

## Chapter 1:1-22

*Verse 1—Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus*—Paul is stating his true apostleship as contrasted to what he later (11:13) calls “false apostles” who are in Corinth. In fact, this whole epistle is Paul’s account of what it means to be a true apostle of Jesus Christ, which is primarily the proclamation of the Gospel (11:4). He speaks of his apostleship in 1:21; 2:17; 4:5; 5:20; 10:8; and 13:10.

- *by the will of God*—Paul was uniquely set apart by God for the ministry of the “new covenant” (3:6), primarily to the Gentiles.
- *and Timothy our brother*—Most likely Timothy is not a coauthor. The reference to him at this point would give him credibility as Paul’s envoy to Corinth. This term also occurs in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 and Colossians 1:1.
- *To the church of God which is at Corinth*—*church* is the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning “called out ones.” In Ephesians 1:19, 22-23, Paul says these are *us who believe ... which is His body*. Rather than thinking of them as “the Corinthian church,” think of them as the one church of God that appears on the scene at Corinth (a city in southern Greece).
- *with all the saints*—“saints” means “separated ones,” i.e., separated from the world and its evil and separated to and dedicated to God. This is an important idea because, in the last four chapters of the book, Paul will have to deal severely with various groups. So here he reminds the believers in Corinth of their call to holiness as God’s people.
- *who are throughout Achaia*—After 27 B.C., Achaia became the name of the whole of Greece.

*Verse 2—Grace* [God’s favor to those who do not deserve it] *to you and peace* [not at war with God]

- *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*—God’s title is “Father” and Jesus’ title is “Lord.” Both indicate an authority to whom all are answerable for their every action. When Paul uses these titles, it is not the attitude of man to man or scholar to master. It is the attitude of man toward God.

*Verse 3—Blessed* [Gk word *eulogetos*—from which we have the English word “eulogy.” It means “to speak well of”] *be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*—it’s the idea of giving thanks to God for who He is and what He has done.

- *the Father of mercies*—This phrase does not simply mean a quality of God. Rather, it is God as “the creator and original source of mercy,” i.e., “from whom mercy comes.”
- *and God of all comfort*—also translated as “encouragement.” The root in verb and noun forms is found 10 times in the next five verses. It’s also found many times throughout the epistle. From the many contexts, it seems no single translation is adequate. But the idea is: the God from whom all help comes!

*Verse 4— who comforts us in all our affliction*—This is not referring to troubles in general. It is where hostility for the Gospel’s sake is expected, as the next verses make clear. There is also the purpose that Paul’s strengthening by God in the time of trial leads him to be able to help others. Paul can identify with the hostility the believers in Corinth are experiencing because he has experienced the same hostility for spreading the Gospel.

- *so that we will be able*—indicates either purpose or result.
- *to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*—Sufferers can help those in the same circumstances as their own.

*Verse 5—For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance*—Christ’s sufferings “overflow to us,” i.e., it seems to not be talking about the suffering Christ Himself endured but rather to sufferings from being associated with Him in our age, which precedes the coming Millennial age of no suffering.

- *so also our comfort is abundant through Christ*—So our encouragement or strength from Christ overflows to us.

*Verse 6—But if we are afflicted*—i.e., suffer

- *it is for your comfort*—encouragement or strength, i.e., it's how God encourages others, with the encouragement He gives to you
- *and salvation*—obviously, Paul is not talking about eternal life salvation here. In this context, the word means the health and protection of the believers, to keep them from harm or danger.
- *or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort*—just as the suffering results in their encouragement, so the encouragement results in their encouragement.
- *which is effective* [i.e., it results in] *in the patient enduring* [not escaping] *of the same sufferings which we also suffer*. This “strength-in-weakness” idea is repeated throughout the book (such as the famous verse 12:9). The Corinthians were questioning Paul's apostleship because he was suffering, that he was not exempt from trials (chapters 10–13). So Paul is stating his case that in our age, enduring suffering overflows from the suffering Christ endured. That Paul suffers for the Gospel, rather than denying his apostleship, proves his apostleship. So suffering for the Gospel shows you are a believer. But God will give you the strength to endure these sufferings, just as He has given strength to other suffering believers.

*Verse 7—and our hope* [strong assurance] *for you is firmly grounded*—as believers, they are established in Christ, anointed by God, and sealed by the Holy Spirit (vv. 21-22).

- *knowing that as you are sharers* [joint participation in a reality outside the believers' experience] *of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort*—These believers did not experience the exact same suffering as Paul did (vv. 8-9). We don't know what sufferings they experienced. But they are linked because both are the overflowing of Christ's sufferings and both experience strength from God to endure the sufferings.

**Application**—There is a divine purpose in human suffering for the Gospel's sake: (1) It furthers the cause of Christ. Rather than disproving Paul's apostleship, it proved his ministry for the Gospel. So it shows us to be true believers in Jesus Christ. (2) Those who receive encouragement and strength from God to endure their suffering are uniquely qualified to enter sympathetically into the experience of others going through a similar suffering. One man said, “Sympathy is love perfected by experience.” So the Apostle Paul is not a man who lives an untroubled life. He experiences suffering as other believers do and needs God's strength and encouragement the same as we do. So he writes to us with sympathy and experience.

*Verse 8—For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren*—lit. “for we do not wish you not to know”

- *of our affliction which came to us in Asia*—there was some event or set of events that Paul has in mind, but we don't know exactly to what he refers
- *that we were burdened excessively*—like an overladen ship
- *beyond our strength*—Paul uses many words to convey the intensity of the experience he endured and has in his vivid recall of it
- *so that we despaired even of life*—the kind of anguish that drives away all hope

*Verse 9—indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves*—he had accepted that death was inevitable in the situation, even in his recall of the situation

- *so that we would not trust in ourselves*—trusting in yourself means you think you can find a way to deliver yourself, but when you accept that death is inevitable, then you no longer trust in your own means of deliverance of yourself from the situation.

- *but in God who raises the dead*—faith in God who raised the crucified Jesus to life. Here is the believer’s hope—that physical death is not the end. God will raise us from the dead some day. Our hope is in the things of eternity, not in things here on earth.

*Verse 10—who delivered us from so great a peril of death*—Although Paul thought he was going to die, yet he lived to tell the tale and to write 2 Corinthians.

- *and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us*—there are many views as to what Paul was referring to here—perhaps the riot in the Ephesus theater (Acts 19:21-41), perhaps the “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) or some other sickness. Again, we have to say we don’t know to what particular situation he is referring.

*Verse 11—you also joining in helping us*—lit. “working together to support me”—*through your prayers*

- *so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many*—The consequence of the one group praying for Paul, and God’s deliverance, is that now many others will also pray with thanksgiving for what God has done.

**Application**—Here we see that prayer is both a work (see Colossians 4:12-13) and a privilege to be in partnership with those who are in need. Hearing about answered prayers and God’s deliverance and provision for others is a stimulus to our own prayer life.

Verses 12-14 must be seen as the preface to the following verses where Paul is defending his action of not coming to the Corinthians. They were questioning his motives for his decision. In verses 12-14, he states that (1) it was not with worldly motives, such as to deceive them, but with godly motives, i.e., to tell the truth. (2) He wants them to understand his reasons why. Right now, they just had partial understanding. (3) In any case, Christ will one day judge both Paul and the Corinthians, and Paul has confidence in this judgment.

*Verse 12—For our proud confidence* [lit. “reason for exaltation,” i.e., the reason for my joy, gladