. They are our identification with His death in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), our daily mortification of

¹Hughes, pp. 138-39.

²Barclay, p. 222.

³Hughes, p. 140.

⁴Barnett, p. 232.

⁵McGee, 5:104.

the flesh (Gal. 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:31), and our physical debilitation as we serve Christ (2 Cor. 4:16).

Paradoxically "the dying" and "the life" of Jesus (v. 10) were simultaneously obvious in Paul's experience (cf. 1:4-5). Though living, Paul was always in danger of dying ("handed over to death") because enemies of Jesus were constantly opposing him and even trying to kill him. However, even though enemies opposed him, God kept giving him "life," just as He had provided resurrection life to Jesus, in order that Paul could continue to serve Him.

"... God exhibits DEATH in the *living*, that He may exhibit LIFE in the *dying*."¹

4:12 There is another paradox: While Christ's ministers suffer because of their testimony for the Savior, those to whom they minister experience new and greater spiritual life because of those ministers' faithfulness though threatened with death (cf. 1:3-7). The more faithful that Paul and his companions remained to God's will, the more they suffered and the more the Corinthians prospered spiritually.²

4:13 Why did Paul continue to serve God faithfully even though it meant suffering for him? First, Paul believed, as the psalmist did, that inner conviction about the truth must result in outward confession of that truth ("I believed therefore I spoke"; cf. 1 Cor. 9:16). Paul quoted the Septuagint translation of the Psalms, which represents the spirit of the original Hebrew here. The psalmist also spoke from a context of deliverance from suffering. He had trusted in God and God had vindicated him (Ps. 115:1-11). Therefore he expressed his devotion to the Lord (Ps. 115:12-19).

"We need to believe more intensely in God, so as to trust Him more practically and more unquestioningly."³

¹Alford, 2:2:653.

²See Toussaint, pp. 190-91.

³C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, p. 304.

- 4:14 Second, Paul believed that physical death was not the end of existence but that the power of God presently at work in him would continue to work in him after death. When the apostle could serve God no longer due to death, God's power would "raise" him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of believers in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:23). God's power would unite Paul with his readers whom God would also resurrect (cf. Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 4:14). Paul's reference to reunion with the Corinthians in heaven likely suggests his genuine love for them.
- 4:15 This concluding statement in this verse also reflects the apostle's sincere desire for the Corinthians' welfare. All the things that Paul had been experiencing would result in the Corinthians' good and God's "glory." He gladly endured suffering for the gospel in view of this prospect. Paul had brought God's "grace" to Corinth, and now the Corinthians were taking that grace to other people in other places ("to more and more people"). "Thanksgiving" is always the proper response to God's grace.

"As God's grace expanded in their hearts and through them reached ever-increasing numbers, so too, the volume of thanksgiving to God for the receipt of illumination (cf. 4:6) would increase and promote the glory of God."¹

So far Paul gave three reasons for his refusal to become discouraged as he served the Lord: (1) In the past he had received a divine commission to proclaim a new and better covenant (v. 1). (2) In the future he looked forward to sharing Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead (v. 14). (3) In the present he had the opportunity to promote the Corinthians' spiritual welfare and the glory of God (v. 15).

The contrast between outward deterioration and inward renewal 4:16-18

- 4:16 In view of the reasons just cited, the apostle restated that he did "not lose heart" (cf. v. 1). However, Paul's sufferings, while

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 344.

not fatal, were destroying his body. Yet even this did not discourage him because even though physically he was "decaying," spiritually he was still developing ("being renewed"; cf. Eph. 3:16). In this verse Paul resumed the thought he began in verse 1.

"We are, in fact, on the threshold of one of the most important eschatological passages of the New Testament."¹

4:17 Paul introduced another paradox: Suffering now will result in glory "far beyond all comparison" later. He could consider the "affliction" that he had undergone as a servant of Christ as "light" only in comparison with the heavy "weight of glory" that he would receive at Christ's judgment seat (cf. 11:23-27). Furthermore, his present suffering was only "momentary," whereas his future reward would be "eternal."

"His choice of the expression 'the weight of glory' may be influenced by the fact that in Hebrew 'weight' and 'glory' come from the same root *kbd*. It is because the coming 'glory' is so 'weighty' that the present 'affliction' seems so 'slight' (Gk *elaphron*, 'light'), just as the eternity of the coming 'glory' makes the 'affliction' seem 'momentary.' It is not simply that the 'glory' is the compensation for the 'affliction' [cf. Rom. 8:18] ... rather, the 'glory' is the product of the 'affliction,' produced in measure 'beyond all comparison' ..."²

"Affliction is not something to be endured in order to reach glory. It is the very process which creates the glory."³

¹Hughes, p. 152.

²Bruce, p. 199.

³G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 480.

Paul spoke of the glory as something that he could increase by continuing to suffer as he continued to follow God faithfully. He was referring to his eternal reward.

"No more does the Apostle mean that all suffering is productive of glory, as though it were an infallible means to this end. The history of the Church has shown that such a concept leads to an unscriptural self-interest and to a misconception of the true character of Christian suffering. Paul is concerned here with suffering *for Jesus' sake* (v. 11; cf. Acts 9:16), which means suffering in which there cannot possibly be any self-interest. It is precisely as the 'I' decreases that Christ increases (Jn. 3:30)."¹

4:18 Another paradox is that the "temporal" things "which are seen" now appear to be permanent, but in fact the "eternal" things "which are not seen" are truly permanent (cf. Heb. 11:1). What we can see now is only temporary. The present, momentary, visible things of life paled for the apostle as he considered the future, eternal, invisible things on ahead. These things included his fullness of joy, his completed salvation, and his heavenly inheritance. By keeping these unseen realities in view Paul could avoid discouragement when the troubles that he saw tempted him to feel discouraged (cf. Col. 3:1-2).

"No man need fear the years, for they bring him nearer, not to death, but to God."²

The contrast between our present and our future dwellings 5:1-10

Paul continued to give reasons why Christians need not lose heart. The themes of (1) life in the midst of death and (2) glory, which follow as a result of present suffering, also continue.

"Few chapter divisions are more unfortunate than this one since what follows (5:1-10) details the thought expressed in 4:16-18. Failure to appreciate this fact unduly complicates

¹Hughes, p. 157.

²Barclay, p. 225.

these already difficult verses by removing their contextual constraints."¹

What about the believer who dies before he or she has followed God faithfully for very long? Will such a person experience no glory in the future? Paul explained that there are three bases for comfort in such a case. First, all Christians who die will enter Christ's presence in their heavenly home (v. 1). This is by itself a substantial gift of glory. Second, all Christians, including those who die soon after becoming believers, presently possess the Holy Spirit who is God's pledge of our future complete glorification (vv. 4-5). Third, death begins a new phase of existence for all believers that will be far superior to what we experience now (vv. 7-8).

5:1 "For" (Gr. *gar*) continues the contrast between things presently seen and things not yet seen (4:18).

There are three views as to what "a building from God," "a house not made with hands," which is "eternal in the heavens" refers to:

One view is that Paul was describing an intermediate body that God will give every believer who dies, which He will replace with a resurrected body that the believer will inhabit thereafter throughout eternity.² However Paul called the believer's new habitation "eternal," not temporary. If the intermediate body is eternal, what need is there for a resurrection body? Nowhere else in the Bible is there specific revelation that there is such a thing as an intermediate body.

One advocate of this view pointed out that Samuel (1 Sam. 28:12), Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-25), Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3, et al), and the martyred dead in heaven (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:13-17; 20:4) were visible in bodies after they died.³ Possibly they became

¹Lowery, p. 565.

²Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:414-15; John F. Walvoord, ed., *Lewis Sperry Chafer's Systematic Theology*, abridged ed., 2:506-7; Kent, p. 81.

³See Larry J. Waters, "The Believer's Intermediate State after Death," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:675 (July-September 2012):283-303.

visible temporarily, like the angel of the LORD and angels, who are spirit beings but occasionally became visible temporarily.

A second view is that the "house" in view is the believer's resurrection body, which a believer receives when God resurrects him or her.

"The 'clothed upon' and 'swallowed up by life' imagery (vv. 2-4), when read alongside 1 Cor 15:53-54, leaves little doubt that this 'house' is the individual's resurrection *body*."¹

Most believers who die have to wait for some time before their bodies are resurrected. They do not receive their resurrection bodies immediately after they die, unless they die at the moment of the Rapture. Believers living when Christ calls them home at the Rapture will receive immortal (imperishable) bodies, but their mortal (perishable) bodies will be immediately transformed into immortal bodies. They will receive their immortal bodies by translation (immediate change), not by resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-52). This view does not answer the question: In what form will believers exist between their death and their resurrection?

A third view is that the "house" in view is heaven: specifically, the dwelling place that Jesus said that He was going to prepare for His disciples (John 14:2-3; cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; Phil. 1:22-24; Heb. 11:10).² This view understands "house" to be a dwelling place, not a body. This view, like the previous one, gives us no specific information about the form in which believers will exist between their death and their resurrection.

"The simple idea is that the soul, when it leaves its earthly tabernacle, will not be lost in immensity, nor driven away houseless and

¹Barnett, pp. 257-58. Cf. Keener, p. 179; Gaebelein, 3:2:170; Harris, *The Second ...*, pp. 176, 369-81; George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 552.

²See Hodge, pp. 107-27; Plummer, p. 145; and Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 44-48.

homeless, but will find a house and home in heaven."¹

"The substance of the Reformed view ... is, that the intermediate state for the saved is Heaven without the body, and the final state for the saved is Heaven with the body; that the intermediate state for the lost is Hell without the body, and the final state for the lost is Hell with the body."²

In ancient times a "tent" was a familiar symbol of what was not permanent.³ References to a "building" and a "house" that is permanent ("eternal in the heavens") in this verse lead me to believe that Paul was contrasting the believer's temporary home, his or her body, with our eternal home: heaven. This conclusion leaves us with a question: What will believers be like between our death and the resurrection of our bodies? Even though this verse does not teach it, it seems reasonable to conclude that people will be recognizable in this intermediate state, either without bodies or with some form of a body.

"The general meaning is that life here is only a pilgrimage. Christians are citizens of a realm that is in heaven, and on earth they are only sojourners ..."⁴

5:2 Paul changed his metaphor slightly. God will clothe us with something better than our present bodies. Until then "we groan," because we feel the pains associated with our mortality, namely, our physical limitations, sickness, and the increasing disability that accompanies advancing age. This new dwelling "from heaven" awaits us immediately after death and before our resurrection. It is, therefore, probably our heavenly home.

¹Hodge, p. 112.

²William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:594. See also Barnett, pp. 262-63; Plummer, p. 149; and Martin, p. 106.

³Alford, 2:2:657; Hughes, p. 162.

⁴Plummer, p. 142.

"The body is compared to a house in which the soul now dwells, heaven is the house into which it enters when this earthly house is dissolved."¹

5:3 When we enter Christ's presence and our heavenly home "we will not be found naked." That is, as our mortal bodies were our covering before death, so our dwelling in heaven will be our covering after death. Verse 3 is parenthetical.

Some who believe in the intermediate body view (view 1 above) say that Paul meant that believers who die are not disembodied spirits ("found naked") between their death and the resurrection of their bodies. Those who hold the other two views understand "found naked" to refer to being without a resurrection body (view 2) or without a heavenly home (view 3).

"Greeks celebrated exercise in the nude, though even they regarded nakedness as shameful in some situations (Polybius 14.5.11). Although Romans favored nakedness less than Greeks (Juvenal *Sat.* 1.71), they had adopted the custom of nude bathing from Greeks (Plutarch *Marcus Cato* 20.5-6; *Roman Q.* 40, *Mor.* 274A), and Corinth had notable public baths (as well as public latrines). For most Jews, however, nudity remained scandalous."²

5:4 This verse develops further what Paul wrote in verse 2. The Christian does not "groan" in his or her present body—Hodge called it a "mud hovel"³—because he or she wants to get rid of it. At least that was not what Paul meant here. We groan because we long to enter into whatever God has for us in the future: an intermediate body, a resurrection body, or a heavenly home. We want "to be clothed" rather than "to be unclothed." God's promises of something better make us dissatisfied ("burdened") with what we have now. We long for

¹Hodge, p. 109.

²Keener, p. 180.

³Hodge, p. 116.

the time when mortal "life" will, in a sense, "be swallowed up by" what is immortal and ends. This is another paradox: life will overcome death, rather than death overcoming life, as it does now. Paul was confident that if death would destroy his present body he would certainly receive something better in which to live. Paul's purpose in verses 1 through 4 seems to have been to contrast our present and future habitations.¹

"Believers shrink from, not the *consequences*, but the mere *act* of dying ..."²

5:5 The hope of heaven is not just wishful thinking. We already have the down payment of our inheritance in "the [Holy] Spirit." In modern Greek the word translated "pledge" or "deposit" (NIV) here, *arrhabona*, elsewhere describes an engagement ring (cf. 1:22). Our present possession of the Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that He will provide all that He has promised in the future.

The Spirit may not seem like a very comforting guarantee, since we cannot see Him. But we can see what His presence in us produces, namely, the transformation of our character and conduct (cf. John 3:8). And we experience His guidance, peace, wisdom, insight, etc. This should give us great confidence that God will transform us completely in the future.

5:6-8 These verses bear the same relation to each other as do verses 2 through 4. Verses 2 and 6 make a statement, verses 3 and 7 are parenthetical, and verses 4 and 8 expand verses 2 and 6 respectively.

Statement	verse 2	verse 6
Parenthesis	verse 3	verse 7
Explanation	verse 4	verse 8

¹See Lowery, pp. 565-66, for a helpful summary of the views.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1239.

Since Christians have the promise that we will obtain a state of glory immediately after death (v. 1), and since we have a pledge of that promise in our present possession of the Holy Spirit (v. 5), we can feel consistently confident ("being always of good courage").

However, because we are "absent from the Lord" (v. 6) while we are living in our mortal bodies, we desire to leave these bodies and to take up our new residence in the Lord's presence. Note that there are no additional alternatives for the believer. We are either in our mortal bodies and absent from the Lord, or we are with the Lord and absent from our mortal bodies. This is a strong guarantee that when we leave our mortal bodies we will go immediately into the Lord's presence (cf. Luke 23:43). There will be no purgatory. Being "at home with the Lord" (v. 8) implies a closer fellowship with Christ than we experience now as well as a better habitation (cf. John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:17; Phil. 1:23). These verses seem to confirm that Paul was talking about our heavenly home in verses 1 through 5.

We need never despair, therefore, when "we walk by faith," believing what God has revealed He has in store for us. Nevertheless, the fact that we now walk by faith and "not by sight" reminds us that the fellowship that we enjoy with the Lord now, while genuine, is inferior to what we will experience.

"Heaven was not simply a *destination* for Paul: it was a *motivation*."¹

5:9 As we look forward to the realization of these good things "our ambition" should be to please God—come life or death ("whether at home or absent"). "At home or absent" is a figure of speech (merism) for "always." In a merism two parts represent the whole (e.g., heaven and earth means the universe). The prospect of face-to-face fellowship with Jesus Christ should motivate us to please Him out of love (cf. Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:20; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1).

¹Wiersbe, 1:645.

"To be well-pleasing to Christ is, indeed, the sum of all ambition which is truly Christian."¹

"... one always wishes to please the one he or she loves."²

5:10 It is not just the hope of our heavenly home that should motivate the Christian however. We must also bear in mind that we will have to account for our works when we meet the Lord. Then He will reward His children on the basis of their "deeds." This is not a "judgment" to determine whether Christians will enter heaven (cf. Rom. 8:1) but a judgment that decides to what extent God will reward those who enter heaven (cf. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 9:24-27).³

"The imagery used here for the future moment of eschatological revelation is that of the forensic process whereby the Roman governor sat on his tribunal to hear accusation and defense of an accused person standing before him. If he judged the accused guilty, the governor would order immediate punishment. Paul's use of this language to the Corinthians may have been calculated; he himself had stood accused before the Roman governor Gallio in the Corinthian *agora* some years earlier (Acts 18:12, 16-17), as the original members of the Corinthian church doubtless remembered."⁴

"The term for 'judgment seat' [Gr. *bema*] is a normal one for the raised platforms from which governors could issue decrees or judgments,

¹Hughes, p. 178.

²Barnett, p. 273.

³See Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, ch. XLVI: "Judgment of the Believer's Works," pp. 283-87; Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*; Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 25-34; Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 409; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 219-26; John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, pp. 305-11.

⁴Barnett, p. 275.

including the particularly impressive one excavated in Corinth (Acts 18:12)."¹

The Greek word translated "bad" (*phaulos*) really means "worthless." The idea is not that God will reward us for the "good" things we did and punish us for the "bad" things we did. Rather He will reward us for the worthwhile things we did and not reward us for the worthless things we did (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Cor. 9:24-27).² The worthwhile things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. Worthless deeds are those that make no contribution to the fulfillment of God's good purposes (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

"The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward."³

"... believers do not face condemnation at Christ's tribunal (see Rom 5:16, 18; 8:1) but rather *evaluation* with a view to the Master's commendation given or withheld (1 Cor 3:10-15)."⁴

"Judgment on the basis of works is not opposed to justification on the basis of faith. ... Yet not all verdicts will be comforting. The believer may 'suffer loss' (1 Cor. 3:15) by forfeiting Christ's praise or losing a reward that might have been his."⁵

"Both with regard to the wicked and the righteous, there is to be a great distinction in the

¹Keener, p. 181.

²See Hodge, p. 125.

³John F. Walvoord, "The Church in Heaven," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:490 (April-June 1966):99. Cf. Hughes, p. 182.

⁴Barnett, p. 276.

⁵Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 349. Cf. 1 John 2:28.

recompense, which different members of each class are to receive."¹

"The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential."²

"... because much is required of those to whom much has been given, the thought of the judgment seat of Christ has for the Christian a peculiar solemnity. It is not meant to cloud his prospect of future blessedness, but to act as a stimulus, as strong a stimulus as the most imperious of human ambitions; for the word *philotimoumetha*, translated *we labour* (RV 'we make it our aim'), means literally 'we are ambitious'.³

"... I've got a hunch that when the score is added up one day as we stand before our Lord, many of

¹Hodge, p. 126.

²Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:546 (April-June 1980):131. See also idem, "The Judgment Seat of Christ and Unconfessed Sins," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:545 (January-March 1980):38-39.

³Tasker, p. 82. RV refers to *The Revised Version*. See also Wall, pp. 31-38, for a fine popular explanation of judgment at the *bema*. See also René Pache, *The Future Life*, pp. 220-43; Harlan D. Betz, *Setting the Stage for Eternity*, and Rick Howard and Jamie Lash, *This Was Your Life!*

us will wish we'd played a lot more *Risk* ... and a lot less *Trivial Pursuit*."¹

Another notable feature of this verse is that Paul ascribed the role of Judge to "Christ," whereas the Old Testament ascribed it to Yahweh. Paul believed that Jesus Christ is the member of the godhead who will judge (cf. John 5:22, 27; Rom. 14:10).

Paul did not specify when this evaluation will take place—at death, at the Rapture, or at some other subsequent time.

"... he seems to imply that the requital will follow immediately upon the manifestation [of Christ to the believer, i.e., at death or, if the believer does not die, at the Rapture]."²

"If we learn to live as Paul did with the judgment-seat of Christ before us, we will not be men-pleasers, but we will be Christ-pleasers."³

Throughout this section contrasts between the Spirit-imparted viewpoint (worldview) on life and the natural viewpoint (worldview) stand out. Some of the Corinthians were criticizing Paul because they were looking at his activities from the human viewpoint and were projecting that point of view onto him. They were concluding that he viewed life as they did. He drew these contrasting views of life clearly for their benefit.

The extent to which we Christians view life from Paul's spiritual viewpoint will be the extent to which we do not lose heart in our ministry.

4. The life of a minister of Christ 5:11—6:10

The longest section of this epistle, which expounds the glory of the Christian ministry (2:14—6:10), builds to a climax in the following verses (5:11—6:10). Here Paul clarified the driving motive, the divine mission, the dynamic message, and the diverse ministries of the New Covenant. He did

¹Charles R. Swindoll, *Come before Winter*, p. 205.

²Plummer, p. 159.

³Ironside, p. 135.

this in order to inspire the Corinthians to recognize his ministry as Spirit-led and to follow his example in their ministries.

The constraining love of Christ 5:11-15

5:11 Respect for the Lord, since He would be his Judge ("the fear of the Lord"), motivated Paul to carry out his work of persuading people to believe the gospel. A healthy sense of our accountability to God should also move us to fulfill our calling as Christians (Matt. 28:19-20).

"According to II Cor. 5:11, the judgment seat is the place where the 'terror of the Lord' will be manifested. The word 'terror' in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *phobos*, referring to 'that which causes fear,' 'terror,' 'apprehension.' This is the same word translated 'fearful' in Heb. 10:31 ... another reference to events at the judgment seat."¹

Paul had a double purpose. The NEB rendered the Greek clause translated "we persuade people" as "we address our appeal to men."² Paul tried to persuade people of the truth of the gospel but also of the truth about himself, which seems to be the main point here.³ His motives were pure (1:12) and his conduct had been consistent with his apostleship (cf. 3:1-6; 4:1-6). Paul's knowledge that his life was an open book to God led him to voice the hope that it would be transparent to all the Corinthians as well.

"The ministry is ultimately responsible to God. Christian ministers are servants of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:5), attendants of Christ and stewards of God (1 Cor. 4:1); they discharge their ministry 'in

¹Chitwood, p. 31.

²NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

³Plummer, p. 169.

the sight of God' (2 Cor. 4:2; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5) as 'knowing the fear of the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:11)."¹

5:12 Paul insisted that he had not written to his readers in the previous verses in order to boast (cf. 3:1). He had written what he had in order to give his allies in Corinth ammunition to combat his critics whose judgments were wrong. He was simply reminding his original readers of things that they should have remembered. The external "appearance" that Paul's critics admired included physical relationship to Jesus during His earthly ministry (5:16), their Jewish orthodoxy (11:22), and their visions and revelations (12:1-7). The "heart" reality that Paul considered more important was the testimony of his clear conscience before God and people. This is what the false apostles lacked.

"His anomalous [abnormal] position as an apostle who was called directly by Christ and who did not belong to the college of the twelve disciples meant that he had no option but to appeal to that call. But this laid him open to the accusation that he was *self*-commended. In consequence, whenever he affirms his ministry—in this case that he evangelizes ('we persuade men')—he must disclaim self-commendation (see on 3:1 and 6:4). Nonetheless, his ministry did commend him, as the Corinthians should have recognized (12:11; cf. 4:2, 10:18)."²

5:13 All of Paul's ministries to and for the Corinthians had been for God's glory and their welfare.

What Paul meant by the charge that he had lost his mind, and its opposite, being "of sound mind," could and probably does include all of the following possibilities: Some critics apparently attacked him for his teaching that differed from mainstream Judaism, his ecstatic experiences, and his ceaseless service.

¹Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):138.

²Barnett, p. 282.

To this his response was: That is for God to judge (cf. vv. 9-11). Other critics may have thought him crazy for speaking in tongues and having visions (cf. Acts 22:17-21). For Paul that too was a matter between him and God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:2).

Occasionally Paul may have appeared to have been carried away with his emotions ("lost our minds"), but that conduct only resulted in God's glory. His self-commendation may have looked like lunacy to some in Corinth, but Paul was only defending God's cause. In Paul's culture people considered self-commendation inappropriate except in certain particular circumstances.¹ To the Jews the apostle's conversion marked him as a madman, but that change of mind was a totally rational decision.² Jesus' critics had misjudged Him too.

5:14-15 The primary reason that Paul could not live for himself, however, was Christ's love for him. The Greek construction is probably a subjective genitive (Christ's love for him rather than his love for Christ).³ Paul went on to illustrate the greatness of Christ's love for His own. Christ's love extended to His dying on the cross. Jesus provided the example that all of His disciples must follow: He voluntarily sacrificed His life for others. Yet Jesus' death was much more than an example. Paul had come to appreciate the widespread effects of that death as being "for all" and the essence of that death as a substitute sacrifice ("on their behalf," v. 15).

"Paul is not suggesting that, irrespective of their response and attitude, all men know forgiveness of sins or experience selfless living. There is universalism in the scope of redemption, since no man is excluded from God's offer of salvation; but there is a particularity in the application of redemption, since not all men appropriate the

¹Keener, p. 166.

²Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 351.

³See Martin, p. 128; Bernard, 3:69-70; Kent, p. 87.

benefits afforded by this universally offered salvation."¹

"This clause ["one died all died"] puts as plainly as it can be put the idea that His death was equivalent to the death of all; in other words, it was the death of all men which was died by Him. Were this not so, His death would be nothing to them."²

The apostle had also become aware that such love merited complete devotion (i.e., making the fulfillment of God's desires, not one's selfish desires, the goal of life). In the context, "controls us" (v. 14) may refer to Christ's love restraining Paul from self-praise.³ We "all died" (v. 14) in the sense that all believers died in the Person of their representative, Jesus Christ.⁴

"... Christ's death was the death of all, in the sense that He died the death they should have died; the penalty of their sins was borne by Him; He died in their place ..."⁵

"... One died on behalf of all (not only, for the *benefit* of all ... but *instead of* all ...)..."⁶

Moreover, as Jesus died to His own desires and rose to life in order to continue serving us, so we should die to our own selfish interests and live to serve others. Paul himself modeled what he observed in Jesus' experience, and he called on his readers to duplicate his own example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1).

"Thus there emerge from v. 11 and v. 14 two motives for apostolic evangelism, the 'fear of the

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 352.

²James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p. 142.

³Plummer, p. 173.

⁴See Hodge, p. 136; and John V. Dahms, "Dying with Christ," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):15-23.

⁵Tasker, p. 86.

⁶Alford, 2:2:663.

Lord' and the 'love of Christ.' ... The one relates to Jesus' role as Judge, the other to his role as Savior."¹

In this section of the epistle (vv. 11-15) Paul identified two motives for Christian service: an awareness of our accountability to God (v. 11), and the example of Jesus Christ (vv. 14-15). Jesus is both our Judge and our Savior, and His two roles should have an impact on how we live.

The new creation 5:16-17

Paul now illustrated how Christ's love had changed his viewpoint.

5:16 Since his conversion ("from now on") Paul had stopped making superficial personal judgments based only on external appearances (cf. v. 12). Previously he had looked at people on a strictly natural basis, which was the typical human perspective. Now a person's spiritual condition was more important to him than whether he or she was a Jew or a Gentile.

"The differences between king and clown, rich and poor, master and slave, genius and dunce, do not come into the estimate; what counts is the person's character as a Christian."²

Paul had also formerly concluded that Jesus could not be the divine Messiah in view of His lowly origin, rejection, and humiliating death. Now he recognized and knew Him for who He really was and what He really had done (cf. vv. 14-15). Probably Paul was not claiming in this verse to have known Jesus personally during His earthly ministry, though he may have met Him. However after his conversion on the Damascus Road Paul saw Christ in a new light: from God's perspective.³

5:17 Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (vv. 14-15) had had another effect besides altering Paul's viewpoint (v. 16). Verses 16 and 17 each begin with the same Greek word: *hoste*

¹Barnett, p. 288.

²Plummer, p. 176.

³J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 53.

"Therefore." Whenever a person experiences conversion, as Paul did, he or she really becomes "a new creation." It is not just his or her viewpoint that should change and can change, but many other things also change. Certain old conditions and relationships no longer exist ("the old things passed away," Gr. *parelthen*, aorist tense), and others take their place and continue ("new things have come," Gr. *gegonen*, perfect tense).

Obviously there is both continuity and discontinuity that takes place at conversion. Paul was not denying the continuity. We still have the same physical features, basic personality, natural temperament,¹ genetic constitution, parents, susceptibility to temptation (1 Cor. 10:14), sinful environment (Gal. 1:4), etc. These things do not change. He was stressing the elements of discontinuity ("old things passed away"): perspectives, prejudices, misconceptions, enslavements, etc. (cf. Gal. 2:20). God adds many new things at conversion including new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, the righteousness of Christ, as well as new viewpoints (v. 16).

The Christian is "a new creation" (a new person, Rom. 6) in this sense: Before conversion he did not possess the life-giving Holy Spirit, who now lives within him (Rom. 8:9). He had only a sinful human nature. Now he has both a sinful human nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit. This addition makes him an essentially new person, since the Holy Spirit's effects on the believer are so far-reaching. He also possesses many other riches of divine grace that contribute to his distinctiveness as a believer. Lewis Sperry Chafer listed 33 things that the Christian receives at the moment of justification.² I have counted several more.³

¹See Paul Tournier, *The Strong and the Weak*, pp. 230-51.

²Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65. See Robert A Pyne and Matthew L. Blackmon, "A Critique of the 'Exchanged Life,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):131-57.

³See Appendix 2 at the end of these notes.

The ministry of reconciliation 5:18-21

This section, along with the first two verses of chapter 6, constitutes the crux of Paul's exposition of his apostolic office (2:14—7:4) and of this entire letter.¹

5:18-19 The basis of this total change (new attitudes, v. 16, and new creation, v. 17, "all these things") is God's gracious provision of reconciliation in sending His Son to die for us. He has brought people to Himself by dealing with our sins in Christ. God is the Reconciler, and He has "reconciled" everyone ("the world," v. 19) to Himself, the elect and the non-elect alike (cf. Rom. 5:10-11; Col. 1:20-22).²

God has brought everyone into a savable relation to Himself by sending His Son who paid the penalty for sin, which separates people from God. The fact that God has reconciled everyone does not mean that everyone is thereby correctly related to Him however. People still need to respond to the offer of salvation by believing the gospel in order to receive justification (an acceptable standing before God, v. 20). Reconciliation removes a barrier to our salvation, but it does not by itself accomplish our salvation.

"All the religions of the world say, 'Do, do, do.'
The gospel says, 'Done.'"³

God has committed the message of this provision of "reconciliation" to those who have experienced reconciliation (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul was probably speaking primarily of his own "ministry" of bringing people back to God as well as the ministry of his fellow apostles. However all believers clearly share this ministry, since God has reconciled us all. "The word of reconciliation" (v. 19) is the gospel message.

5:20 This ministry makes us God's "ambassadors for Christ," which is one of the most exalted titles that the Christian can claim.

¹Barnett, p. 300.

²See Gary L. Shultz Jr., "The Reconciliation of All Things in Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):442-59.

³McGee, 5:100.

An ambassador is at the same time a messenger and a representative.

"The ambassador has to be *persona grata* [an acceptable person] with both countries (the one that he represents and the one to which he goes)."¹

"In the Roman Empire, there were two kinds of provinces, the senatorial and the imperial. The senatorial provinces were generally peaceful and friendly to Rome. They had submitted to Roman rule and were under the control of the Senate. The imperial provinces, however, had been acquired later, and were not as peaceful. These provinces were under the authority of the emperor himself. Syria, including Judea, was such an imperial province. To these provinces, the emperor sent ambassadors to govern and maintain peace."²

"The ambassador, before acting, receives a commission from the power for whom he acts. The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of his sovereign. Lastly, the ambassador's duty is not merely to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but he is obligated to watch opportunities, to study characters, to cast about for expedients, so that he may place it before his hearers in its most attractive form. He is a diplomatist."³

Ambassadors authoritatively announce messages for others and request ("appeal"), not demand, acceptance. The Christian ambassador for Christ, moreover, announces and appeals for God ("as though God were making an appeal through us").

¹Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 4:233.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1952.

³J. B. Lightfoot, *Ordination Addresses and Counsels to Clergy*, pp. 47-48.

"... when Christ's ambassador entreats it is equivalent to the voice of God entreating through him."¹

"When I was a young pastor, it used to embarrass me somewhat to make visits and confront people with the claims of Christ. Then it came to me that I was a privileged person, an ambassador of the King of kings! There was nothing to be embarrassed about. In fact, the people I visited should have been grateful that one of Christ's ambassadors came to see them."²

However the stakes involved in announcing this message of reconciliation require an urgent "appeal." We should never present the gospel to the lost with a "take it or leave it" attitude. Our presentation should communicate the urgency of their believing the message. Full reconciliation only takes place when a person trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior (John 3:16). Consequently, it may be helpful to think of reconciliation as objectively provided by God in the past but needing subjective appropriation by the unsaved in the present.

We could understand the word "you," in "we beg you," as a specific reference to the Corinthians or as a general reference to all people. Paul was probably not appealing to his Corinthian readers to be reconciled to God. They had already been reconciled (v. 18) and had trusted in Christ (cf. 1:1). While there may have been a few unbelievers in the Corinthian congregation, Paul was clearly writing to believers. If his appeal was to the unbelievers in the city of Corinth to get saved he probably would have made a more specific appeal and identified that segment of his audience in his appeal.

But Paul was, at the very least, explaining his ministry of reconciliation in general to the unsaved ("the world," v. 19). He may have, at the same time, been addressing the many

¹Hughes, p. 210.

²Wiersbe, 1:650. Cf. Rom. 1:16.

carnal believers in the Corinthian church who, although reconciled in the basic sense of saved, nonetheless needed to be reconciled to God in their relationship to Him as His children. Some of them were attending church but were "out of fellowship" and needed to "get right with" (be reconciled to) God.

5:21 This verse condenses the grounds for Paul's appeal and at the same time expresses his appeal in another paradox. This verse explains the how of full reconciliation, and it illuminates the very heart of the atonement.

"In these few direct words the Apostle sets forth the gospel of reconciliation in all its mystery and all its wonder. There is no sentence more profound in the whole of Scripture; for this verse embraces the whole ground of the sinner's reconciliation to God and declares the incontestable reason why he should respond to the ambassadorial entreaty. Indeed, it completes the message with which the Christian ambassador has been entrusted."¹

Paul probably intended that we understand what he wrote about Jesus Christ becoming "sin" in three ways: First, God treated Jesus as if He were a sinner when He poured out His wrath on Him and Christ bore the guilt and penalty for all people's sins. Jesus' sinlessness is a clear revelation of Scripture (Isa. 53:9; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Second, Jesus Christ became a sin-offering (Lev. 4:24; 5:12)—the perfect and final one. Some Hebrew words mean both sin and sin-offering (i.e., *hatta't* and *'asam*; Isa. 53:6, 10). Third, Christ became the focus of sin under the judgment of God and the place in time and space where God judged sin.

"So complete was the identification of the sinless Christ with the sin of the sinner, including its dire guilt and its dread consequence of separation

¹Hughes, p. 211. Cf. Hodge, p. 150; Broomall, p. 1272.

from God, that Paul could say profoundly, 'God made him ... to be sin for us.'"¹

Jesus Christ was the target of God's punishment of sinners, God having imputed the "sin" of all humankind to Him (cf. Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:3). Now God makes sinners the targets of His "righteousness" and imputes that to us (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9). The amazing effect, from God's imputing His righteousness to believers, is that now God sees us as He sees His righteous Son, namely, fully acceptable to Him, or, as Paul often described it, He sees us "in Christ."

"Paul has chosen this exceptional wording ["made sin in our behalf"] in order to emphasize the 'sweet exchange' whereby sinners are given a righteous status before God through the righteous one who absorbed their sin (and its judgment) in himself."²

"As Christ, who knew no sin of his own, was made sin for us, so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God in him."³

"What makes this statement of Paul's so remarkable is the fact that he does not say: be given, get, receive, have God's righteousness, but 'become.' It is identifying us with God's righteousness in Christ. The expression constitutes a climax. Justification has never been put into stronger or intenser terms."⁴

"Here, then is the focal point to which the long argument has been building up. Paul, having himself been reconciled to God by the death of Christ, has now been entrusted by God with the task of ministering to others that which he has himself received, in other words, reconciliation. Verse 20 then follows

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 354.

²Bruce, p. 211.

³Henry, p. 1832.

⁴Lenski, p. 1055.

from this as a dramatic double statement of his conception of the task ... That is to say, when Paul preaches, his hearers ought to hear a voice from God, a voice which speaks on behalf of the Christ in whom God was reconciling the world. Astonishingly, the voice of the suffering apostle is to be regarded as the voice of God himself, the God who in Christ has established the new covenant, and who now desires to extend its reconciling work into all the world. The second half of the verse [v. 20] should not, I think, be taken as an address to the Corinthians specifically, but as a short and pithy statement of Paul's whole vocation: 'On behalf of Christ, we make this appeal: "Be reconciled to God!"'"¹

"What the whole passage involves, then, is the idea of the covenant ambassador, who represents the one for whom he speaks in such a full and thorough way that he actually *becomes* the living embodiment of his sovereign—or perhaps, in the light of 4:7-18 and 6:1-10, we should equally say the *dying* embodiment."²

"Coming to Christ and trusting Him is more than an intellectual assent to the fact that Christ died on the cross. It is placing our *trust* in Him and experiencing His regeneration."³

"The closing verses of the fifth chapter of 2nd Corinthians may fairly be called the *locus classicus* [lit. classical place: the best known or most authoritative passage] on the death of Christ in St. Paul's writings."⁴

Paul's example as an ambassador of Christ 6:1-10

"... the first ten verses of this chapter are a continuation of the Apostle's self-vindication from another point of view; they set forth his conduct and his experiences as God's ambassador, and as a minister to whom has been entrusted the message of reconciliation. ... He is addressing weak

¹N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 205.

²*Ibid.*, p. 206.

³McGee, 5:101.

⁴Denney, p. 150.

believers, who were in danger of a lapse into heathen laxity, through making so poor an attempt to reach a Christian standard of holiness."¹

6:1 Since God appeals to the unsaved through heralds of the gospel (5:20), the herald is in that sense a partner ("working together with Him") in His work of bringing people—all people ("you")—into final reconciliation. Another, less likely view, is that Paul meant that he labored together with the Corinthians (cf. 5:20; 1 Cor. 3:9). The words "with Him" are not in the Greek text. In this case, the objects of Paul's and the Corinthians' entreaty would be the unsaved ("you").

Evangelism is a joint effort between the Lord and His human ambassador. Paul went beyond that specific evangelistic function of an ambassador and, in behalf of God, also appealed to his Christian readers ("we also urge you"). In addition to responding to the call to be reconciled to God, they also needed to respond to another call. They needed to make sure that they were responding to God's "grace" as well.

Paul's readers had received God's grace when they had heard the gospel message. Now Paul urged them ("you") to respond to it so that God's gracious bestowal would not have been "in vain." God gives grace to all people throughout their lives, but He gives more grace at the moment of conversion and from then on. It is not clear which manifestation of grace Paul had in mind: the grace the Corinthians received at conversion or the subsequent grace. I think he probably had both in mind and was speaking of their response to divine grace generally, since he did not clearly identify the past or the present manifestation.

Receiving God's grace "in vain" would mean not allowing it to have its divinely intended result in their lives and making it an excuse for continuance in sin (cf. v. 3). Paul was referring to failing to persevere in perfecting holiness (7:1). He occasionally wrote of receiving God's grace (or believing) in vain (cf. 1 Cor. 15:2, 10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16). In the context

¹Plummer, p. 189.

here a conflict between some of the Corinthians and Paul, which resulted in the discrediting of the gospel ministry, seems to be in view (v. 3). More generally, disunity among believers frustrates God's desire and His provision of grace (help). Most broadly, any disobedience to God's will frustrates His grace (cf. 7:1; 11:4; 12:20-21).

"The explanation which in our judgment is most satisfactory, and which seems best to fit the broad context in which this verse is found, is that Paul is here thinking in terms of the judgment-seat of Christ, before which the works of every Christian will be made manifest (5:10)."¹

6:2 As he had begged unbelievers to receive God's reconciling grace (5:20), Paul now urged his readers to respond quickly and positively to God's grace to them. Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8 in order to stress the importance of responding immediately. The "favorable time" will not last forever. On the other hand, "now" can be understood as emphasizing that the prophesied time of salvation, through His provision of a Savior, had finally arrived, and Paul and his readers were enjoying it and should enjoy it.²

"His point here is not (as it is often represented) that the only day of grace which we can reckon [count] on is the present (gravely true though this is), but that the Christian dispensation is the one spoken of by the O.T. prophet in familiar words."³

In the context of the Isaiah quotation God addressed His Servant, whom the nations had despised, promising eventual vindication and urging Him to restore His people. The parallel with Paul and the Corinthians' ministry is obvious: Rather than squabbling among themselves over Paul, the readers needed to get on with the ambassadorial work that God had given them to do.

¹Hughes, p. 218. Cf. Martin, p. 166.

²Plummer, p. 191.

³Bernard, 3:74.

6:3 The Corinthians should not, and Paul tried not, to give any cause for others to stumble ("giving no reason for taking offense in anything") because of their "ministry" lest it "be discredited." Obviously we cannot prevent all criticism of our ministry, because there may be some who take offense without good reason.¹ Still, we should do everything we can to make sure that we do not give anyone cause for justifiable criticism of us.

6:4-5 Paul proceeded to positively describe how he had conducted himself in order to prove that his own reception of God's grace had not been in vain. He commended and defended his ministry in order to provide the faithful Corinthians with more ammunition to rebut his critics. Note that he referred to his actions rather than his words. He cited three groups of trials, and there are three kinds of trials in each group. These he prefaced with a claim to patient perseverance ("much endurance"), which is an extremely important quality in an ambassador of Christ.

"Writers often used affliction lists to emphasize their integrity (although, unlike Paul, Stoics also used them to underline their impassivity); sufferings were tests of character (Seneca *Dial.* 1.4.5). The rhetorical emphasis in such lists is not so much on the individual components (inviting a modern lexical focus) but the total effect."²

Trials of a general nature

- "Afflictions" (troubles, Gr. *thlipesin*) are oppressive experiences that put various kinds of pressure on a person.
- "Hardships" (Gr. *anagkais*) are strains that one cannot diminish.

¹See Ironside, pp. 158-59.

²Keener, p. 188. See also Toussaint, pp. 191-92.

- "Difficulties" (Gr. *stenochoriais*) are calamitous situations from which one cannot escape. The Greek word pictures a person trapped in a confining place.

Sufferings inflicted by other people

- "Beatings" (Gr. *plegais*) are thrashings delivered with a whip or lash (cf. 11:24-25).
- "Imprisonments" (Gr. *phulakais*) in Paul's day involved confinement and extreme discomfort (cf. 11:23).
- "Mob attacks" (Gr. *akatastasiais*) were a frequent result of Paul's ministry (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:15; 16:19; 19:29; 21:30).

Hardships inflicted on self for the furtherance of the gospel

- "Labors" (Gr. *kopois*) encompasses all the strenuous activities of life including manual labor.
- "Sleeplessness" (Gr. *agrupniais*) results from laboring long hours as well as wakefulness because of concerns (cf. Acts 16:25).
- "Hunger" (Gr. *vesteiais*) refers to missed meals.

G. Campbell Morgan divided these trials under three different categories: physical, mental, and spiritual afflictions.¹

6:6-7a

Paul now named various graces (positive character qualities) that God had produced within him mainly in and through these trials. He moved from external circumstances to internal qualities.

- "Purity" (Gr. *agnoteti*) means single-mindedness, as well as moral uprightness.

¹Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 246.

- "Knowledge" (Gr. *gnosei*) includes understanding of the Christian faith, insight, and sensitivity to God's will (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).
- "Patience" (Gr. *makrothumia*) is longsuffering with difficult people without retaliating.
- "Kindness" (Gr. *chrestoteti*) reflects a generous and sympathetic disposition that manifests itself in good actions (cf. Luke 6:35).
- Perhaps Paul used "the Holy Spirit" (Gr. *pneumati hagio*) here in the same sense that he did in Galatians 5:16. We should walk in the Spirit just as we walk in purity, knowledge, etc. The Spirit as a gift, rather than as a person, may be in view here.
- "Genuine love" (Gr. *agape avupokrito*) is the honest desire to do what is best for those in view.
- "The word of truth" (Gr. *logo aletheias*) probably refers to truthful speech or perhaps the message of truth (cf. 5:19).
- "The power of God" (Gr. *dunamei theou*) was the power that God manifested when His ambassadors followed Him faithfully and proclaimed His Word.

6:7b Paul next described some of the conditions under which he ministered and some of the methods he used.

"Weapons of righteousness" (Gr. *hoplon tes dikaiosunes*) may refer to the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) and the shield of faith (cf. Rom. 6:13; Eph. 6:11-17; 1 Thess. 5:8). "The right hand" normally attacked with a sword, and "the left" hand defended with a shield. However, these are weapons "of righteousness," the spiritual weapons that God supplies. Another possibility, not necessary mutually exclusive, is that "weapons of righteousness" may refer to the weapons that come from doing right: personal integrity. "Righteousness" often refers to right conduct in the New Testament. "The right

hand and the left" may then be a figurative expression (merism) for all acts.

"... one so equipped is prepared to meet attack from any quarter ..."¹

Matthew Henry suggested that temptations on the right might refer to prosperity, and temptations on the left to adversity.²

"We stand in need of the grace of God to arm us against the temptations of honour on the one hand, so as to bear good report without pride, and of dishonour on the other hand, so as to bear reproaches without recrimination [counter-accusation]."³

6:8-10 The contrasts in these verses probably give us some indication of the charges that Paul's critics were leveling at him (cf. Rom 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13). Human responses to Paul's preaching evidently varied greatly (v. 8), but God's estimate was positive regardless of the opinions of people. These contrasts may be between human responses, or between the human and the divine responses. Regardless of people's estimates of him, the great apostle continued to fight the good fight of faith (vv. 7, 9). Moreover, regardless of how he appeared to be doing, in reality God was preserving and blessing him (vv. 9-10).

"'The sorrow of the world' is not at the *sin* itself, but at its *penal consequences*: so that the tears of pain are no sooner dried up, than the pleasures of ungodliness are renewed."⁴

¹Hughes, p. 231.

²Henry, p. 1832.

³Ibid.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 1245.

C. PAUL'S APPEAL FOR RESTORATION OF THE CORINTHIANS' CONFIDENCE IN HIM 6:11—7:16

Paul now appealed directly for the Corinthians to reconcile with him in their hearts.

"The call for reconciliation with Paul, therefore, stands in parallel with the call for reconciliation with God [5:20]. While it would be too much to say that these two forms of reconciliation are equally important, for Paul they are directly linked with one another."¹

"... in Roman politics and ancient Mediterranean culture in general, friendship included accepting the friend's friends as one's friends and his enemies as one's enemies (e.g., Iamblichus *Pyth. Life* 35.248-49). How then can the Corinthians be reconciled with God if they mistrust his agent (cf. 6:14-16; Matt 10:40; Ex 16:8)?"²

Paul made this appeal in order to stimulate the Corinthians to accept him and his ministry so that they would continue to experience all the blessings that God wanted them to have.

1. An appeal for large-heartedness and consistency 6:11—7:4

"Centuries of speechmaking had taught ancients the value of an emotional appeal (*pathos*) at the climax of arguments; Paul likewise clinches his appeal to be reconciled in 6:11—7:4, emphasizing both affection (6:11-13; 7:2-4) and indignation (6:14—7:1). Letters were not speeches, but their very informality invited even more natural expressions of emotion (Seneca *Lucil.* 75.1-3; Demetrius *On Style* 4.227)."³

¹Beverly R. Gaventa, "Apostle and Church in 2 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 193-94. This essay points out the strong connection that bound Paul as an apostle to the Corinthian Christians, who were his children in the faith.

²Keener, p. 186.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

"This section is the high point of emotion for the whole epistle. It begins and ends with Paul asking the Corinthians to open their hearts to God."¹

The appeal stated 6:11-13

- 6:11 On the basis of his preceding unreserved openness with the Corinthians ("Our mouth has spoken freely to you," v. 11), Paul tenderly exhorted them, on the ground of fair play, to respond toward him as he had behaved toward them ("open wide your hearts to us as well," v. 13). His "freely" open speech (cf. 3:12; 4:2) reflected his "wide" open "heart."
- 6:12 They had shown reserve ("are restrained"), not because Paul had put them under bondage, but because they doubted his integrity. He urged them to become unrestrained in their "affections" toward him just as he had demonstrated that he was unrestrained in his affection toward them.
- 6:13 Paul appealed strongly for his readers to reciprocate his openness and love completely. However he knew that he could not demand this but only request it, like a parent requests the love of his or her "children. Paul rarely addressed his readers by name in the body of his epistles. He did so only when he felt very emotionally involved in what he was saying (cf. Gal. 3:1; Phil. 4:15). Here it was his extreme candor in sharing the painful experiences of his ministry with his dear friends that moved him (vv. 4-10). Many students of this book have felt that Paul's openness with the Corinthians, which comes through so strongly here, is a distinctive mark of this epistle. One scholar therefore entitled his commentary *A Heart Opened Wide*.²

The counter-balancing caution 6:14—7:1

The Corinthians had a tendency to respond to Paul's teachings by first resisting them and then going overboard in applying them inappropriately. They had done this in dealing with the incestuous man, for example (1 Cor. 5). Consequently Paul immediately explained what he did not mean by his

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 1953.

²Homer A. Kent Jr.

appeal so his readers would not become dangerously open-hearted to all people. To be open-hearted means to express or display one's warm and kindly feelings without concealment. This section of text summarizes 1 Corinthians 10:1 through 22, where Paul had previously warned the Corinthians about idolatry.

"Paul is quite capable of digressing, and it may be argued that while he is pleading for mutual openheartedness he reflects that the reason for the restraint which he deprecates [deplores] on his readers' part is their uneasy awareness that they have not made the complete break with idolatrous associations which he had earlier urged upon them (1 C. 10.14ff.); hence this exhortation."¹

6:14 Some of the Corinthians were not open-hearted toward Paul because they were doing things that they knew he disapproved of. This evidently included maintaining inappropriate relationships "with unbelievers." Various interpretations of the identity of the unbelievers see them as untrustworthy persons in contrast to Paul, Gentile Christians who did not observe the Mosaic Law, the immoral within the church, and the false apostles.²

Paul was not saying that Christians should break off all association with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 10:27). He had previously encouraged the saved partner in a mixed marriage to maintain the marriage relationship as long as possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16). He had also urged his fellow Christians, as ambassadors of Christ, to evangelize the lost (5:20). Rather here Paul was commanding that Christians form no binding interpersonal relationships with non-Christians that resulted in their spiritual defilement. This is an extension to human beings of the principle underlying the prohibition against breeding or yoking an ox and a donkey together (cf. Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:10). Such "mismatched" alliances can prevent the Christian from living a consistently obedient Christian life.

¹Bruce, p. 214. See also Carson and Moo, pp. 438-40.

²See William J. Webb, "Who Are the Unbelievers (*apistoi*) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):27-44.

The fulfillment of God's will must be of primary importance for a believer. Obviously some relationships with pagans do not pose a threat to our faithfulness to God. Where they do the Christian must maintain his or her relationship with Christ even if it means forfeiting relationships with unbelievers. There is a conceptual parallel here with what Jesus, Paul, and Peter taught about the believer's relationships with God and the state (cf. Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25; Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). We should obey both authorities unless they conflict, but when they do conflict we must obey God.

"Urban Roman colonies understood quite well the custom that one could not be friends with a friend's or patron's enemies."¹

Paul set forth the folly of such behavior by pointing out five contrasts. Each contrast, which he posed in the form of a question, expects a negative answer. All of them point out the incompatibility and incongruity of Christian discipleship and heathenism. Paul supported the last of these contrasts with quotations from the Old Testament (vv. 16b-18).

(1) Christians should follow God's will, which results in righteous behavior ("righteousness"), but pagans have no regard for God's laws ("lawlessness"). (2) Christians are children of the "light," but unbelievers are children of "darkness" (cf. Col. 1:13). The contrast between light and darkness was and still is a common way of distinguishing what is good from what is bad.

6:15 (3) "Belial" is the personification of evil (cf. Deut. 13:13; 2 Sam. 22:5-6), and he is the antithesis of "Christ." Belial was a recognized name for Satan in Paul's day.² This may have been the result of combining the Hebrew word for worthlessness with the name of the pagan god Baal.³ (4) A "believer" has little in common with an "unbeliever" when it comes to things

¹Keener, p. 193.

²Hughes, p. 248.

³Keener, p. 194.

that are characteristic of unbelievers. Obviously we share many non-moral things such as food, clothing, houses, sun, air, rain, etc.

6:16a (5) A Christian, who is a "temple of the living God," is quite different from a heathen who worships "idols" in temples made with hands. Some believe that the church, rather than individual Christians, is what Paul compared to a temple, since "we" ("For we are") is emphatic in the Greek text.¹ But it seems to me that either view could be correct. Paul could have meant we Christians.

The main reason for Paul's prohibition ("Do not be mismatched with unbelievers," v. 1) is that Christians belong to Christ. We already have a binding relationship with Him, and we must not be unfaithful to Him by tying ourselves to others who would hinder that relationship.²

6:16b Paul quoted several Old Testament passages in order to support his contention.³ The first is a gracious promise that God gave the Israelites in the wilderness ("I will dwell in them and walk among them"). Therefore they needed to be holy (Lev. 26:11-12; cf. Exod. 25:8; 29:45). Paul had taught the Corinthians that they were the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Therefore it was only appropriate that they set themselves apart to God, since He inhabited them.

The second quotation is from Exodus 6:7 and Leviticus 26:12 (cf. Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27). The essential relationship between God and the people whom He has chosen for special blessing requires that those so blessed remain faithful to Him: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

"In our present passage Paul's language indicates the corporate figure, but the responsibility of the

¹E.g., Plummer, pp. 208-9.

²See William J. Webb, "What Is the Unequal Yoke (*hetepozygountes*) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:594 (April-June 1992):162-79.

³See J. Michael McKay, "Paul's Use of an Ontological Metaphor in 2 Corinthians 6:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:710 (April-June 2021):163-84.

individual to keep himself pure is both implicit and later emphasized (7:1)."¹

6:17 Third, Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11, where God called His people to depart from Babylon and its idolatry. He applied this to the Corinthian situation in which unbelievers practiced idolatry. The contexts, both in Isaiah and here, have nothing to do with separation caused by doctrinal differences between Christians. Both passages are speaking about pagan idolatry ("do not touch what is unclean"). The promise of fellowship with Himself ("I will welcome you"), in return for separation (Ezek. 20:34, 41), should motivate us to avoid idolatry (cf. 1 John 5:21).

"There was a grave danger that, through carelessness and compromise, the Corinthian believers would be carried away, as it were, into a Babylonian captivity of the soul."²

"Separation runs through the entire Old Testament and equally through the New. God's children are ever a separated and a separate people."³

"However hard it may be it will always remain true that there are certain things a man cannot do and be a Christian."⁴

That is, be an obedient Christian.

6:18 This final mosaic of quotations (2 Sam. 7:14, 27; Isa. 43:6) advances the revelation concerning the Christian's relationship to God. He is not only our God (v. 16) who is holy (v. 17), but He is our spiritual "father." God has a right to demand loyal allegiance from His children ("sons and daughters"). Since He is "the Lord Almighty," we must remember that to disregard His Word means to incur divine discipline. Paul compared the

¹Hughes, p. 252.

²Ibid., p. 256.

³Lenski, p. 1089.

⁴Barclay, p. 248.

church here first to a temple (v. 16) and then to a family (v. 18).

7:1 "Having these promises" of intimate fellowship with God as an incentive for obedience, Christians should "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit." These sources of defilement may be external or internal: in relation to other people or in relation to God. "Flesh" (or body, Gr. *sarx*) "and spirit," as used here, is a merism for the whole person (cf. 5:9; 1 Cor. 7:34). Instead of living spiritually contaminated lives we should press on in our continual struggle against sin, all the while fearing God (cf. 5:11). This verse stresses what we must do ("cleanse ourselves") in order to progress in practical sanctification ("perfecting holiness"), and it reminds us that this process is ongoing.

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

"This passage [6:14—7:1] is a specific call for separation from the temple cults of Corinth, in direct continuity with the holiness-separation theme of 1 Corinthians, and is located here as the climax of the apologia [defense] for Paul's apostolate."²

Restatement of the appeal 7:2-4

7:2 Paul returned to his appeal for the Corinthians' full affection in 6:11 through 13. He claimed to be innocent toward the Corinthians on three counts: (1) He had done no wrong to anyone ("wronged no one"), (2) he had not led anyone astray

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," pp. 360-61.

²Barnett, p. 341.

("corrupted no one"), and (3) he had not deceived anyone for his own advantage ("taken advantage of no one"). Paul used the literary devices of *anaphora* (beginning each of the three clauses with the same word in Greek) and *homoiopoton* (using verbs that have the same ending, here *amen*). This wordplay added emotional force to his claim.

7:3 Paul did not say what he did in order "to condemn" his readers. He explained that they had a secure place in his affections. Neither death, nor the trials of life, including charges against him, would alter his love for this church ("you are in our hearts to die together and to live together"). There was no reason that they should feel restraint in their dealings with him. Regardless of their reaction, he promised that he would never exclude them from his love. This is a good example of unconditional love.

"The caveat [qualification] that one was writing something not to stir negative emotion but to demonstrate affection (7:3; 1 Cor. 4:14) was an appropriate way of showing love (Cicero *Fam.* 2.4.2)."¹

7:4 Paul was very confident that the Corinthians would respond to his defense and exhortation properly. Even though conditions were far from ideal in this church, Paul was also very proud of his converts there. God had "filled" his heart with encouraging "comfort" concerning them (cf. 1:3-4). In spite of much "affliction," some of which the Corinthians produced, Paul felt an "overflowing" sense of "joy." His explanation of the reason for these positive feelings follows.

"The idea of receiving joy in the midst of affliction strongly suggests that Paul wrote this part of the epistle while enduring suffering."²

¹Keener, p. 197.

²Martin, p. 222.

This paragraph (vv. 2-4) is transitional. It summarizes Paul's appeal for large-heartedness and consistency (6:11—7:4), and it resumes his personal narrative that he left behind temporarily in 2:13.

2. The encouraging responses of the Corinthians so far **7:5-16**

Here Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians' recent reception of Titus, and their response to Paul's previous letter, demonstrated a proper response to him (cf. 1 Thess. 3:1-9). He said this in order to encourage his readers to follow through and become completely open-hearted toward him—to accept him and his ministry without reservation.

Paul's encouragement at their response 7:5-13a

Paul returned to the subject of his meeting with Titus in Macedonia (2:13), which he had postponed in order to explain new covenant ministry (2:14—6:10) and to urge the Corinthians to accept his ministry (6:11—7:4).

7:5 When he had arrived in "Macedonia" Paul could not find Titus. He continued to experience trouble from external "conflicts" and from internal "fears." In particular the Corinthians' response to his severe letter concerned Paul (cf. 2:12-13). His reference to his "flesh" here emphasizes "the weakness of human nature which is so much influenced by external circumstances and internal moods."¹ Paul evidently used "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*) here like he used "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) in 2:13, namely, to refer to his whole person.

7:6-7 Paul had felt "discouraged" (Gr. *tapeinos*) by several circumstances. However he felt greatly relieved and encouraged ("comforted") when "Titus" found him and reported to him that the Corinthians had responded to his severe letter properly (cf. 2:3-4).

¹Bruce, p. 217.

"This epistle opened with the declaration that God was the God of all comfort [1:3-4]. Paul has now gone back to that thought."¹

Paul evidently wrote the severe letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians.² Three things turned his spirits around since he had written that letter: the "arrival" of Titus after some delay, Titus' report of his positive experience at Corinth ("the comfort with which he was comforted among you"), and the Corinthians' positive attitude toward Paul. The Christians felt affection for Paul and wanted to see him again ("your longing"). They were very sorry that they had been disloyal to him ("your mourning"). Moreover they strongly supported Paul against his critics, and they sought to obey him ("your zeal for me"). The more Titus told Paul, the more the apostle's spirits revived ("I rejoiced even more").

7:8-9 Paul admitted that he had regretted sending the severe letter after he had done so. He had thought that it was too harsh. Fortunately his readers responded to it as he had hoped they would, though it had caused them some "sorrow" at first. Fortunately it had not led the church into excessive sorrow but genuine "repentance." Most of the Christians had changed their thinking and their behavior. Evidently the majority in the church had decided to defend Paul against a vocal critic of his (v. 12). The church's failure to take this stand would have resulted in some "loss" for them, possible the loss of Paul's ministry to them. Therefore Paul presently did not regret sending the severe letter.

"We may say that Paul was in the position in which many a true pastor is today who has rebuked and chastised some member and has done this in perfect accord with God's Word and Spirit and knows that he has, and yet, when the effect hangs long in the balance, when, as here in the case of Paul, he cannot even see the effect, his poor

¹Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 248.

²See the chart in the introduction section of these notes.

human nature asserts itself in the form of useless worries, misgivings, even regrets."¹

7:10 The apostle then added a somewhat philosophical reflection on two possible responses to criticism and their consequences. The proper response, which is "the will of God," results in a change of mind ("repentance") that leads to eventual deliverance ("salvation") from the bad situation "without" later "regret." The improper response, the world's typical response, does not result in repentance but leads to resentment, bitterness, and, in the worst case, "death." Suffering as a result of receiving criticism in itself does not necessarily benefit us. It proves to be a good thing for us only when we respond to the criticism properly (cf. James 1:2-4).

7:11 Paul identified several good things that had come to his Corinthian readers because they had responded properly to his recent rebukes with "godly sorrow." Their response had yielded "earnestness" (seriousness of purpose) in them, the desire to prove themselves worthy ("vindication of yourselves"), and righteous "indignation" at the affront to Paul. It had further resulted in appropriate "fear" over their behavior and its effects, a "longing" to see Paul again, a determination ("zeal") to make things right, and a correction of their error ("punishment of wrong"). The church had now put itself in the right, having been in the wrong: "you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter."

"He [Paul] acquits them of all responsibility for the offense which was committed. At first they had been to blame. By not protesting against the outrage they had seemed to acquiesce in it, but all this had been put right by their reception of Titus and submission to Paul's letter."²

Another interpretation is that by their response the Corinthians showed that they had always been guiltless in this

¹Lenski, pp. 1106-7.

²Plummer, p. 223.

matter. This seems unlikely, since the church had mourned (Gr. *odyrmos*, indicating deep sorrow, v. 7).

7:12-13a The primary value of Paul's severe letter turned out to be the good effects that it had produced in the Corinthians as a whole ("your earnestness on our behalf"). This final outcome, which had been Paul's hope when he had originally written the severe letter, was now a reality. It had not just produced a change in "the offender" (probably Paul's critic) or even in the Corinthians' response to "the one offended" (Paul himself). Paul had wanted them to realize that "in the sight of God" they were devoted to him ("your earnestness in our behalf") as their spiritual father (cf. 2:9). That loyalty would fortify them against future tests to depart from his teaching. Paul again rejoiced that this was what had happened ("we have been comforted") and that they had not responded improperly.

"Many opinions have been expressed as to the identity of the wrongdoer and the nature of his act of injustice toward Paul. Most likely, in our view, is the suggestion that this event should be linked with a public disturbance during the second visit (12:20) when Paul confronted those who had not relinquished their former sexual practices (12:21—13:2), connected as these probably were with ongoing temple attendance (6:14—7:1). The most consistent reconstruction of Paul's scattered remarks on the subject throughout 2 Corinthians is that this man publicly opposed, and to some degree thwarted, Paul's attempt at discipline during that fateful visit."¹

Titus' encouragement at their response 7:13b-16

7:13b-14 "Titus," who had observed the Corinthians' repentance, had also rejoiced at the Corinthians' response to Paul's severe letter ("his spirit has been refreshed by you all"). Paul's words of praise for his readers ("our boasting"), before he had sent

¹Barnett, pp. 380-81.

Titus to them, had proved worthy of them in view of their response to Paul's messenger and his message.

"Paul's relief stemmed from the fact that his generous assurances to Titus about the Corinthians had not proved unfounded and therefore embarrassing (v. 14). On the contrary (*alla*) ["But"], just as his own truthfulness had been vindicated at Corinth (cf. 1:18-20), so also his boasting about them had now proved fully justified."¹

"Paul's attitude shows how excellent a director of their spiritual interests he is: not hesitating to reprove what is amiss, but yet warmly and sympathetically encouraging them in the true emotions of those whose hearts are regenerate, which is the best way of ensuring that their past errors will not be repeated."²

7:15 The Corinthians' submissive response ("obedience") to Titus, even though initially they feared him ("received him with fear and trembling"), had endeared these Christians to Titus greatly ("His affection abounds all the more toward you").

7:16 Paul was now completely confident of the Corinthians' continuing submissive obedience to him ("in everything I have confidence in you") as their spiritual father and apostle. Consequently he proceeded to appeal to them again (8:1—9:15).

"This brief verse, indeed, provides a perfect transition to all that follows. It is the delicate pin around which the whole of the epistle pivots."³

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 365.

²Hughes, p. 280.

³*Ibid.*, p. 282.

III. INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JUDEA 8:1—9:15

The New Testament reveals that Paul was actively collecting money for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26) for about five years (A.D. 52-57). He solicited funds from the Christians in Galatia (Acts 18:23; 1 Cor. 16:1), Macedonia (Acts 19:22; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:2, 4), Achaia (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8—9), and Asia Minor (Acts 20:35; cf. Acts 24:17). Delegates from most of these regions accompanied Paul when he took the gift to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

The recipients were Hebrew Christians who were poor for several reasons: Conversion to Christianity, and particularly baptism, resulted in social and economic ostracism in their society where Judaism dominated all of life. The communal sharing of goods that the early Christians in Jerusalem practiced did not solve their economic problems (cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35). All Judean residents suffered from lack of food due to a famine that descended during the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 46, Acts 11:27-30). Being the mother church of Christianity, the Jerusalem church probably had a larger number of teachers, missionaries, and visitors to support than its daughter churches did. Finally, Jews, including Jewish Christians, who lived in Judea, had to pay double taxes: to Rome and to the Jewish authorities.¹

Why did Paul devote so much of his time and energy to raising and delivering this collection? Undoubtedly love for his needy Jewish Christian brethren was a primary motivation (Rom. 12:13; 13:8; Gal. 6:10). He also believed that this gift would honor Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:19). It would help equalize God's provision for His people's physical needs too (2 Cor. 8:13-15). Moreover it provided a visual demonstration of the equality that exists between Gentile and Jewish Christians (Eph. 2:11-22). It was also something that God might use to dispel Jewish suspicions of Christianity and of Paul's mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 11:2-3). It also illustrated the spiritual indebtedness that the Gentiles owed to their Jewish brethren (Rom. 15:19, 27; 1 Cor. 9:11). For Paul personally it was one way that he could compensate in part for his earlier persecution of the Jewish Christians (Acts 8:3; 9:1; 26:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13).

¹See the excursus on Paul's collection in Martin, pp. 256-58.

Paul wrote as he did in the following two chapters in order to make the collection easier and to set forth basic principles of Christian stewardship. This is not the first time that the Corinthians had heard about this collection. Paul's abrupt introduction of the collection for the saints in 1 Corinthians 16:1, and his subsequent discussion of it in that chapter, suggest that he had spoken to them about it previously. Evidently they began to participate but then dropped the project. Perhaps the controversy concerning Paul that developed contributed to that decision (2:5-11; 7:12). However, now that Paul had learned that the Corinthian congregation was responding more positively to him again, he could reintroduce the subject and press for its completion.¹

A. THE EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIANS 8:1-7

Paul was not only proud of the Corinthians, but he also rejoiced over the Christians in Macedonia, who were the Corinthians' neighbors to the north. This joy connects the present section with the former one.

8:1 Paul tactfully began his appeal by referring to the good example of others rather than to the duty of his readers. The behavior of the Philippian, Thessalonian, Berean, and perhaps other Christians ("in the churches of Macedonia") manifested "the grace of God." They had given help just as God gives help.

The first of ten occurrences of the word "grace" (Gr. *charis*) in chapters 8 and 9 occurs here (v. 1). This Greek word occurs more frequently in these chapters than in any other two chapters in the New Testament.² Paul used it to refer to God's enablement to participate in the collection here (cf. 9:8, 14). Elsewhere it refers to the honor and opportunity of giving, which God gives (v. 4), and God's lavish display of His generosity (v. 9). It also refers to the offering itself as an expression of goodwill (vv. 6, 19). Paul further referred to grace as a generous, virtuous act of helping by sharing (v. 7). He also used it as a synonym for thanks (v. 16; 9:15). Thus the range of meanings of *charis* is quite broad.

¹See Carson and Moo, pp. 440-42, for discussion of the integrity of these chapters within the rest of 2 Corinthians.

²Hunt, 2:800.

8:2 These Macedonian believers were both poor ("deep poverty") and persecuted ("a great ordeal of affliction"; cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; Acts 16:20; 17:5). Even so they demonstrated abundant "joy" and great generosity ("the wealth of their liberality") in giving to others (cf. Rom. 12:8; Phil. 4:15).

"In 8:1 a similar pattern to that of 4:7-15 is used to describe the Macedonian participation in the collection. Out of their affliction and depth of poverty comes a wealth of liberality. Just as life has come from death in Paul's ministry, so here the Macedonians give liberally from their scarce monetary resources."¹

"The paradox of Paul's expression, 'the abundance ... of their extreme poverty' (v 2) lies at the heart of this section; and it invites the present-day reader to see how Paul regarded the meaning of Christian commitment in the most practical area of stewardship."²

"... the contribution of the Macedonian Christians was really comparable to the giving of the widow's mite (Mark xii. 44). It is noteworthy that no warnings against the temptations of wealth occur in 1 and 2 Thess. or Phil."³

"Liberality" means generosity that is free of any self-serving motive. Paul did not mention the size of their gift. Their attitude and their sacrifice were more important (cf. Mark 12:41-44).

"Christian giving is estimated in terms not of quantity but of sacrifice."⁴

8:3-4 Three characteristics marked the giving of these Macedonian brethren: First, they gave sacrificially, "beyond their ability" (v.

¹Kraftchick, p. 177.

²Martin, p. 255.

³Bernard, 3:85.

⁴Hughes, p. 288.

3a). That is they gave more generously than their limited means and their difficult circumstances might have warranted.

"The meaning of this paradox is that, because of their extreme poverty, the amount collected by them was not huge in quantity; a man possessing only ten pounds cannot be expected to contribute a hundred pounds, for ten pounds is the absolute limit of his ability. In this sense, the Macedonians had given 'according to their ability'. But the proportion of his goods which a person gives is generally determined by a twofold consideration: (i) a reckoning of the basic necessities for his own immediate existence, and (ii) prudence in setting aside at least something as a measure of security against future needs and emergencies. Such circumspection is justifiable and reasonable. The Macedonians, however, poor though they were, had shown a complete disregard of their own requirements, both present and future. It is in this sense that, impelled by love and compassion for brethren in Christ whom they had never seen, they had given 'contrary to their ability'. And this was a noteworthy token of their refusal to take anxious thought for the morrow because of their confident dependence on God, who as the Heavenly Father, knows His children's needs even before they ask Him and will not fail to supply those needs from the boundless storehouse of His grace (12:9; Mt. 6:8, 25ff.; Phil. 4:19)."¹

Second, they gave on their own initiative ("voluntarily"), without receiving any pressure from others that they should give (vv. 3b-4). Having received "grace" from God (v. 9) as needy sinners, they desired to extend "grace" to their needy brethren by sending them material assistance. Evidently Paul had not pressed the Macedonians, in view of their economic condition, to contribute, since he wrote that they had begged

¹Ibid., pp. 290-91. "Pounds" in this quotation refers to pounds sterling, a monetary amount, not to a measure of weight.

him for that privilege ("begging us with much urging for the favor of participation").

The Macedonians wanted to extend gracious fellowship to the poorer saints. "Gracious fellowship" is a better translation of the Greek hendiadys construction *ten charin kai ten koinonian* (lit. the grace and the fellowship), rendered "the favor of participation" in the NASB and "the privilege of sharing" in the NIV. (Hendiadys is a figure of speech in which the writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.)

8:5 Third, they gave as a part of their larger personal dedication to the Lord and to Paul for any service that they might request of them in harmony with "the will of God." When people give themselves totally to the Lord and to His servants their hearts are already open toward others in need. Meeting the needs of others is really service for Christ (Matt. 22:39).

8:6 "Titus" had begun to prepare the Corinthians to give their gift sometime before his most recent visit to Corinth. He had made an earlier visit to Corinth a year before the time that Paul wrote this epistle (cf. v. 10, 9:2). The Corinthians were not facing persecution, nor were they facing financial constraints, as the Macedonians were. Nevertheless they had not yet assembled their offering, even though Titus had been with them again recently and had encouraged them to do so.

"Here we have the right view of the work of the ministry in collecting money for the church. When we induce the congregations to give as these Macedonians gave, and as the Corinthians had begun to give and were to finish giving, we act as God's means for bestowing additional measures of God's grace upon them, we are helping them to new measures of priceless grace. In other words,

we are enriching *them* and not impoverishing them."¹

8:7 Paul now called on his readers to remember the vastness of their spiritual resources and to make sure that generosity marked them as a congregation, as did so many other gifts of God's Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 1:5, 7; 12:31; 14:37).

"The Corinthians were strong in activities that are local to and centered upon them (miracle-working faith, charismatic speech, and theological understanding), but weak on those that are for the benefit of those outside, in this case the 'saints of Jerusalem.'"²

This verse elevates giving to the status of a spiritual gift on the same level as "faith, speaking, knowledge," "earnestness," and even "love."

"An ungenerous Christian is far from being a complete Christian."³

"I have met pastors and missionaries who have argued that, since they devote their whole time in serving the Lord, they are not obligated to give. Paul argued just the opposite: since you are wonderfully gifted from God, you ought to want to give even more!"⁴

B. THE SUPREME MOTIVE FOR GIVING 8:8-15

Paul cited the example of Jesus Christ's gift of Himself for needy humanity in order to further motivate his readers to finish their work of assembling the collection.

8:8 Paul wanted his readers to understand that he did not want them to take his exhortation to "excel in this gracious work"

¹Lenski, p. 1132.

²Barnett, pp. 403-4.

³Tasker, p. 114.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:656.

(v. 7) incorrectly. It was not an apostolic "command," since obedience to a command is an inferior motive compared to volunteering when it comes to giving to others. Rather he hoped that "the earnestness of others" would motivate the Corinthians to prove the "sincerity" of their "love" by giving. The "others" in view are the Macedonians.

Paul claimed full apostolic authority (cf. 10:8; 13:10), which his critics challenged, but he often chose, as here, not to use it. It is often wiser and more effective to appeal for change by citing motivating examples rather than by making authoritative demands.

"Paul uses the conventional rhetorical strategy of comparison (*synkrisis*), in this case competition, to spur the Corinthians to action (8:1-8, esp. 8:8)."¹

"When [I was] a boy I knew ... churches that assessed members how much they were to give on church expenses. This method of giving is not scriptural. It is not in accordance with the genius of Christianity. 'Whosoever will ... if any man wills to do,' is the spirit of action in Christian circles."²

8:9 The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the greatest of all examples of self-sacrificing generosity. He gave up the riches of glory in heaven when He became a man and died on the cross so that believers might share His riches of glory in heaven (cf. Phil. 2:1-11). Paul referred to His great sacrifice as "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." This was His "gracious work" (v. 7). Gratitude to Him for His sacrificial grace should be the supreme motive for Christian giving.

"Paul depicts the glory of heavenly existence as wealth, in comparison with which the lowliness of earthly existence amounts to 'poverty.' Thus it is not possible [i.e., proper], from this verse alone,

¹Keener, p. 203.

²Charles B. Williams, *A Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, p. 202.

to deduce that Christ's life on earth was one of indigence [extreme poverty]. In the context the stress is on his voluntary surrender of glory contrasted with the spiritual wealth derived by others (Eph. 1:3) through his gracious act of giving."¹

"... there is nowhere in St. Paul a more definite statement of his belief in the pre-existence of Christ before His Incarnation (*cf.* John xvii. 5)."²

Paul frequently used doctrine to appeal for proper conduct (*cf.* Rom. 15:2-3; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:9-10).

The Macedonians gave when they were very poor, but Christ gave when He was indescribably "rich." The Corinthians were between these two extremes. These two examples leave no question that giving is a grace which both the rich and the poor should demonstrate.

"We should be charitable to the poor out of what we have, because we ourselves live upon the charity of the Lord Jesus Christ."³

"No man can enter into the meaning of this verse or feel its power, without being thereby made willing to sacrifice himself for others."⁴

8:10-11 Though he did not command his readers ("I give my opinion in this matter"), Paul advised them strongly to complete their collection ("finish doing it," v. 11). It was to their "advantage" to do so both because it was the gracious thing to do and because it would meet with his and the Lord's approval. They had, after all, both desired to begin a collection and had actually begun their collection before the Macedonian churches

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 368.

²Bernard, 3:87.

³Henry, p. 1834.

⁴Hodge, p. 201.

had taken either of those steps. A better understanding of "a year ago" (v. 10) is "as long ago as last year."

"Therefore in all three cases [whether Paul was thinking of a Macedonian year, an Olympiad, or a Jewish year] a person writing in November might speak of the previous January-April as 'last year.'"¹

8:12 The standard by which God would judge their contribution would be how much they gave in relation to how much they had, not simply how much they gave (cf. Mark 12:41-44). God does not expect us to give what we do not have. The apostle assumed that their desire to give sprang from proper motivation ("willingness").

"Paul's sentiment here is entirely in line with the OT prophets' teaching that the right attitude to Yahweh is more important than the sacrifice itself."²

8:13 The objective in view was not making the Judean Christians rich and the Corinthian Christians poor. It was that there should be more material "equality" among them than presently existed.

"Here *isotes* ["equality"] involves (negatively) the equalization of economic burdens and (positively) the equal supply of the necessities of life. It is achieved by giving that is proportionate to the resources available at any given time (vv. 11-12)."³

8:14 In the future the Corinthians might be in need of help from other Christians who had more than they did. Then it would be their turn to receive. Paul viewed Christians as being brothers and sisters in a large family. As members of a family we have

¹Plummer, p. 243.

²Barnett, p. 412.

³Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 592.

a responsibility to care for each other. Again he argued for "equality."

"... the Scriptures avoid, on the one hand, the injustice and destructive evils of agrarian communism, by recognising [*sic*] the right of property and making all almsgiving optional; and on the other, the heartless disregard of the poor by inculcating the universal brotherhood of believers, and the consequent duty of each to contribute of his abundance to relieve the necessities of the poor. At the same time they inculcate on the poor the duty of self-support to the extent of their ability. They are commanded 'with quietness to work, and to eat their own bread.' Could these principles be carried out there would be among Christians neither idleness nor want."¹

Some people see any financial demand placed upon them by church leaders, governmental leaders, or others as an evidence of discrimination. Their argument is that they should not have to give because others do not give as much as they are being asked to give. It was this attitude that Paul addressed in these verses. Paul did not legislate equality; he appealed for it.

8:15 Paul illustrated the fact that God wants all of His people to have enough (to be equal in this sense) by citing the Israelites' situation in the wilderness (Exod. 16:18). Some of the Israelites "gathered much" manna and some "gathered little" for various reasons. Nevertheless they all had their needs met. God saw to that. Now the Corinthians needed to see to it that what God had provided for those who "gathered much" in Corinth shared with those who had "gathered little" in Judea. As they did this they would become God's agents in maintaining sufficiency for all.

God has always wanted all of His people to have enough to live on and for them to share with their needy brethren who do not have enough. We

¹Hodge, p. 206.

should implement this principle of relative equality (meeting the basic needs of others) in our giving. God's desire is the same today as it has been throughout history. This is clear from Paul's appeal to the past (v. 15). There are no easy answers as to how we can really meet the needs of our needy brothers and sisters in our world with its gigantic population and complex socio-economic-political problems. Moreover God's will is not exactly the same for every Christian, meaning that He leads His people to meet needs in varying ways and with differing amounts. Paul appealed, implying that the Corinthians could decide what they wanted to do (vv. 10-12). Nevertheless our responsibility is clear. A pastor posted the following notice on his church marquee: "Give God what's right, not what's left."

C. THE DELEGATES OF THE CHURCHES 8:16-24

Having motivated his readers to finish the collection, Paul proceeded to explain the practical steps he had taken to pick up their gift. He wanted the Corinthians to know what to do and what to expect. He wrote a letter of commendation (cf. 3:1) in the following verses in which he set forth the credentials of the three delegates who would visit them soon to pick up their contribution.

8:16 One of Paul's representatives, whom he was sending to Corinth to pick up their gift, was "Titus." Paul's readers had met Titus, received ministry from him, and would see him again shortly. Paul again affirmed Titus' love for the Corinthians so that they would receive him happily. The apostle also expressed thanks to God for working in Titus in order to give him his good attitude of "earnestness." Titus, like Paul, felt concern for the Corinthians personally, not just for their money (cf. 12:14).

"The Corinthians might think that the zeal of Titus for the relief-fund was zeal on behalf of the Jerusalem poor; but it was really on behalf of the Corinthians. They would be the chief losers if a suitable sum was not raised in Corinth."¹

8:17 It is not clear whether Titus had already left Paul for Corinth when Paul wrote this epistle or whether he was about to do so. The Greek aorist tense permits either translation, and no other

¹Plummer, p. 247.

textual reference provides a solution. He may have carried 2 Corinthians to its recipients. In any case it was Titus' own "earnest" desire ("of his own accord"), as well as Paul's ("our appeal," cf. v. 6), that led him back to Corinth.

8:18-19 The famous brother's identity is also unknown. He may have been Luke.¹ Or he may have been any one of a number of other Christians who assisted Paul. Lenski thought he was either Sopater of Berea, or Aristarchus, or Secundus of Thessalonica.² The churches of Macedonia, Asia Minor, and Galatia had chosen this man as a courier. They knew him well, and he had won their respect.

"Perhaps we can best account for the anonymity of the two brothers [cf. v. 22] by submitting that although the Corinthians had heard about (at least) one of the brothers, they had not met either of the two, but since all three delegates were the bearers of the present letter, the two *adelphoi* [brothers] would be introduced to the church by Titus."³

Sometimes "us" refers to more than one person. In this case Paul and Titus may be in view. But "us" sometimes refers to only the person speaking, as in the plural of majesty usage. In this case only Paul is in view. I believe that in this case Paul alone is in view since he supervised the project ("being administered by us"). Paul conducted this project for a double reason: He saw it as an opportunity to promote "the glory of the Lord" and as an opportunity "to show" his "readiness" to lend a helping hand to his needy brethren in Judea (cf. Matt. 22:37-39).

8:20-21 Paul was very conscious of his need to carefully guard this generous gift and to protect the people involved in the handling of it from any charge of financial mismanagement so that no one would "discredit" him. Doing what was correct was

¹See John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):3-44; Plummer, p. 248; Henry, p. 1834; and Hughes, p. 313.

²Lenski, p. 1151.

³Harris, *The Second ...*, pp. 601-2. Cf. Plummer, p. 248; Barrett, p. 228.

not enough for Paul. He wanted to make sure that everyone knew that what he did was honest and above board as well: "the Lord" and "other people" (cf. Prov. 3:3-4). Paul had learned to anticipate the suspicions and/or accusations of those who viewed his ministry critically and to take any necessary "precaution."

"Cicero's words (*De officiis* 2.21.75) are appropriate: 'but the main thing in all public administration and public service is to avoid even the slightest suspicion of avarice [greed]' ..."¹

Some observers may have wondered if Paul was using the money of other people for his own advantage. Others may have suspected him of skimming a certain percentage of the large gift off the top as his commission. In order to guard against any misunderstanding Paul had originally thought that he would not accompany the delegates who carried the money to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3-4; cf. 2 Cor. 1:16; Rom. 15:25). He had also insisted that the churches, rather than he himself, appoint the delegates (1 Cor. 16:3), and that two delegates accompany Titus to Corinth before he arrived (vv. 18-19, 22-23). The names of Paul's companions are listed in Acts 20:4: Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus.

We need to apply Paul's wise caution in our day when so many professed servants of the Lord have proved deceitful. We cannot afford to be naive or careless but do things that are honorable in the sight of all people.

8:22 A third member of the delegation, beside Titus and the unnamed brother of verse 18, is also unknown to us. His qualifications fitted him well for his duties however, since he had previously proven himself worthy of significant responsibility. Like Titus this Christian "brother" also had "great confidence" in the Corinthians and consequently would have been welcome in Corinth.

¹Martin, p. 279.

Why did Paul not mention Titus' two companions by name? Perhaps the Corinthians already knew who they were, or Paul may have wanted to heighten anticipation for their arrival by keeping their identities a secret. Paul may have sent three delegates to Corinth, rather than one or two, since his credibility there had been under attack. The anticipated arrival of three visitors would have also provided additional motivation for these until now slack Corinthian Christians to complete their collection. One writer speculated that they may have been Jason of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5) and Sopater of Berea (Acts 20:4; cf. Rom 16:21).¹

8:23 "Titus" was obviously the man in charge of this delegation. He was a special representative of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom. 16:21): "my partner and fellow worker." The other two delegates were Paul's spiritual "brothers" in the faith and the "messengers of the [other] churches." They also were credits Christ (cf. Rev. 2:1). By calling these fellow workers "a glory to Christ" Paul meant that they brought glory to Christ.²

This is one place where the Greek word *apostolos*, usually translated "apostle," but here rendered "messenger[s]," occurs in the non-technical sense of someone sent on a mission (cf. Phil. 2:25; Acts 14:4, 14; et al.).³ Usually it refers to one of the 13 apostles whom Jesus Christ personally commissioned (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:1, et al.).

8:24 Paul concluded his letter of commendation (vv. 16-24) with another appeal. He charged his readers to grant these messengers a reception that would demonstrate to the other "churches" the Corinthians' "love" for Christ, Paul, and the delegates. They were to be open-hearted toward them as Paul had urged them to be open-hearted toward himself (6:11-13). Their warm reception of the messengers would confirm the genuineness of their acceptance of Paul as well as their positive response to his admonition concerning the offering.

¹Lowery, p. 575.

²See Keener, p. 210, for a parallel in Greco-Roman literature.

³See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "apostolos," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 1 (1964):407-47.

Paul had boasted to other churches about the Corinthians, and other churches were watching them and knew of their history. Therefore this positive welcome of the delegates needed to be public, in order to dispel any doubts about the Corinthian believers that other believers might have.

D. THE ANTICIPATED VISIT OF PAUL 9:1-5

Paul revealed his plan to visit Corinth, soon after Titus and his two companions arrived, in order to further motivate the Corinthians to complete their collection and have it ready to go to Judea. Chapter 9 continues the subject of chapter 8. Some scholars have argued for separating chapter 9 from chapters 1 through 8, but there are insufficient compelling reasons for doing so.¹

- 9:1 Even though Paul said that he felt no need to go on writing about the importance of this collection, he did so in this chapter. This is the rhetorical device called *paraleipsis* (cf. 1 Thess. 4:9, 13; 5:1): Saying one is not going to mention a subject, and then proceeding to do so, which is what *paraleipsis* is, has the effect of emphasizing it in an understated way that is less offensive than if one would simply say it. The emphasis in the verses that follow is primarily on Paul's plan to return to Corinth. The additional motivation that this visit placed on the readers to get the collection ready (cf. Phile. 21-22) is only a secondary emphasis.
- 9:2 Paul said that he told "the Macedonians" that the Corinthians had "been prepared since last year." Evidently he meant by "prepared" that they had been ready to start collecting a gift rather than that their gift was ready to go to Judea (8:6, 10). Their enthusiasm a year ago had faded since then (8:11), but they had been eager ("your zeal") to participate in the offering project. It was this initial attitude that Paul commended here. Apparently the Corinthian Christians were taking the lead in their province, which also included churches in Cenchrea and probably other communities. This explains his reference to "Achaia."

¹See Keener, pp. 210-11.

"... he [Paul] never criticized [*sic*] one Church to another; he praised one to another. He never quoted to one Church the faults and the failings of another; he always quoted the things that he could praise."¹

9:3-4 Paul planned to bring some "Macedonians" with him to Corinth (v. 4). The "if" (v. 4) does not imply doubt about this possibility, in the Greek text. The first class condition in the Greek text describes a condition that Paul assumed to be true for the sake of his argument. In this case we could translate the Greek word translated "if" as "when" (cf. John 12:32; 1 John 2:28). Despite Paul's "boasting" there was a possibility that he and his Macedonian companions might find the Corinthians unprepared when they arrived. Paul evidently mentioned his intention as an added incentive for the Corinthians to complete their collection before he arrived.

"There were two situations Paul wished to avoid. One was that his repeated and confident boast to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' 'eagerness to help' (v. 2) and their expected 'readiness' on his arrival should turn out to be without foundation (v. 3). The other was that when the delegates of the Macedonian churches (not to be confused with the two companions of Titus) arrived at Corinth with Paul on his forthcoming visit (12:14; 13:1-2), the Corinthians would be still unprepared and this would lead to his acute embarrassment—not to mention that of the Corinthians themselves (v. 4)."²

"He is not afraid that they will refuse to give, but he is afraid that they may be dilatory [slow] for want of organization. It will produce a bad impression if the money is not ready when it is

¹Barclay, p. 259.

²Harris, "2 Corinthians," pp. 374-75.

wanted. He carefully limits his anxiety to 'this particular.'¹

9:5 "The brothers" in view here are Titus and his two companions. The Greek word translated "generous gift" (*eulogian*, lit. good word) usually reads "blessing" elsewhere. The Corinthians' gift would be a blessing to the Judeans. That is, it would be an occasion for the Jerusalem believers to bless (thank) God for their gift. The Greek word also implies a sizable blessing. Paul assumed that his readers would collect a substantial sum of money and that generosity, rather than "greediness," would motivate them. Paul was contrasting two attitudes to giving: generously or "grudgingly."

"Apparently, Paul did not see anything wrong or unspiritual about asking people to promise to give. He did not tell them *how much* they had to promise, but he did expect them to keep their promise. When a person signs up for a telephone, he promises to pay a certain amount each month. If it is acceptable to make financial commitments for things like telephones, cars, and credit cards, certainly it ought to be acceptable to make commitments for the work of the Lord."²

The subtle pressure that Paul put on his readers, which comes through especially forcefully in this section, raises a question as to his method of motivating his readers. Was he making it almost impossible for them to give from proper motives by stressing lesser motivating factors so strongly? In other words, was he manipulating them into giving? Evidently Paul realized that the Corinthians might not follow through with their commitment unless they wanted to do so very strongly. After all, they had procrastinated for a year (8:10). The fact that he motivated them from several different angles does not mean that what he presented as the proper primary motivation for giving, in chapter 8, is secondary. If his primary arguments failed by themselves, these secondary arguments would add force and hopefully move his readers to do what was right.

¹Plummer, p. 254.

²Wiersbe, 1:660.

"The word motivation is often confused with manipulation. Motivation occurs when you persuade others to take an action in their own best interests. Things such as people preparing their homework, accepting responsibility for their performance, and finishing their education are the results of motivation. Manipulation is persuading others to take an action that is primarily for your benefit. Things such as selling an inferior product at an inflated price and working people overtime with no extra pay are examples of manipulation."¹

"So far from opportunistically playing off one church against another, as is often concluded from this passage, Paul is, rather, seeking to preserve the reputation of the Corinthians in a situation of potential misunderstanding in which they would have lost face."²

E. THE BENEFITS OF GENEROUS GIVING 9:6-15

Paul concluded his exhortation regarding the collection by reminding his readers of the benefits that God inevitably bestows on those who give generously. He did this so that they would follow through with their purpose and would believe that God would provide for the need that their sacrifice would create.

"Having begged the Corinthians not to spoil his praise of them by exhibiting unreadiness now, but to give without further delay, he puts before them three motives for giving liberally and joyfully. 1. Giving in a right spirit is a sowing which is sure of a harvest. ... 2. God is able and willing to bestow the right spirit and the worldly wealth with which to exhibit it. 3. What they give will not only be a relief to the recipients, but it will fill them with gratitude to God and with affection for the donors."³

9:6 One of the great spiritual principles of life is that God blesses people in proportion to their blessing of others (cf. Prov. 11:24-25; 19:17; 22:8-9; Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). Paul reminded

¹Zig Zigar, *Something to Smile About*, p. 43.

²Barnett, p. 435.

³Plummer, pp. 257-58.

his readers of this principle here by citing the example of the farmer. If he "sows sparingly" he will harvest little, but if he "sows generously" he will harvest much. Giving to meet the needs of others is like sowing seed. It will yield fruit in time. There will be a crop.

"The important lesson which Paul is urging upon the Corinthians at this point is that *to give is to sow*. What is given is not lost, but, like the seed sown by the farmer, contrary to all appearances it possesses the potency of life and increase. At the same time it is important to remember that, as the whole context shows, the Apostle is speaking of the quality, not the quantity, of giving."¹

Is a proper motive for giving to get something in return? Both Jesus and Paul urged us to lay up treasure in heaven, namely, to make investments of time, effort, and resources counting on the fact that they will yield eternal rewards (Luke 12:31-34; 14:14; Matt. 6:4, 6, 18-21; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; cf. Prov. 19:17; Matt. 10:42; Luke 6:38). It is perfectly legitimate to remind people of the inevitable consequences of their actions in order to motivate them to do what is right, as Paul did here.

"Low motives, if not immoral, are admissible, esp. in dealing with those to whom high motives do not always appeal."²

9:7 The example of the harvest suggests that the farmer has the freedom to plant as much or as little as he chooses (cf. Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2). We should give generously, freely, and deliberately. We should not give "reluctantly," feeling that we hate to part with what we are giving. We should not give "under compulsion," because we feel that there is no alternative or because we think that others will look down on us if we fail to give (cf. Acts 5:1-11). We should not give impulsively or thoughtlessly either, but with inward resolve. We should give cheerfully, or hilariously, in the sense of very

¹Hughes, p. 329.

²Plummer, pp. 258-59.

joyfully, but not in the sense of thoughtlessly. "Cheerful" (Gr. *hilaron*) givers always receive God's loving approval (Prov. 22:8 LXX).

"What makes a man a cheerful giver is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

"I have been in many churches where they take up an offering and then the congregation stands and sings, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' I think that is wonderful. The only thing that would be better would be if they would sing it *first*. This would put them in the attitude of giving and of giving joyfully. Also they would be able to reach for their wallets as they stood up!"²

"It is often taught from this passage that people must give until it hurts, and then give some more. That idea is not found here (or elsewhere). One should not give unless they give cheerfully."³

One church printed in its bulletin: "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver. He also accepteth from a grouch."⁴

9:8 Such giving need not produce anxiety in the giver, even if he or she is giving away much. God demonstrates His love for cheerful givers by giving them more "grace" (enablement) and more opportunity. He not only provides them with what is sufficient for their needs, but He gives them more that they can give away. We always need to remember that God is the One from whom everything we have comes.

"The word he [Paul] uses is *autarkeia* ["sufficiency"]. This was a favourite [*sic*] Stoic word. It does not describe the sufficiency of the

¹Richard D. Balge, "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 9:1-7," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 85:3 (Summer 1988):228. This article contains a good summary of what verses 1-7 teach concerning motivation in Christian giving and methods for encouraging it.

²McGee, 5:131.

³Hunt, 2:803.

⁴Cited in Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 388

man who possesses all kinds of things in abundance. It means independence. It describes the state of the man who has not directed life to amassing possessions but to eliminating needs. It describes the man who has taught himself to be content with very little and never to want anything, the man who has learned to do without things."¹

Notice the "able" in this verse. This should not lead to the conclusion that God can, but He might not, "make all grace overflow to you" (cf. 12:9). Rather, He is more than able and willing. The righteous person who desires to give to the needs of others will not lack opportunity to do so, because God will make this possible for him or her.

9:9 Psalm 112:9 supports Paul's point that God will provide grace (divine enablement) to givers. In this psalm the psalmist described the God-fearing person distributing material goods "to the poor." The words read like the epitaph of a philanthropist. God will remember the God-fearing person's benevolent acts. "Righteousness" probably refers to benevolent acts here (cf. Matt. 6:1). These are acts of giving for which God will reward the sacrificial donor with permanent benefits ("His righteousness endures forever"). God will multiply His grace to those who bestow grace on others.

"The righteous man does not keep for selfish use what was meant for the benefit of many."²

9:10 Paul applied the principle stated in verses 9 to his readers, and we can apply it to ourselves (cf. Isa. 40:10; Hos. 10:12). However notice that what God will provide is "seed" for sowing: the opportunities and resources to make further investments of good works ("your righteousness"). He did not promise wealth for our own consumption.

¹Barclay, pp. 262-63.

²Plummer, p. 261.

Preachers of "prosperity theology" have used these verses to support their contention that God will inevitably give you more material goods if you give what you presently have to Him. They often urge their hearers to give to God through their ministries. However Paul was comparing what God does on the physical plane with what He does spiritually. The farmer who plants a crop gets back more seed than he sowed. Similarly, Paul argued, those who sow spiritually—by giving sacrificially to others—will receive more spiritual seed, namely, divine enablement to help more people (vv. 8-9). God will not just supply more spiritual seed, but He will "multiply" it.

"There is no hint here of a 'prosperity theology.' Enrichment, like 'overflowing' (v. 8), is metaphorical, and is not at all motivated by self-interest."¹

Generally, what we give away is what we get back. That is the principle in view. However this is not a promise that we will inevitably get more wealth if we give away our wealth. The opposite usually happens. In Galatians 6:7 ("whatever a person sows, this he will also reap") the emphasis is on "whatever" rather than "reap." Paul's point there was that we reap in kind what we sow (cf. Gal. 6:8). He did not say that we will get back more of whatever we sow.

9:11 "In everything" means that God will give generous Christians additional blessings. He may give them more material resources that they can pass on to others. However we should remember that the context is primarily dealing with "righteousness" that "endures forever," not Rolls Royces and Rolex watches. Another result of the Corinthians' benefaction would be that the Jerusalem saints would thank "God" when the gift came to them through Paul and his associates.

9:12 The Corinthians' gift would not only meet the needs of their Jewish brethren and cause them to thank God (v. 11b), but it

¹Barnett, p. 443. For an evaluation of "prosperity theology," see Jim Kinnebrew, "The Gospel of Affluence," *Mid-American Theological Journal* 9:2 (Fall 1985):49-65, and Ken L. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.

would also cause many other people to thank God. Paul viewed the benefits of their gift as spilling over ("overflowing") onto others who would also praise "God" for the Corinthians' generosity. The abundant grace that God has given us will overflow into the lives of many others too, if we pass it on. For example, when it becomes known that someone has given a gift, other people are often moved to do the same thing.

In Matthew 6:3 and 4 Jesus said, "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your charitable giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." His point was that His disciples should not give to others with a view to receiving the praise of other people when they gave. He did not mean that all giving should be in secret.

9:13 The Jerusalem believers, and others who would hear about the Corinthians' gift, would glorify God because it demonstrated the vitality of the donors' faith (cf. James 2:14-26 for the alternative). News of the Corinthians' former conduct probably had raised some questions about their faith among the Christians in the other churches. All who confess "the gospel" imply that they follow the teachings of Jesus and His apostles, who taught us to love our brethren (Rom. 12:13; et al.). Another reason these onlookers would thank God was that the Corinthians had been sacrificially generous (their "liberality," Gr. *haplotes*) in their giving. Paul apparently believed that there would be more thanksgiving for the virtues of the Corinthians than for their gift.

9:14 Another benefit of this gift that Paul foresaw was that those who received it and heard about it would reciprocate by interceding for the Corinthians. Moreover they would long to see and be with the Corinthians "because of the surpassing grace" that God had given them. There is something attractive about people on whom the grace of God obviously rests.

9:15 The "indescribable gift" to which Paul referred in closing is probably Jesus Christ, the "divine gift which inspires all gifts."¹ It is probably not the same as the gift that God would give the Corinthians because they were generous toward the Judeans, to which Paul referred in the immediately preceding context (vv. 8-11). Some have suggested that it is the gift of eternal salvation.² Others have suggested that, in view of the preceding context, the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians, which this collection would facilitate, qualifies as the indescribable gift.³ Christ qualifies as an indescribable gift (cf. Rom. 8:32). Furthermore, reference to Him is appropriate and climactic at the end of this section of the epistle. Perhaps Paul meant that both Christ and the salvation that He brings constitute this gift.⁴ Paul here was going back to the primary motivation for Christian giving (cf. 8:9) for his final appeal to his readers.

The Corinthians did follow through and assemble their gift. It was only a few months after Paul penned 2 Corinthians that he wrote his epistle to the Romans. In that epistle he said that the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia (which included Corinth) had made a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26-27). After writing this Paul and his delegation traveled back to Jerusalem from Corinth through Macedonia and Asia Minor (Acts 20:3—21:19). The leaders of the Jerusalem church evidently received the gift gladly (Acts 21:17).

IV. APPEALS CONCERNING PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY 10:1—13:10

In this third and last major division of his epistle the Apostle Paul strongly defended his apostolic authority. He did this in order to silence his critics in Corinth—and perhaps elsewhere—permanently, and to confirm the united support of the Christians there. One of Paul's major purposes in writing this letter was to prepare the way for his next visit to Corinth. He

¹Henry, p. 1835; Hodge, p. 227; Tasker, p. 130; Ironside, p. 214; Jamieson, et al., p. 1248; Gaebelin, 3:2:183.

²E.g., Lowery, p. 576.

³E.g., Plummer, p. 268.

⁴Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 660.

had just referred to that anticipated visit (9:3-4). Consequently he felt compelled to establish his apostolic authority firmly.

"... the reason for the new subject (as in 1 Cor. 7:1; 12:1; 15:1) lies primarily in the situation [Paul faced in Corinth] rather than in Paul's logic."¹

"The last four chapters reveal why the collection for the saints in Jerusalem began to lag, and why Paul wrote chapters 8 and 9 in order to expedite the matter of the collection."²

Broomall's observation on the general tone of 2 Corinthians is especially true of chapters 10 through 13:

"The progress of thought in this epistle is like the movement of a mighty army advancing over rugged terrain still inhabited by pockets of stubborn resistance."³

"... 2 Corinthians 10—13 presents us with what might almost be called a new kind of Judaizing: a Hellenistic Jewish movement that opposed Paul but was less concerned (so far as we know) with circumcision and with detailed observance of the Mosaic law than with prestige and power in accord with the contemporary values of Corinthian society. Paul's response (2 Cor. 10—13) is the most intense, revealing, and emotional of all his writings."⁴

Several commentators have argued that chapters 10 through 13 were originally part of Paul's former severe letter. The strongest evidence for this view is the seeming reasonableness of it. The strongest argument against it is that there are no ancient manuscripts, versions, or quotations that support it. There is no external evidence that this section was ever separated from chapters 1 through 9.⁵

"It is my contention ... that chs. 1—9 were written in stages over a considerable period and that after Paul had written

¹Keener, p. 216.

²Lenski, p. 1191.

³Broomall, p. 1261.

⁴Carson and Moo, p. 447.

⁵See Plummer, pp. xxii-xxxvi, for a full discussion of this issue.

these chapters, he received distressing news of further problems at Corinth that prompted him to write chs. 10—13 and then send all thirteen chapters as a single letter."¹

A. REPLIES TO CHARGES MADE AGAINST PAUL 10:1-18

In this section of his letter Paul responded to charges of cowardice, weakness, and intrusion that one or more critics in Corinth had evidently leveled against him. Failure to submit to apostolic authority could have dangerous consequences, such as disregarding his inspired writings and other instructions. It was to spare his beloved readers from these ill effects that Paul wrote as he did, not out of a carnal sense of wounded pride.

1. Reply to the charge of cowardice 10:1-6

10:1-2 Paul may have identified himself by name here ("I, Paul, myself") so his readers would have no doubt that what he proceeded to say indeed came from him. Whenever he described himself as "I Paul" (and here "myself") he proceeded to say something with strong emphasis (cf. Gal. 5:2; Eph. 3:1; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Phile. 19). He began by asking his readers to respond to his appeal to submit to his apostolic authority. This was important so that when he came he would not have to deal severely with those who opposed him (cf. Acts 5:1-10).

Paul's description of himself in verse 1b ("I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent") is really his critics' opinion. Those individuals were saying that Paul was behaving like a carnal Christian ("as if we walked according to the flesh," v. 2; cf. 1:12-24). His critics were evidently say that Paul sent forceful letters to them, especially his severe letter, but when he was with them in person he was less forceful ("meek"). However his "meekness and gentleness" when he was among them were characteristics "of Christ," rather than signs of personal timidity and weakness (v. 1; cf. Matt. 23; John 2:14-22). Paul did not want to have to

¹Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 661.

be critical ("bold") when he arrived in Corinth, but he was ready to be if necessary.

"In v. 2 Paul gives the probable clue to his critics' basis of opposition to him. Judging his attempted discipline of moral offenders in Corinth to have been ineffectual, they 'reckon' that Paul must be a man who 'walks according to the flesh.'"¹

10:3 Paul admitted that he walked "in the flesh" (was only human), but he denied that he conducted spiritual warfare "according to the flesh" (like carnal Christians and unbelievers do). He was contrasting living in the world with living like a worldly person. Carnal "weapons" like intimidation, manipulation, trickery, double-talk, rumor, and hypocritical behavior are ineffective in spiritual warfare. Reliance on the working of God, however, results in supernatural victories.

10:4 The spiritual Christian's "weapons" are those that Paul later enumerated in Ephesians 6:11 through 17. The "fortresses" (Gr. *ochuroma*, used only here in the New Testament) probably refer to Satanic strongholds, and in particular, in this context, the arguments of Paul's opponents (cf. v. 5).

10:5 Like he did in Ephesians 6:12, Paul described the enemy of believers as impersonal. We wage war against invisible, intangible spiritual forces, though obviously Satan is behind these forces. Satan's strategy is not only to use demons (Eph. 6:12) but also "arguments" and "all arrogance" that contradict God's revealed truth ("the knowledge of God"). The propaganda of our enemy consists of reasonings that run counter to the truth of God. "Arguments" contrast with revelations that God has given, and they contradict those revelations.

"Arrogance" includes any human act or attitude that asserts itself as being superior to God's will or truth. Paul claimed to make it his aim to bring all such thoughts and actions into submission to what God has revealed in His Word. He regarded

¹Barnett, p. 461.

this as "obedience" to "Christ." He was a bond-servant to the truth of God in his thinking. His desire was that everyone would voluntarily submit to such servant status.

"It is not a case of the Christian's effort to force all his thoughts to be pleasing to Christ. Rather the picture seems to be that of a military operation in enemy territory that seeks to thwart every single hostile plan of battle, so that there will be universal allegiance to Christ."¹

10:6 Paul was "ready" to come to Corinth and "to punish all disobedience" to God's will and his own apostolic authority. However he wanted to do that only after the whole church had made a clean break with the rebels in its midst ("whenever your obedience is complete"). If the church would not stand with him in disciplining his unrepentant opponents, his discipline would not be effective. Unless any church as a whole is willing to support the discipline of its member or members, the discipline that its leaders seek to impose will be ineffective.

2. Reply to the charge of weakness 10:7-11

As Paul defended himself against the charge of cowardice leveled by his critics, so he also claimed ability to deal forcefully with them in person as well as by letter. He referred to this in order to explain his conduct further and to urge obedience to his commands.

10:7 The Corinthian Christians tended to evaluate the claims of Paul's critics superficially ("outwardly"). The apostle urged them to look below the surface. At least one critic seems to have been claiming that he had received apostolic authority from Christ, which would have been every bit as binding as Paul's, if not more binding. Paul did not dispute this claim here but simply argued that his own authority was from Christ. The critic and Paul both claimed to belong to Christ as His apostles. It was unfair for the Corinthians to accept the claim of the critic and to deny Paul's claim.

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 380.

10:8 Paul argued that he could have said more about his apostolic "authority" ("boast somewhat more") without feeling "shame" about exaggerating. The facts spoke for themselves. But he did not want to put that kind of pressure on his opponents in a letter. They had charged that it was only in his letters that he could express himself forcefully (v. 1). His reference to his authority for building them up here seems intended to contrast his edifying ministry in Corinth with the destructive work of his critics (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17).

Paul had stressed the divine origin of his call and the gospel when he defended himself to the Galatians (Gal. 1:1, 11-12, 15-16). Here he stressed the divine origin of his authority (3:5-6; 13:10) and how he had used it for his readers' good.

10:9-10 Paul's reference to terrifying his readers (v. 9) is sarcastic, as is clear from verse 10. It is probably better to take the critics' charge that Paul was "unimpressive" as a reference to his conduct among them, rather than to his physical appearance, in view of the context (cf. 1:13). Paul evidently was not a showy speaker compared to many silver-tongued orators of his day, or even Apollos. The power of his influence came through the Holy Spirit's working through his words (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:3; 2 Cor. 11:6).

"... unlike his opponents (11:20), Paul avoided self-assertiveness and admitted the inferiority of his rhetorical skills (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; 2 Cor 11:6). What he firmly resists, however, is the inference drawn from the claim about his personal bearing and his manner of speaking—namely, that he was "'timid" when face to face' (v. 1)."¹

"Like so many who judge things according to the outward display of this world, Paul's opponents interpreted meekness as weakness, forbearance as cowardice, and gentleness as indecision (cf. v. 1; ... 11:21 ...)—or at least they had sought to

¹Ibid., p. 382.

induce the Corinthians to place this interpretation on Paul's character."¹

10:11 Paul had restrained his words of exhortation to the Corinthians while he was with them for their welfare. He continued to restrain himself in this letter so that he would not give substance to the charge that he was only bold and impressive when absent. However he was perfectly capable of being just as forceful in person as he was in his letters (cf. 13:2, 10).

3. Reply to the charge of intrusion 10:12-18

Paul defended his right to preach the gospel in Corinth, and he denied his critics' claim that they had been responsible for what God had done there. He did this both to vindicate his former actions as well as to justify his future ministry in the regions beyond Corinth.

"... Paul, responding to his opponents' characterization of him as inconsistent, and hence as a flatterer, and of the invidious [unpleasant] comparisons of his opponents, attacks the whole convention of self-advertisement by means of a remarkably subtle and forceful parody of its methods."²

What Paul wrote in this section and the following ones helps us to see that some opposition against Paul in Corinth came from Jewish Christians. These critics contested Paul's special calling as an apostle and his legitimate right to minister to Gentiles. Moreover, in their unrestrained self-commendation, they were claiming the credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth.

10:12 In irony Paul claimed to be a coward, as his critics accused him of being, when it came to comparing himself with his critics ("those who commend themselves"). They cited their own conduct as normative and then prided themselves on measuring up to their own artificial standard. The Corinthians would be just as foolish if they measured Paul's apostolic

¹Hughes, p. 362.

²Christopher Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *New Testament Studies* 32:1 (January 1986):2.

credentials by using the same subjective standard that his critics applied to themselves.

J. B. Phillips' paraphrase of the first part of this verse captures Paul's irony well:

"Of course, we shouldn't dare include ourselves in the same class as those who write their own testimonials, or even to compare ourselves with them!"¹

10:13 Evidently Paul's critics were claiming that the apostle had exceeded the proper limits of his ministry by evangelizing in Corinth. They refused to admit that Paul's commission as an apostle gave him the right to minister as far from Palestine as Corinth ("as far as you'). He responded that he had not exceeded the territorial limits of his commission by planting the church in Gentile Corinth. God had imposed no territorial limits on Paul but had called him to minister to Gentiles (as well as to Jews; cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; Rom. 1:5; cf. Gal. 2:9).

"It marks the *personal* character of this Epistle that the word 'boast' occurs twenty-nine times in it, and only twenty-six times in all the other Epistles put together."²

10:14 Paul's ministry included doing pioneer missionary work (Rom. 15:20). His ministry at Corinth had been within those bounds. In fact, he had been the first apostle to minister in Corinth. He had not overextended his authority by coming to Corinth. It was his critics who were overextending themselves by claiming that Corinth was their domain and not Paul's.

"We may conjecture that had they come to Corinth and confined their ministry to the synagogue (as Cephas had?), there would have been no problem. The difficulty appears to be that these newcomers [the critics] are not content

¹J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1249.

with that; they wish to move into Paul's God-assigned 'field' of ministry, the Gentiles."¹

10:15-16 Paul was anxious that all the Corinthians acknowledge that he was not doing what his critics were doing, namely, taking credit for what others did ("boasting ... in other people's labors"). They were taking credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth. They were apparently claiming that the spiritual vitality of the Corinthian church was due to their ministry in spite of Paul's influence, not because of it. This is sometimes a temptation for those who follow others in ministry. Sometimes they confuse, unconsciously, or as in the case of Paul's critics, consciously, the results of their work and the results of their predecessors' work.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to continue to support him as he reached out ("enlarged even more") to yet unevangelized fields ("our domain"), such as Rome and Spain, in the future (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:11; 15:24, 28). He hoped that his ministry would take him even farther still as their "faith" in him grew.

Pioneer evangelism precluded the possibility of Paul falling into the error of his critics. He could not claim the credit for what his predecessors had done, since he had no predecessors whenever he planted a new church. Paul did not want to build on, much less take credit for, the foundational work that his predecessors had done, but to preach the gospel in previously unevangelized areas (Rom. 15:18-21). He did not, however, object to others building on the foundation that he had laid, or watering what he had planted (1 Cor. 3:6, 10). He did object to their taking credit where credit was not due.

Paul spoke as though his future was in the Corinthians' hands. It was because, in order for Paul to proceed into unreached areas beyond Corinth, he needed to have his former churches, including Corinth, in good spiritual condition. Paul did not just want to plant as many churches as he could. He wanted to plant a church, and then make sure that it continued to follow

¹Barnett, p. 488.

the Lord faithfully, before he moved on to plant other churches. If it did not, he felt responsible to get it spiritually healthy before he moved on. The "faith" of the Corinthians in Paul would continue to grow as they responded positively to Paul's instructions. Then they would be able to provide the support (prayer and perhaps financial) that was essential for him to expand his ministry (v. 15b).

10:17 In summary, Paul purposed not to take credit for ("boast in") what others had accomplished in their service for Christ. He could not even boast about what he himself had accomplished, since it was God who was at work through him. His only boast therefore would be "in the Lord." That is, he would be proud only of and promote only his Lord. He quoted Jeremiah who expressed this thought well (Jer. 9:24; cf. 1 Cor. 1:31).

10:18 The only commendation worth anything is the Lord's commendation (cf. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:15). He makes this commendation through the work that He does through His servants. The Lord does not approve of those who simply commend themselves.

"In the Christian church, indeed, self-commendation [*eauton sunistano*, self-promotion, not self-approval] should be viewed with suspicion as a mark of disqualification. God's commendation of a person is shown, not by verbal boasts, but by the testimony of the consciences of those who have experienced the blessing attendant upon that person's labours and by the continuing and increasing fruits of his labours (cf. 4:2, 5:11)."¹

"The true servant of God should not boast in works he has done nor in works he has not done. Boasting should be limited to the Lord exclusively."²

¹Hughes, p. 371.

²Hunt, 2:808.

In this chapter the contrast between Paul's view of ministry and his critics' view stands out clearly. They had different motives, different authority, different loyalties, different objectives, and different procedures. In all of these contrasts Paul emerges as the truly Spirit-led apostle.

"If there is currently a temptation to import models of ministry from management, the social sciences, or academia, the New Testament sources indicate the inadequacy of all nonbiblical models."¹

"The import of this passage is threefold. First, Paul establishes that the spreading of the gospel is the priority of Christian ministry. In Paul's case this meant the mission to the Gentiles to which he was called by God on the road to Damascus, as recognized by the missionary concordat [agreement] of Jerusalem c. A.D. 47. Second, because the existence of another mission—that to the Jews—brought its own complications and tensions, accepted principles of cooperation were needed, as they continue to be in comparable situations. Third, self-commendation in Christian ministry is excluded. The Lord commends his servants for ministry by the fruits of their ministry."²

B. CLAIMS MADE BY PAUL 11:1—12:18

In this section of the epistle Paul gave further evidence that he possessed apostolic authority. He did this in order to encourage the whole Corinthian church to continue to respond positively to his ministry. Some writers refer to 11:1 through 12:13 as Paul's "Fool's Speech" because of the recurring "foolishness" terminology in this passage (*aphrosyne, aphron, paraphron*; cf. 11:1, 16 [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:11, 16).

1. Paul's reasons for making these claims 11:1-6

In this first subsection Paul explained his need to present evidence of his apostleship.

¹James W. Thompson, "Ministry in the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 27:3 (Third Quarter 1984):156.

²Barnett, pp. 493-94.

11:1 Paul found it necessary to share with the Corinthians some of the evidences of the Lord's commendation of his ministry (cf. 10:18). He called this exhibit "foolishness" because he should not have had to make this defense. He and his ministry were well known to his readers. "Indeed you are bearing with me" may also be translated "Do indeed bear with me."

"As much against the grain as it is with a proud man to acknowledge his infirmities, so much is it against the grain with a humble man to speak of his own praise."¹

11:2 God had jealously guarded His people Israel from the deceitfulness of deceivers who sought to draw their affections away from Him (cf. Hos. 2:19-20; 4:12; 6:4; 11:8). Paul felt the same concern for the Corinthians. His "jealousy" was in that sense "godly" (God-like). Paul pictured himself as the father of a "virgin" bride (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 12:14). His desire was to keep his virgin daughter, the Corinthian church, "pure" until she would consummate her marriage "to Christ" (cf. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; 1 John 3:2-3).² The union of the church and Christ that Paul referred to here will take place at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17).

Another view is that Paul was thinking of himself as the groomsman or bridegroom's friend who, traditionally, presented the bride to the groom in the Jewish wedding ceremony.³ However since Paul said that he had "betrothed" these Christians to Christ, it seems to me that he was thinking of himself as the father of the bride rather than as the bridegroom's friend.

"Human jealousy is a vice, but to share divine jealousy is a virtue. It is the motive and object of the jealousy that is all-important. There is a place

¹Henry, p. 1835.

²See Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.

³See Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 153; and Barclay, pp. 274-75.

for a spiritual father's passionate concern for the exclusive and pure devotion to Christ of his spiritual children, and also a place for anger at potential violators of that purity (11:29)."¹

The motive of Paul's critics in citing what they had done was self-glorification, but Paul's motive was the welfare of his readers. This is the first of three reasons that Paul gave for the Corinthians to bear with him (v. 1): he wanted them to be spiritually "pure" when they stood before Christ.

11:3 Paul's critics were not just calling his apostolic authority into question. They were leading the Corinthians "astray." The apostle communicated the seriousness of this seduction by comparing it with the serpent's cunning deception ("deceived," Gr. *exepatesen*) of Eve (Gen. 3:13).

"The very future of the Corinthians as an apostolic church is in jeopardy."²

"As I have meditated on this verse throughout my life, I have come to realize that it is perhaps one of the most significant warnings in the entire Bible concerning spiritual warfare. Satan's major thrust into the experience of Christians is to cause our minds to stray from devotion to Jesus Christ into all sorts of other avenues, even ones that seem wise."³

Genuine Christians can be and are being deceived by false teachers, and they are abandoning their faith today. This sometimes happens when young people go off to college and conclude that what they learned in church is unscientific and inaccurate. It also happens when Christians accept the teachings of cultists who come knocking on their doors.

"So many of our young preachers are the products of seminaries which are trying to train

¹Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 385.

²Barnett, p. 501.

³Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 1451.

intellectuals. I was listening to one of these men the other day, and I couldn't tell what he was talking about. After about fifteen minutes, I was convinced that *he* didn't know what he was talking about. They try to be so intellectual that they end up saying nothing. What he needed to do was give out the Word of God."¹

- 11:4 The "Jesus" that Paul's critics were preaching was different enough from Him whom Paul preached that he could say that their Jesus was a different person. The "if" in this verse does not represent a hypothetical possibility but a past reality for the Corinthians. By listening to the false teachers' message the church had come under the influence of some sort of "spirit," but it was not the Holy Spirit. They were in danger of accepting a "different gospel" (cf. 10:5; Gal. 1:8-9). Through all this they were bearing up beautifully. Paul sarcastically described their accepting all this false teaching very graciously and submissively ("this you tolerate very well!" cf. 10:7). Since they showed such remarkable toleration of false teachers, surely they owed their father in the faith the same toleration.

This is the second reason that the Corinthians should bear with Paul (v. 1): they were willing to accept outsiders who presented an adulterated gospel.

"If the devil cannot induce people immediately to give up some line of truth, then he will attack those whom God has sent forth to defend that truth."²

- 11:5 The "most eminent apostles" were probably the false apostles who claimed to be eminent but were not even actual apostles, rather than the genuine apostles who preached a pure gospel.³ The context supports this interpretation, as does the rare expression translated "eminent apostles" (Gr. *huperlian*

¹McGee, 5:136.

²Ironside, p. 228.

³Alford, 2:2:698; Bernard, 3:104; Hughes, pp. 378-80; Lenski, pp. 1245-7; Plummer, pp. 298-9; Tasker, pp. 148-9; Barnett, pp. 507-8; Martin, p. 337; Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 87; Wiersbe, 1:669; Kent, p. 165.

apostolon, lit. exceedingly beyond apostles). This is probably a description more appropriate to imposters who claimed apostleship than to genuine apostles. However "eminent" may have been one that Paul's critics used to describe the Twelve in contrast to Paul (cf. 12:11-12).¹ By elevating the Twelve exceedingly they effectively belittled Paul. Whichever view is correct the meaning is clear: Paul's enemies were claiming that he was an inferior apostle.

This is the third reason that the readers should bear with Paul (v. 1): he claimed that he was not "inferior" to these super-apostles—either his critics or the Twelve.

11:6 Paul had just said that he was not inferior. His critics apparently charged him with being an inferior speaker ("unskilled in speech"), but Paul claimed that his "knowledge" was not inferior. He evidently meant that even if his critics' charge that he was unskilled in speech was true, which it was not, no one could charge him with being inferior in knowledge. Another view is that Paul meant he was not professionally trained as a rhetorician.² In any event the Corinthians knew very well Paul's superior knowledge of the revelations of God (cf. Eph. 3:4-5; 1 Cor. 2:6-11). He had expounded divine truth to his readers exhaustively, both in person and in his letters. Obviously knowledge is more important than speech.

Paul had previously revealed that some of his Corinthian hearers criticized him for not being a skilled rhetorician (10:10). Nevertheless Paul was as competent as any of the Twelve, or any of his critics, in his ability to communicate—as well as in his ability to understand God's revelations. He was responding to criticism of him here, not conceding inferiority.

The fact that the early Christians used the word "apostle" in both a general sense (e.g., 8:23; Acts 14:4, 14; et al.) and in a technical sense (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:1; et al.) probably created some confusion. In what sense was Paul an apostle? He claimed to be an apostle on the same level equal with the

¹Bruce, pp. 236-7; Hodge, p. 256; Kent, pp. 164-5; Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 386; Lowery, p. 580.

²Plummer, pp. 299-300; *The Nelson ...*, pp. 1959-60.

Twelve. Yet the word in the general sense means anyone sent out on the Christian mission, and in this sense the teachers in Corinth who were criticizing Paul were themselves apostles. Perhaps it would be more accurate to define the Corinthians' question about Paul as: What type of apostle is he?—rather than—Is he an apostle or not?

2. Freedom to minister without charge 11:7-15

Paul claimed the freedom to minister in Corinth without receiving financial support from the Corinthians in order to illustrate his self-sacrificing love for his readers and to contrast his attitude with his critics' selfishness. He digressed from his foolish boasting (vv. 1-6) in order to defend his policy regarding his own financial support (vv. 7-12) and to describe his opponents' true identity (vv. 13-15).

- 11:7 Again Paul used irony bordering on sarcasm: He meant the opposite of what he said, and this would have been obvious to his readers. He had written that apostles have the right to refrain from working for a living and to live off the gifts of their audiences (1 Cor. 9:6, 14). Yet he had made tents in Corinth and had refused to accept gifts from the Corinthians ("by humbling myself"; cf. Acts 18:3; 1 Cor. 9:4-15). This suggested to some in Corinth that he did not believe he was an apostle. The other apostles normally accepted support from the recipients of their ministries, and these false apostles evidently did so consistently.
- 11:8 Paul had expounded God's truth in Corinth without accepting money from his converts there for doing so. He adopted this policy in Corinth and elsewhere because he did not want to burden the people that he was currently ministering to. He also did so because he knew that there were people who would accuse him of preaching in order to receive payment. He accepted financial help from other churches, while not ministering to them directly (he "robbed them;" hyperbole) so that he could serve the Corinthians "without charge."
- 11:9 Paul had practiced his trade of leather-working (Gr. *skenopoios*) when he had arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:3). But when Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia Paul quit

his manual labor and devoted all of his time to preaching and teaching (Acts 18:5). He apparently did this because these brothers had brought financial gifts with them from the Macedonian churches ("they fully supplied my need"; cf. Phil. 4:15; 1 Thess. 3:6). Paul's principle was to preach and teach without charging those who benefited directly from his ministry. This is a good policy in church planting, but it is not normative for a settled pastoral ministry (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).¹

11:10-12 Paul claimed that he had not sinned in behaving as he had (v. 7). He had not deceived his readers. Rather, as God knew his heart, he had behaved as he had because he loved the Corinthians. Furthermore, it was not necessary for him to change his policy of accepting or declining support on the basis of the welfare of those he served. His critics uniformly accepted support. By giving up his right to preach the gospel free of charge Paul would have been descending to their level. He also would have enabled his critics to compare themselves with him favorably. Paul backed up his statements in these verses with strong affirmations: "As the truth of Christ is in me" (v. 10) and "God knows that I do!" (v. 11).

11:13-15 "The moment has come for Paul to drop the veil of irony and to speak in the plainest possible terms in denunciation of these would-be 'super-apostles' who have invaded his territory in Achaia."²

Paul did not want the Corinthians to associate him with these critics because they were counterfeit ambassadors of Christ ("false apostles"). It was for this reason that their accusations concerned Paul. They were self-servers ("deceitful workers") who were the true sons of their father Satan, the consummate hypocrite.³ Nevertheless in their conduct they were following the example of Satan ("disguising themselves"). They

¹Cf. Barnett, p. 518.

²Hughes, p. 392.

³See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Work as a Deceiver," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):190-202.

perverted the thinking of, and misdirected the affections of, the Corinthians. Some scholars have argued that these false apostles were different individuals from the eminent apostles of verse 5, but I agree with those who see them as the same.

"Several factors suggest ... that they were Palestinian Jews, members of the Jerusalem church who were false brothers (cf. Gal. 2:4) in Paul's estimation."¹

It is impossible to prove whether they were genuine believers or not. They could have been either.

In our own day, when people value toleration so highly and practice it so widely, even in the church, we need to learn from Paul's example of "calling a spade a spade." The welfare of those under Paul's ministry required him to identify his critics for who they really were. We will serve our own generation faithfully if we do the same. We should point out teachers who lead others into error, and warn people about them, if we want to keep the naive from harm (cf. 3 John 9-10).

3. Paul's service and sufferings 11:16-33

In order to answer his critics and to prove the extent of his own service and sufferings for Christ, Paul related many of his painful experiences as an apostle.

11:16 Paul did not want his readers to think that he was "foolish." But if they insisted on thinking that he was foolish, he would speak to them as a foolish person, and they should listen to his foolish words. His foolish words were boasting. Paul proceeded to boast like a fool, and the Corinthians were to understand what he proceeded to say as the boastings of the fool that they thought him to be. He boasted "a little" in his sufferings in order to prove to the skeptical minority in the church that he had suffered as much as, if not even more than, the false apostles. The false teachers had impressed the "wise" Corinthians with their boasts. Consequently Paul answered these fools according to their folly (Prov. 26:5).

¹Lowery, p. 579.

However he stressed that he was not a fool but was only speaking like one (i.e., boasting) in order to make his point.

"The key term is *aphron*, 'fool': not a dim-witted person or clown, a jester (as in 'play the fool'), but in the technical sense of the person in hellenistic-Roman society who had lost the correct measure (*metron*) of himself and the world around him ... [was insane]"¹

11:17-18 These two verses are probably parenthetical. Paul evidently knew that such "boasting" would help convince the minority of his own genuineness as an apostle. Straightforward claims, such as the Lord Jesus made, would not. Jesus never boasted "according to the flesh" (i.e., in order to defend Himself), like "many" other people, including Paul's critics, did. But Paul chose to boast "according to the flesh" in order to defend himself.

"The reason for Paul's embarrassment at this juncture is now given: self-commendation is not 'after the Lord' [cf. Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:24; Col. 2:8] but, the exact opposite, 'after the flesh' [cf. 5:16], that is, typical of the old unregenerate nature whose values are dictated by the external, self-centered standards of this fallen world."²

11:19 The apostle was most ironical and sarcastic in these verses (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10). The Corinthians considered themselves unusually "wise," but they were being unusually foolish by not only humoring and tolerating the fools in their midst, but they were doing so "gladly." Since they tolerated the foolish gladly they should put up with Paul's temporary foolishness gladly.

11:20 They were absurdly tolerant. They submitted to the teaching of the false apostles even though it resulted in their own enslavement. Probably this teaching involved the "Judaizing error" (i.e., enslavement to the Mosaic Law being necessary

¹Martin, p. 362.

²Hughes, p. 397.

for justification and/or sanctification, cf. Gal. 2:4; 5:1). The false teachers had evidently devoured the Corinthians' financial contributions. They had abused them ("takes advantage of you") and exalted themselves at their expense. Hitting "in the face" may have literally occurred (cf. Acts 23:2; 1 Cor. 4:11), but this description definitely depicts the most insulting and harmful conduct. How inconsistent this behavior was with the manner of the Savior!

"That such violence might literally be expected from the rulers of the early Christian society, is also implied in the command in 1 Tim. iii. 3, Tit. i. 7, that the 'bishop' is not to be 'a striker.' Even so late as the seventh century the council of Braga (c. 7), A.D. 675, orders that no bishop at his will and pleasure shall *strike* his clergy, lest he lose the respect which they owe him."¹

11:21a In irony Paul pretended that he was embarrassed that he had behaved so weakly among them compared to how the false teachers had treated them. Really it was the Corinthian Christians who should have been ashamed (cf. 1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34). Paul's conduct had been Christ-like. Now he was experiencing abuse for such gentleness, as his Master had.

11:21b After repeated warnings that he was going to boast (10:8; 11:1, 6, 16), Paul now finally began. As his critics had been "bold" in challenging his apostleship, so Paul now would be "bold" in defending himself, speaking as a fool.

"It is probable that this 'Speech' mirrors, but so as to parody and also correct, the claims of the newly arrived false apostles."²

"Thus the 'Speech' proper has elements of antitriumphalism [defeat] as well as of triumph, characteristics that inexactly replicate those in

¹Stanley, quoted by Alford, 2:2:703.

²Barnett, p. 534.

the remarkable victory parade metaphor set out in 2:14."¹

11:22 At first Paul matched each of his critic's claims: "So am I." The term "Hebrew" had three connotations: A Hebrew was a pure-blooded Jew, and/or one who could read the Old Testament in the original languages, and/or one who could speak Aramaic, as contrasted with one who knew only Greek (cf. Acts 6:1; Phil. 3:5).

"'Hebrew' ... denotes Jews whose family ties were Palestinian, if they were not wholly resident in Palestine. ... It looks very much as if Paul's opponents at Corinth were of Palestinian provenance [origin]."²

As an "Israelite" Paul was a member of God's chosen people, as his critics probably were. Paul traced his descent all the way back to "Abraham." He probably did so to connect himself with the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision, both of which were of cardinal importance to the Jews. Thus, in his upbringing, his citizenship, and his ancestry Paul was not inferior to any of his Jewish critics.

11:23 The apostle first listed general afflictions that he had suffered in the service of Christ ("labors"), and then he cited specific examples of those afflictions ("imprisonments," beatings, near death experiences, vv. 24-25). He turned from nationality (v. 22) to achievements (vv. 23-29). Here he claimed superiority to his critics ("I more so"), not just equality with them. He proceeded from speaking like a fool (vv. 16, 17, 21) to talking like an "insane" madman.

Paul's opponents claimed to be "servants of Christ," but really they were only masquerading as such (v. 13). Paul alone was the true servant of the Lord. However instead of citing successes that he had experienced in his ministry—any awards that he had received from others—he listed his apparent

¹Ibid., p. 535.

²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 240-1.

defeats. Thus he boasted in his weaknesses (v. 30; cf. 12:5, 9, 10).

"... Paul is not in fact magnifying self in the passage which is now beginning—in this, too, there is complete disparity between himself and his adversaries—but he is magnifying, as he does throughout this epistle, the amazing grace of God which in the midst of afflictions and sufferings is sufficient for his every need."¹

Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians fits into Luke's chronology of his life at Acts 20:2, so everything that Paul described here occurred before Acts 20:2. Paul's life involved many more dangerous experiences than we read about in Acts. Paul referred to "more imprisonments" than his critic has endured, but Acts only records one before this time (i.e., in Philippi, Acts 16:23-40).

"Prison (cf. Acts 16:23) was merely detention until trial or execution, but having been in prison and bonds were matters of grave shame in the culture—not a typical subject of boasting!"²

The apostle mentioned beatings "without number," whereas Acts only records one by this time (also in Philippi, Acts 16:22-23). The only record of Paul being "in danger of death" in Acts, before 20:2, was Paul's stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19), though Paul said that he had "often" been in danger of dying.

11:24 Paul claimed to have received whippings ("thirty-nine lashes") by the Jews five times, but Acts says nothing about any of these. A commonly accepted method of punishment by the Jews was thirty-nine lashes:

"He begins with sufferings which were inflicted on him by officials, Jewish [v. 24] and Roman [v. 25a], in the name of law; then, after one outrage

¹Hughes, p. 406.

²Keener, p. 234.

inflicted by a lawless mob, he mentions a number which were due to the operations of nature."¹

It was "only inflicted after a regular judicial investigation and sentence, and for the breach of some negative precept or prohibition. ... If the number of stripes were less than thirty-nine, it must still be some multiple of three, since, as the scourge was composed of three separate thongs (the middle one of calf's leather, the other two of asses', with a reference to Isaiah i. 3), each stroke of the scourge in reality inflicted three stripes. Hence the greatest number of strokes administered at one time amounted only to thirteen. The law also most particularly defined and modified every detail, even to the posture of the criminal. Still this punishment, which St. Paul underwent not less than five times at the hands of the Jews, must have been very severe."²

"This punishment was so severe that death often ensued ..."³

Even though the Torah limited the number of lashes to 40 (Deut. 25:3), the Jews customarily limited it to 39 in order to avoid exceeding 40 as a result of miscounting.

11:25 Acts does not mention the three beatings "with rods" (by the Gentiles; cf. 2 Tim. 3:11) either.

"The fact that St Paul was thrice treated in this way [i.e., beaten with rods by the Romans] is evidence that being a Roman citizen was an imperfect protection when magistrates were disposed to be brutal."⁴

¹Plummer, p. 323.

²Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 66-67, 68. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4:8:21.

³Bernard, 3:106. Cf. also Alford, 2:2:705.

⁴Plummer, p. 325.

"Once" Paul was "stoned" (by the Jews; cf. Acts 14:19). Paul had already experienced shipwreck "three times" when he wrote this letter, though Luke recorded none of these before Acts 20:2. Paul's "night and a day ... adrift at sea" also comes as news to the reader of Acts.

"Ancient sources suggest that shipwreck was a common experience for those who spent much time on the sea (cf. Ps.-Phoc.25), especially if they traveled even during the more dangerous seasons. Some would view surviving them (especially multiple times), however, as divine protection or even vindication."¹

Obviously in Acts Luke gave us only a highly selective account of the Apostle Paul's extremely difficult life.

11:26-27 Paul broadened his description from specific hardships to general types of dangers (v. 26) and deprivations (v. 27) that he had experienced as an apostle. Paul's sufferings on his journeys as a missionary merited special mention (v. 26) as did his labors when he settled in an area to plant a church (v. 27). Again, Luke recorded only a few of these in Acts (cf. Acts 9:23, 29; 13:13, 45, 50; 14:19, 24; 16:16-40; 18:12; 19:23-41)

11:28-29 All the previous trials that Paul enumerated were temporary, but what follows remained with him always. Internal "pressure" (v. 28) harassed Paul on top of all the "external" difficulties that he endured. Specifically, the "weak" and the moral failures of his converts who had been "led into sin" made Paul "weak" and gave him "intense concern" (v. 29).

"And so it should be with every faithful pastor of Christ's flock: he should lovingly identify himself with those who have been committed to his care, showing himself deeply anxious for their spiritual well-being, compassionate with them in their frailties and temptations, and resisting and

¹Keener, p. 234.

resenting every one who seeks to entice them away from the purity of their devotion to Christ. This compassion is not of man: it is the divine compassion of Christ Himself, burning in the heart of His servant, and blazing forth in love to reach and to bind to the one Bridegroom the hearts of those to whom he ministers."¹

- 11:30 Rather than boasting about his strength, as his critics did, Paul boasted in his "weakness," humiliations, and sufferings.² These would not initially impress others with his qualifications as an apostle, but these afflictions had come upon him as he had faithfully served others and Christ. They were evidences that God had supernaturally sustained His servant through countless discouraging circumstances. They were, therefore, the greatest possible proof and vindication that Paul was a genuine apostle (cf. 1:8-10; 3:5; 4:7, 10-11; 12:5, 9-10). Paul's boast was that he resembled the Suffering Servant; his life was like that of Christ.
- 11:31 Paul called God as his Witness that his claims, which probably seemed incredible to those who did not know him well, were true. It seems possible that, with his strong claim to be telling the truth in verse 31, Paul was anticipating what he was about to say in verses 32 and 33.³ Others believe that Paul was referring to what he had already written in this chapter.⁴ Still others think that he meant what he wrote both before and after this verse.⁵ I tend to prefer this view. "He who is blessed forever" may have been a common Jewish way of referring to God that ascribes praise to Him.
- 11:32-33 Paul might have mentioned this final experience because it was his first experience of suffering for the gospel. It had provided a pattern that continued throughout Paul's life. Paul's critics may have charged him with cowardice in his escape from

¹Hughes, p. 418.

²See Toussaint, pp. 190-92.

³Alford, 2:2:707-8; Hughes, pp. 419-20.

⁴E.g., Tasker, p. 167; Hodge, p. 278.

⁵E.g., Plummer, p. 332.

Damascus, though there is no basis for this charge revealed in Scripture. That may be an additional reason he mentioned it, though I doubt it. It may also have been that it would have reminded his readers of his supernatural call and appointment as an apostle on the Damascus road. It was also undoubtedly a humbling memory for Paul. This specific example of danger increases the emotional intensity of Paul's litany of sufferings.

"Aretas" IV was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas. He lived in Petra and ruled the kingdom of Nabatea (called Arabia in Gal. 1:17) between 9 B.C. and A.D. 40. "Damascus" at the time of Paul's conversion may have been under Nabatean rule.¹

"Nabatea included the city of Damascus before the city was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria. Aretas was able to appoint a governor over Damascus because the emperor Caligula (A.D. 37-41) gave Aretas control over the city."²

Alternatively, Damascus might have been under Roman rule with a colony of Nabateans controlling it.³ A third possibility is that Aretas ruled the Nabatean population of Damascus.⁴ The historical evidence is incomplete. Aretas evidently wanted to arrest Paul, because the apostle had begun evangelizing in that region immediately after his conversion (cf. Acts 9:20; Gal. 1:17, 22-23). Aretas himself may have been a Jew.⁵

Paul's activity had antagonized the Jewish "Damascenes," who had obtained official support for their opposition to Paul (cf. Acts 9:23-25). Paul's escape from Damascus "in a basket" probably took place after his return to Damascus from Arabia (between Acts 9:19a and 19b; cf. Gal. 1:15-17).⁶ It seems unlikely that Paul would have escaped in a basket, went to

¹Hughes, p. 425.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1962.

³Bruce, pp. 244-45.

⁴Keener, p. 236.

⁵Hughes, p. 425.

⁶Plummer, pp. 335-36.

Arabia, and then returned to Damascus, from which he had previously fled for his life.

In many of his examples of suffering for the cause of Christ Paul presented himself as one who did not fit the pattern of successful ministers of the gospel. Like the Corinthians, we modern Christians tend to evaluate a person's success on the basis of the world's standards. Rather than playing down the events in his ministry that made him look inferior, Paul emphasized them, because they glorified God and His remarkably sufficient grace. In view of all of Paul's calamities, there is no way that he could have been so effective unless God had been with him and using him as an apostle.

4. Special revelations Paul received 12:1-10

Paul had cited his freedom to minister without the Corinthians' financial support, as well as his sufferings in ministry, as grounds for boasting. He next mentioned, in this section, the special visions and revelations that God had granted him. He referred to these here in order to further bolster his readers' confidence in his apostolic calling and authority.

12:1 The apostle again explained that he felt his "boasting" was "necessary" in order to convince the fleshly-minded Corinthian minority. It was "not beneficial" for any other reason.

All "visions" of the type that Paul mentioned were "revelations," but not all revelations came through visions. Furthermore, visions are always seen, but revelations may either be seen or perceived in other ways.

"If, as seems likely, his opponents are claiming paranormal experiences to validate their apostolate (cf. on 5:12-13), the very vagueness of Paul's reference may be his way of asserting the uniqueness of his apostolate."¹

Commenting on visions that people have seen in more recent times, Madame Guyon (1648-1717), a godly French woman, wisely wrote:

¹Barnett, pp. 558-59.

"Visions are in the inferior powers of the soul, and cannot produce true union [with God]. The soul must not dwell or rely upon them, or be retarded by them; they are but favors and gifts. The Giver alone must be our object and aim."¹

12:2-4 The "man" of whom Paul spoke in the third person was himself (cf. vv. 7-9). He referred to himself this way probably out of reluctance to speak of this matter. Moreover he wanted to minimize the effect of boasting, which personally claiming such a spectacular experience would have produced.

Paul did not know whether God had transported him physically in his "body" into "the third heaven" (cf. Acts 8:39; 1 Thess. 4:17) or if his experience had been "out of the body," namely, in a vision (cf. Gen. 15:12-21; Ezek. 1:1). "The third heaven" probably represents the presence of God. It could be a technical description of God's abode above the cloudy heavens overhead and beyond the farthest reaches of space that human beings can perceive. "Paradise" (v. 4) is a good synonym for "the third heaven" (cf. Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7). They seem to be the same place.² However Paul seems to have been describing two separate events, not just one.

"How ridiculous it was for the cosmonauts in the Russian sputnik to say they didn't see God when they went to the moon. They didn't go far enough, friend."³

What Paul "heard" in heaven, not what he saw there, is what the apostle referred to. That message, which was given in "inexpressible words," was personal. Paul never revealed in Scripture what God had told him. However it had the effect of strengthening his faith and giving him the hope that the Lord would abundantly reward his sufferings. This experience evidently took place when Paul was ministering in and around Tarsus (cf. Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21). This was about A.D. 42, "14

¹Jeanne-Marie Guyon, *Autobiography of Madame Guyon*, p. 76.

²Williams, p. 217.

³McGee, 5:141.

years" before A.D. 56, which is the most probable date for the composition of 2 Corinthians. Paul had at least six other visions and revelations from God (cf. Gal. 2:2; Acts 9:3-19 = 22:6-10 = 26:12-18; 11:25-26; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21).¹

"The man who experienced the ineffable 'ascent' even to the third heaven was the same man who had experienced the undistinguished 'descent' from a window in the Damascus wall [11:32-33]."²

12:5 Such a revelation could have made Paul quite a Christian celebrity had he publicized it. Instead he preferred to proclaim his "weaknesses," since by these people could see more easily the supernatural working of God through him.

12:6 Even if Paul chose to "boast" in his own behalf (v. 5), which he did not, he would not be acting foolishly but would be "speaking the truth." But he chose not to boast in his own behalf but in what God had done through him. Paul did not want his converts to form an opinion of him based on hearsay: what they heard about him second-hand. He preferred that they do so because of what they saw and heard in person, first-hand, with their own eyes and ears. Besides, other people could not verify many of his experiences.

12:7 Others might live in awe of Paul because of the spectacular "revelations" that they had heard he had received, but Paul himself was in no danger of becoming too impressed with himself. Paul's "thorn [Gr. *skolops*] in" his "flesh." reminded him of his limitations and so kept him humble.³

"In this passage there is a complete reversal of the religious pride and the religious triumphalism [excessive exultation] of the 'superlative' apostles. Genuinely apostolic ministry sustains 'weaknesses ... on behalf of Christ,' replicating his sufferings yet finding power in ministry in

¹See M. Harris, *The Second ...*, pp. 836-37, for discussion of these.

²Hughes, p. 422.

³Bernard, 3:111.

dependence on him. There is no place for arrogance in ministry."¹

Why did Paul change from the third person ("a man in Christ," vv. 2-5) to the first person ("myself," v. 7) in describing this experience? He probably did so because there was now no danger that others would think too highly of him because of the outcome of his vision.

Does "flesh" here mean his physical flesh or his sinful human nature? Was the "thorn" a physical affliction or some external problem?

"Three basic suggested interpretations of the thorn are as follows: (1) If flesh is a reference to the body, then it is a physical ailment like an earache, headache, eye trouble, epilepsy, or recurrent fever. (2) If flesh is a reference to the fallen nature, then the thorn could be a temptation. (3) If the expression is figurative, it could refer to persecution or opposition. Most commentators interpret it as a physical ailment."²

Many early church Fathers and Reformers understood the thorn to be a spiritual temptation, perhaps a tendency toward pride, or the opposition of Paul's enemies. Some modern Roman Catholic interpreters take it as a fleshly temptation that assailed Paul's moral purity. Many modern Protestant interpreters see it as a bodily suffering, namely, some physical illness or infirmity such as bad eyesight, a speech impediment, malaria,³ or epilepsy (cf. Gal. 4:13-15).⁴ Since the scriptural data does not provide a definite answer, it seems best to suspend judgment on any conclusion. Various commentators have made good cases for every one of the explanations described above. Probably Paul avoided being explicit so his

¹Barnett, p. 567.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1963. Cf. Alford, 2:2:713.

³E.g., William M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, pp 63-64.

⁴E.g., Hodge, p. 285.

readers would not focus on his particular form of affliction exclusively.

Paul regarded his "thorn in the flesh" as "a messenger" that came from "Satan" that was designed to frustrate him (cf. Job 2:1-10). Nevertheless God had permitted it (cf. Job 1—2), and He would use it to bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:28).¹

"Here, then, we are confronted with a paradox. One and the same *skolops* [thorn] was simultaneously given by God and used by Satan; a *doron Theou* [gift of God] is also an *aggelos Satana* [messenger of Satan]. It is not that God is here working through Satan, or that there is dual agency, divine and demonic, but that Satan is active at the same time as God and by his permission."²

"Satan is regarded as an instrument for effecting the Divine purpose, as Judas in the case of the Atonement."³

12:8 Normally Paul meant Jesus Christ when he used the title "the Lord." There are other scriptural examples of believers addressing their prayers to the second person of the Trinity (Acts 1:24; 7:59). However they usually addressed the Father in the name of the Son with the Spirit's help (e.g., Eph. 2:18). Here "Lord" definitely means God, and probably it also means Jesus, with the emphasis on His being Paul's Master (cf. Acts 9:5). The fact that Paul repeated his petition "three times" shows how intensely he wanted God to remove his affliction—like Jesus prayed in Gethsemane.

12:9 Here is an example of God denying a prayer request because He wanted to give something better (though not more comfortable). What we must learn, from what Paul told us about this messenger of Satan, is that God used it to teach

¹See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

²M. Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 856.

³Plummer, p. 348.

the apostle dependence on Himself and the sufficiency of His "grace."

"What is grace? It is God's provision for our every need when we need it."¹

"I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, *with the exception of sickness*. Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has."²

12:10 So thoroughly had Paul learned his lesson that he even boasted about his "weaknesses." He had come to "delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions" and "in difficulties, in behalf of Christ." He realized that, when he was naturally "weak", the Lord would provide the "power" that he lacked and needed and would make his "strong."³ The Lord enabled Paul to do things that he could not have done had he been naturally strong (cf. Rom. 8:35-37). Someone has said that God chose not to cure Paul, but He healed him. That is, God did not remove the thorn, but He used the thorn to remove Paul's feeling of self-sufficiency.

"This is the summit of the epistle, the lofty peak from which the whole is viewed in true proportion."⁴

This is one of the most important lessons every ambassador of Jesus Christ must learn. Both natural "weakness" and supernatural "power" are constantly at work in us, as they were in Paul and in Jesus. The Cross is the greatest example of divine power working through human weakness. The greater the degree that we sense our weakness, the more we will be ready to experience God's power (cf. Eph. 3:16; Phil. 4:13). Someone has said that Christians live on promises, not

¹Wiersbe, 1:675.

²Spurgeon, p. 384.

³See Larry J. Waters, "Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):425-30.

⁴Hughes, p. 451. Cf. Barnett, p. 572.

explanations. This is one of the greatest promises that God has given us to live on.

We may not have experienced as high spiritual highs, or as low spiritual lows, as Paul did, but we too are in constant need of being aware of God's supernatural power. Our success does not depend on our natural abilities, but on God's power working in and through us. Human weakness can be a profound blessing if it results in our depending more on God and less on self.¹

"It was not, however, in the weaknesses themselves that Paul took delight but in the opportunity sufferings endured 'for Christ's sake' afforded him for Christ's power to reside and be effective in his life (v. 9b)."²

"Human weakness provides the opportunity for divine power."³

"... man's extremity is God's opportunity."⁴

"In the Christian life, we get many of our blessings through *transformation*, not *substitution*. ... Sometimes God does meet the need by substitution; but other times He meets the need by transformation. He does not remove the affliction, but He gives us His grace so that the affliction works *for* us and not *against* us."⁵

"I have given many lectures; and sometimes I have been heartily applauded and yet my message has not borne fruit. But once, when I had been asked to speak at a university, I felt right from the start that I was failing to make contact with my

¹See Rick Warren, "God's Power in Your Weakness," in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, pp. 272-78; and Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul*, Chapter 7: "Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace," pp. 91-107.

²M. Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 397.

³Hughes, p. 453.

⁴Barclay, p. 290.

⁵Wiersbe, 1:675.

audience. A growing nervousness took hold of me, and I came out in a cold sweat. I clung to my notes, which I could scarcely read, and laboriously recited what I had to say. As the audience left I could see my friends slipping hurriedly away to spare my having to meet them. On the way home in my car with my wife, I burst into tears like a child. But the next day I had a telephone call from one of the university professors. 'I have heard many first-class lectures in my life,' he said, 'and I have always come away from them arguing mentally with the speaker. I have never heard one as bad as yours last night; but I could not get to sleep afterwards. It has raised a question in my mind—one that cannot be resolved by intellectual argument. Can I come and see you?' Several weeks later that old professor underwent a religious conversion which has made us close friends."¹

"In the 'Fool's Speech' proper [11:21b—12:10] Paul (1) exposes the triumphalism of the 'false apostles,' whose keyword is *hyper* (they have 'more' to offer than Paul, whom they are 'above,' or 'better' than), but also (2) 'boasts' of his 'weaknesses,' that is, of those sufferings incurred in the course of ministry in replication of the sufferings of Christ."²

5. Paul's supernatural miracles and paternal love 12:11-18

In this pericope Paul concluded his claims of being a genuine apostle by citing the miracles that God had done through him, as well as the love that He had manifested to the Corinthians through him. Paul did this in order to dispel any lingering reservations that any of his readers might have had concerning his apostolic credentials and his affection for them.

¹Tournier, pp. 217-18. Paragraph division omitted.

²Barnett, p. 534.

Paul's previous conduct in Corinth 12:11-13

12:11 Again Paul reminded his readers that he had spoken of his own qualifications as an apostle as he had only because the Corinthians required such proof. He had not done so because he wanted to commend himself or because his critics boastfully commended themselves. The majority in the church should have "commended" him before the critical minority.

"If any Christian community was qualified to write Paul's testimonial, it was the Corinthian church. They had remained silent, forcing Paul to speak up. His action had been excusable, but not theirs. Commendation was what he deserved and they owed."¹

The Corinthians knew that Paul was just as qualified as "the most eminent apostles" (Gr. *huperlian apostolon*) whoever they may have been (cf. 11:5). Paul considered himself to be "a nobody" in the sense that he had received everything that made him an apostle. Apart from the grace and calling of God he was not superior to any other believer. Another possible interpretation is that when Paul called himself "a nobody" he was speaking ironically and using a description of himself that his critics employed. Both interpretations may be valid.

"Such as Paul are chords on which God strikes and on which He produces a wondrous music; but Christ is all the music itself."²

12:12 "The distinguishing marks of a true apostle" refer generally to the supernatural gifts and activities that marked the true apostles. This reference seems to indicate that Paul was referring to the Twelve, rather than to the professed super-apostles, when he used the term "the most eminent apostles" (v. 11; 11:5). God had enabled Paul to perform these "signs, wonders, and miracles." Paul's "perseverance" in his apostolic mission in Corinth, despite much opposition, distinguished him

¹M. Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 398.

²J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 4:356.

from the false apostles (cf. 10:1; 11:4; 13:14; Acts 18:6, 9-10, 12-16). "Signs, wonders, and miracles" are synonymous terms that emphasize respectively their authenticating value, their astonishing effect, and their supernatural power.

"These passages [i.e., Acts 2:22; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4] demonstrate that in the New Testament the purpose of signs and wonders and powers is that of authentication, even when deceitfully imitated by satanic forces."¹

12:13 In irony and sarcasm, again, Paul appealed to his readers for forgiveness because he had not treated them as he had a right to treat them as an apostle. It was only in refraining from demanding his rights of support as an apostle that Paul had not treated the Corinthians as an apostle would normally have treated them (cf. 11:5-12; 1 Cor. 9:1-18). He had given them special privileges, namely, freedom from the burden of supporting him when he was in Corinth. This treatment had led some to criticize him. Some interpreters regard this verse as the end of Paul's "fool's speech."²

Paul's decision to focus on the evidences of an apostle, rather than on the rights of an apostle, is helpful for all servants of the Lord to observe. We too should concentrate on demonstrating the proofs of our ambassadorship in our works, especially our perseverance, rather than expecting those whom we serve to follow us because we are claiming our rights. We need to earn the respect of those we serve with our works and by our example, rather than demanding it because of our position.

Paul's proposed conduct in Corinth 12:14-18

12:14 Paul was planning to return to Corinth a "third time." This was his anticipated visit.³ When he came he planned to continue his same financial policy with them: he would remain financially independent of them ("I will not be a burden to you"; cf. 1 Cor. 9:15; 2 Cor. 11:9, 12). He wanted their welfare and their love ("you") more than their money ("what is yours"). His concerns

¹Hughes, p. 457.

²E.g., M. Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 869.

³See the chart in the introduction section of these notes.

were also for their spiritual maturity (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4) and their complete devotion to Christ (cf. 11:2-3).

As a general principle, "parents" (Paul) sacrifice for their "children" (the Corinthians), not the other way around. However children do have a responsibility to love and help their parents (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:8). Parental responsibility is more basic however, and this is what Paul stressed here. In family life parents sometimes refuse support from their children, like Paul did of the Corinthians, if they feel that doing so is in their children's best interests. Paul planned to use all of his resources to contribute to the Corinthians' welfare. Nevertheless he expected at least their love in return for doing so.

12:15 Paul would "most gladly spend" his energy and resources on the Corinthians to the point of being "expended" (spent out) for their spiritual welfare ("your souls"). Another rhetorical question expects a negative answer: Will you love me less because I love you more, namely, because I have made such great sacrifices for you? No, they should love him more.

"He [Paul] would gladly spend and be spent for them (v. 15); so spend as to be spent, and be like a candle, which consumes itself to give light to others."¹

12:16 Even though the Corinthians had not shown Paul proper love, he had made sacrifices for them ("did not burden you").

Some in Corinth had evidently accused Paul of craftily obtaining money from them indirectly through his agents such as Titus. They may have regarded the collection for the poor Jerusalem saints as one way that Paul was stealthily getting money from them for himself. If that was their charge, he may have used his critics' terms sarcastically when he said that he had been crafty ("I took you in by deceit"). However he was only crafty, not by getting money from them, but by giving money to them ("I did not burden you"). He had done this by

¹Henry, p. 1837.

working to support himself while in Corinth. Even if critics were not leveling this charge, the intent of Paul's irony in this verse remains the same. He, a genuine apostle, had done something that genuine apostles did not normally do: He had not burdened them with his support.

12:17 Paul reminded his readers than not only had he not burdened them with his support when he was with them, but he had not used any of his fellow workers to extract money from them either.

12:18 Paul had previously "urged Titus" and an unnamed "brother" to visit Corinth, which they had done. Titus, and presumably the brother also, had not taken "any advantage" of the Corinthians. Paul reminded them that he had conducted himself with the same self-sacrificing attitude and had not taken advantage of them either.

"There seem to have been three missions of Titus to Corinth; (1) the one mentioned here and in vii. 6 ..., in which Titus and one colleague started the Palestine collection; (2) the one alluded to in ii. 13, vii. 6, 13, in which Titus carried a severe letter from the Apostle, by means of which he succeeded in winning back the rebellious Corinthians to their allegiance; and (3) the one mentioned viii. 6, 17, 18, 22, in which Titus and two colleagues were to finish the Palestine collection. This last cannot be alluded to here; for, when ch. viii. was written, Titus and his two colleagues had not yet started for Corinth. And it is very unlikely that (2) can be the mission alluded to here. St Paul would not make so difficult a task as that of putting an end to a rebellion against his authority still more difficult by coupling with it a request for money."¹

Paul's illustration of a parent's loving sacrifice for his or her children in this section should have helped his readers understand his own motives and

¹Plummer, p. 364.

actions more clearly. It helps us understand the proper attitude of a servant of Jesus Christ toward those whom he or she serves, and it shows how this attitude should manifest itself in the practice of ministry.

C. EXHORTATIONS IN VIEW OF PAUL'S APPROACHING VISIT 12:19—13:10

As he concluded his epistle Paul looked forward to his anticipated return to Corinth in the near future (cf. v. 14). He shared his concerns about what he might experience, and he warned his readers to make certain changes before he arrived. He did this so that he would not have to shame or discipline them when he arrived.

1. Paul's concerns 12:19-21

12:19 The first part of this verse may have been a statement or a question. The meaning is the same in either case. Paul said what he did, especially in 10:1 through 12:18, primarily to build up the Corinthian believers in their faith. His self-defense was only a means to that end. It was for that worthy goal that he was willing to speak foolishly. He recognized that he, as a man "in Christ," was ultimately responsible to God, not to his critics (cf. 2:17; 5:11).

12:20 Paul feared that he might see qualities in his readers that he did not want to see if they refused to respond to his instructions in this letter. Furthermore he feared that they might see the disciplinarian in him. The sins that he feared seeing in them were "strife, jealousy, angry tempers, selfishness, slanders, gossip, arrogance" and "disturbances."

"It is an understatement to say that Paul was afraid of what he might find at Corinth upon his third visit. This list of sins reflects a church that was in turmoil. Little wonder that he was coming to correct the situation."¹

12:21 Moreover Paul feared that he might suffer humiliation over the Corinthians' failure to repent of the attitude that had

¹Martin, p. 464.

embarrassed him on his former painful visit. "God" would humiliate him in the sense that their failure to change would reflect negatively on Paul's divinely empowered ability to move them to change. This situation would cause Paul to "mourn" over "many of those" in the church who had not repented of their former sins (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11-12, 31; 3:3; 4:6; 5:2, 11; 8:1; 11:18; 14:33, 40). The sins mentioned ("impurity, sexual immorality, and indecent behavior") seem to have been unrelated to Paul's critics, though the critics may have practiced them as well. Paul's concern here seems to have been mainly the ungodly conduct that had marked the Christians in Corinth since the founding of their church.¹ This verse and the preceding one give us the most specific list of sins that marked the Christians in Corinth—at least some of them.

2. Paul's warnings 13:1-10

13:1 For the second time Paul warned his readers that he planned on visiting them a "third time" (cf. 12:14). There are at least four possibilities about what Paul meant by the "two or three witnesses" that would confirm his credibility and his critics' guilt:

First, he may simply have been saying that the church would pass judgment and, on the testimony of witnesses, should decide who was right (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:3-5).

Second, Paul may have viewed his three visits to Corinth as three witnesses to his innocence.

Third, he may have been referring to his warnings that he would not spare the Corinthians. These may be the one in 1 Corinthians 4:21, possibly a warning given during the painful visit, and the one in verse 2b.

Fourth, Paul may have meant the witness of his fellow workers when he returned to Corinth. He may have meant Titus and

¹See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

the brethren who accompanied him (cf. 8:23), and/or Paul's fellow travelers.

I tend to favor the first possibility because it views the witnesses as people, which is the normal meaning of "witnesses" in the passage quoted (Deut. 19:15). The fourth view seems weak to me, because Paul's friends would have appeared biased to his critics.

13:2 Paul had "previously" warned the Corinthians during his "second" or painful visit. He was now issuing a second warning in anticipation of his return to Corinth. When (Gr. *ean*, not "if") Paul came he would use his apostolic authority to discipline any in the fellowship who required correction and "not spare anyone." "Those who have sinned in the past" probably refers to the immoral individuals who had failed to respond to Paul during his painful visit (12:21b). "All the rest" probably includes the larger group that failed to submit to Paul's authority (12:20b).

13:3 When Paul returned to Corinth his critics would have first-hand proof of his divinely given power. Christ-like gentleness and humility (10:1) did not impress the Corinthians like displays of power did (11:20). Paul's threatened judgment of the erring in the church, when it was dispensed, would provide the "proof" that many of them required: that the powerful "Christ" was working through Paul and was "not weak toward you, but mighty in you." Jesus Christ will Himself likewise experience vindication one day when He comes in judgment.

13:4 Jesus experienced crucifixion because He was obedient to His Father's will and therefore did not assert Himself against His enemies who eventually executed Him. He appeared to be very weak to onlookers. However His weakness was in reality an evidence of great strength: strength of commitment to His Father's will—even to death on a cross. The Father rewarded His Son by resurrecting Him with supernatural "power." Similarly Paul, in submitting to God's will, had appeared weak to some in Corinth. Nevertheless God would also empower him supernaturally. That supernatural power would become evident to the Corinthians when Paul arrived in Corinth, and when he

dealt with them as Jesus Christ will deal with His critics when He returns (cf. 5:10).

"It appears that Paul and the Corinthians did not understand 'power' in the same way. For them it was on display in an aggressive and a mighty personality. For the apostle, it is seen in weakness."¹

13:5 In anticipation of Paul's judgment of them he called on his Christian readers to "examine" themselves to make sure every one of them was walking "in the faith." They had been examining him, but he turned the tables and challenged them to "test" themselves.² Testing themselves would preclude his having to discipline them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). Paul believed that Jesus Christ was working in each one of them, unless they failed this test. In that case there was some doubt whether they were walking "in the faith." Paul himself claimed to be walking in the faith ("we ourselves do not fail the test").

This verse may at first seem to be talking about gaining assurance of one's salvation from his or her works.³ However, this was not what Paul advocated here or anywhere else in his writings. He was writing to genuine believers (1:1, 21-22; 3:2-3; 6:14; 8:9). He told them to examine their works to gain the assurance that they were experiencing sanctification, that they were walking in obedience to the faith.⁴

"Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were they Christians or not? But it more likely concerned practical sanctification: did they *demonstrate* that they were in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) and that Christ was in them by their obeying His will. To stand the test was to do what was right. To fail was to be

¹Martin, p. 476.

²Alford, 2:2:721.

³See Hodge, p. 305; John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 190; idem, *Faith Works*, pp. 162-63; Kent, p. 196; Wiersbe, 1:679.

⁴See Williams, p. 222; Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, pp. 273-74; M. Harris, *The Second ...*, p. 920; Hunt, 2:819.

disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline."¹

"... were they living Christian lives?"²

"After twelve chapters in which Paul takes their Christianity for granted, can he only now be asking them to make sure they are born again?"³

"... the one thing above all else which Calvin emphasizes is that we must never look to ourselves for assurance."⁴

"In verse 3 Paul indicates that some of the Corinthians were seeking proof (*dokimen*) that Christ was speaking in Paul. Then in verse 5 Paul turns the tables on them and challenges them to prove themselves (*dokimazo*). What some of the Corinthians questioned was not Paul's salvation. It was his sanctification. They questioned whether he was a true spokesman and apostle of Christ. Likewise, when he turned the tables he questioned their sanctification, not their salvation."⁵

"... even though Paul asked the Corinthians to examine their objective standing in Christ, his remarks are structured in such a way that he knew there was no possibility they were still unregenerate. He asked them to examine themselves, not because he doubted their salvation, but because he was absolutely sure of their salvation, and that assurance formed an undeniable foundation for his appeal in verses 5b and 6. Paul's jolting challenge in verse 5a is best

¹Lowery, pp. 586-87. Cf. Barnett, pp. 607-8; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 577; Ironside, pp. 282-84.

²Plummer, p. 376.

³Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 200.

⁴R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, p. 24.

⁵Robert N. Wilkin, "Test Yourselves to See If You Are in the Faith: Assurance Based on Our Works? 2 Corinthians 13:5," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:10 (October 1990):2.

understood when placed in the context of his self-defense in the entire letter. ... The logic of Paul's argument is compelling: If the Corinthians wanted proof of whether Paul's ministry was from Christ, they must look at themselves, not him, because Paul had ministered the gospel to them (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Cor. 2:1-5)."¹

"Nowhere in the Bible is a Christian asked to examine either his faith or his life to find out if he is a Christian. He is told only to look outside of himself to Christ alone for his assurance that he is a Christian. The Christian is, however, often told to examine his faith and life to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."²

"Instead of a threat, Paul's challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is a sobering reminder about the true mark of a Christian's ministry. The barometer of Paul's ministry was people—the believers in Corinth, as well as those in Ephesus, Philippi, and other cities where he ministered. Eternally redeemed people were the proof of his apostolic authenticity and of God's presence in his life."³

13:6 "Fail the test" translates the Greek word *adokimos* (disqualified), which everywhere else in the New Testament refers to Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). Paul challenged his readers to "realize" that he did "not fail the test": that he was walking according to "the faith."

¹Perry C. Brown, "What Is the Meaning of 'Examine Yourselves' in 2 Corinthians 13:5?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:614 (April-June 1997):181. Paragraph divisions omitted. Cf. also Bruce, pp. 253-54; Lenski, p. 1333; Tasker, pp. 188-89; M. Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 403; Hughes, p. 481; Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second ...*, p. 338; and Martin, p. 457.

²Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 288. Cf. pp. 299-300. His twelfth and thirteenth chapters on faith and assurance, pp. 271-91, and self-examination and faith, pp. 293-310, are helpful. See also Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, pp. 61-67.

³Brown, p. 188.

13:7 The apostle's greatest desire was the obedience and godliness of his readers. This was more important to him than his own vindication, as important as that was (v. 6).

"We are [should be] more concerned to pray that we may not do evil than that we may not suffer evil."¹

13:8 Paul could not bring himself to do anything that would harm "the truth," even to vindicate himself. Promoting "the truth" (i.e., the gospel) was his great ambition even if it meant that some regarded him as a false apostle ("though we may appear unapproved," v. 7). This acting "for the truth" included judging the Corinthians if necessary (v. 2).

13:9 The great apostle was happy to appear "weak" if by that weakness his disciples could become "strong" and "mature" (cf. vv. 5, 11; Col. 1:28).

13:10 It was in harmony with this objective that he was "writing" 2 Corinthians. He wanted his distance from the Corinthians to cushion his severe admonitions. Nevertheless, if it became necessary, he would deal severely with them in person by using his apostolic authority. Some destruction, through judgment of sinful conduct, might be necessary before construction of the church in Corinth could proceed.

"... he writes sharply, that he may not have to act sharply."²

"This verse brings to a conclusion the section of the epistle which began at 10:1. The theme there announced as it were in a minor key is now happily transposed into the major key: there he is accused of being bold and terrifying when absent, especially in his letters, but weak and innocuous when present; here he concludes his answer to this charge by saying that if he writes with sharpness when absent it is with the purpose of

¹Henry, p. 1837.

²Plummer, p. 378.

obviating [preventing] the need for acting with sharpness when present. There is, however, no renunciation of authority on his part, but his conduct is governed by the principle that (as he has previously stated in 10:8) his authority has been entrusted to him by the Lord to be used for constructive, not destructive, ends."¹

Evidently Paul's anticipated visit to Corinth turned out to be a pleasant one. Paul wrote Romans during the three months that he was in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3, A.D. 56-57). In that epistle Paul gave no indication that there were problems in Corinth. Moreover he proceeded with his plans to evangelize unreached areas, which he would not have done if the Corinthian church still needed his attention (cf. 10:14-16). Furthermore, Paul wrote that the believers in Achaia were pleased to complete their collection for the Jerusalem saints (Rom. 15:26-27). Finally, the Corinthian church's preservation of 2 Corinthians argues for this church's positive response to Paul's admonitions and warnings.² If they had failed to respond, they probably would have destroyed this letter.

V. CONCLUSION 13:11-14

Paul concluded this letter with an exhortation, a salutation, and a benediction. He intended each one to draw the emphases of this epistle together in order to impress on his readers the basis and importance of their unity with one another and with himself.

A. THE EXHORTATION 13:11-12

13:11 Obedience to five commands would result in one condition that Paul wanted his "brothers and sisters" to express in a particular practice.

First, they were to "rejoice." They could do so because they had the opportunity to judge themselves before God would

¹Hughes, pp. 484-85.

²See Barnett, p. 619.

judge them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). What is more important, they could and should rejoice in the Lord.

Second, they were to "mend" their "ways" and thus experience restoration and wholeness so that God could bring them to maturity (cf. v. 9). They needed to break permanently with all idolatry (6:14—7:1), complete their collection (chs. 8—9), and change their attitude toward Paul (chs. 10—13).

Third, they were to accept Paul's exhortation, which would result in their being "comforted" by his encouragement (cf. 1:3-10; 7:8-13).

Fourth, they were to foster a united outlook by putting first things first (cf. v. 8). Specifically, they needed to unite in their attitude toward Paul and his authority "be like-minded."

Fifth, they were to "live in peace" with one another and with Paul.

These conditions being met, the God who manifests "love and peace" as fruits of His Spirit would remain in fellowship with them. They should emulate God and cultivate love and peace toward one another and toward the apostle.

"It is not by sitting with folded hands that we enter into the blessings of God, but by actively and purposefully promoting those dispositions which are in accordance with God's will for His people: rejoicing, harmony, unity in the truth, living together in peace. It is true that we look to God alone to supply the grace for their achievement; but it is the actual daily practice of love and peace that ensures, from the human side, the realization of the promise that the God of love and peace will be with us."¹

13:12 They could then exchange the "holy kiss" sincerely. The believers practiced this custom commonly. It symbolized the forgiveness, reconciliation, unity, and fellowship that existed

¹Hughes, pp. 487-88.

between the people who kissed each other. Until unity prevailed in the church, this kiss was hypocritical. The custom of kissing one another on the cheeks was, and still is in many cultures, a way of expressing love appropriately.

B. THE SALUTATION 13:13

The love of the body of Christ elsewhere reached out to enfold the Corinthians in unity. Perhaps Paul meant "all the saints" with him where he was, in Macedonia, when he wrote this epistle.

"Like the 'holy kiss,' this epistolary greeting was an expression of unity within the one body of Christ."¹

C. THE BENEDICTION 13:14

This so-called "Trinitarian benediction" is one of the most widely quoted verses in Paul's epistles. In each of the three phrases the Greek genitive is subjective (i.e., "the grace of [that comes from] the Lord Jesus Christ," etc.).

Paul wished that God's "grace," demonstrated in the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, might be the atmosphere in which all his readers lived their lives. True appreciation for that grace banishes self-assertiveness and self-seeking. He hoped that God's "love," demonstrated in the Father's work in sending Jesus Christ as our Savior, might be the motivation for their lives. Thankfulness for His love subdues jealousy and strife. He longed that the "fellowship" that God's "Holy Spirit" produces among all the saved might unite their lives in fellowship with one another and with all believers. Gratefulness for this fellowship minimizes quarreling and factions.

Note the centrality of Jesus Christ's work on the cross in Paul's arrangement of these prayerful wishes. Note too the clear testimony to the Trinity that this verse provides: It is in the grace of Jesus Christ, displayed in His substitute sacrifice (8:9), that we see God's love (Rom. 5:8), which the Spirit uses to produce fellowship (Eph. 4:3).²

¹M. Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 405.

²See also Baxter, 6:135-36.

Appendix 1

In this most autobiographical of Paul's epistles the apostle commented on many of the difficulties that he had faced in his ministry, and how he responded to them.¹

The difficulty	The response	The text
He experienced tribulations and sufferings.	He turned to God for support.	1:3-7
He encountered life-threatening trouble.	He trusted in God.	1:8-11
He faced charges by his opponents that he was unreliable and untrustworthy.	He explained his pure motives for changing his itinerary and postponing his trip to Corinth.	1:12-24
He felt emotional anguish over a previous unpleasant visit with the Corinthian believers.	He expressed his great love for them.	2:1-4
He had to deal with an unpleasant church discipline situation.	He urged forgiveness and comfort for the repentant sinner.	2:5-12
His motives were suspected.	He clarified his sincere motives.	2:17; 4:2, 5
He underwent trials, persecution, and pressure.	He persevered, clinging to the truth that Jesus was being manifested and God was being glorified.	4:7—5:11

¹Adapted from *The Nelson ...*, p. 1954.

His apostolic credentials were questioned.	He recited his record of faithfulness in a wide variety of difficult circumstances.	6:3-10
He faced allegations of misconduct.	He maintained his innocence, stated his affection, and pleaded for a more loving response.	7:2
He experienced conflict, fear, and discouragement.	He found comfort in the arrival of Titus and in the news that the Corinthians cared about him.	7:5-7
He had to write about the uncomfortable subject of giving.	He cited the sterling example of the Macedonian Christians, and he courageously challenged the Corinthians to give.	8:1—9:15
He was criticized by the false apostles.	He refused to compare himself to them and sought the Lord's commendation.	10:9-11
He was compared to the false apostles.	He set forth his long history of sacrificial service.	11:5-33
He had to live with a thorn in the flesh.	He prayed for the removal of this ongoing, unpleasant affliction; then he realized that it was God's grace to him, forcing him to rely on God's strength and not his own.	12:1-10

Appendix 2

Some of the riches of divine grace mentioned in the New Testament:

God incorporated us into His eternal plan for believers.	He foreknew us as believers in eternity past.	He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.
He called us to Himself.	He justified us (declared us righteous).	He assured us of glorification.
Christ redeemed us from sin.	Christ reconciled us to God.	Christ propitiated (satisfied) God.
God forgave all of our sins.	He placed us "in Christ."	He set us free from the Law of Moses.
He set us free from the law that sin results in eternal spiritual death.	He gave us new life.	He adopted us as His heirs.
He made us members of His household.	He gave us immediate access to Himself.	He enabled us to enjoy fellowship with all the saints.
He delivered us from darkness.	He transferred us into His kingdom of light.	He gave us heavenly citizenship.
He prepared a heavenly home for us.	He prepared a heavenly inheritance for us.	He united us with all three members of the Trinity.
He gave us the indwelling Holy Spirit.	He anointed us with the Spirit.	He baptized us with the Spirit.
He sealed us with the Spirit.	He pledged our immortality.	He gave us spiritual gifts (abilities).

He empowered us.	He made us righteous in His sight.	He set us apart or sanctified us.
He brought us near Himself.	He circumcised our hearts.	He gave us to Christ as a gift.
He placed us on a solid foundation.	He gave us abundant grace.	He made us the objects of divine intercession.
He gave us faith.	He gave us hope.	He gave us unconditional love.
He made us complete in Christ.	He gave us mercy.	He gave us freedom from sin's dominion.
He has given us the mind of Christ.		

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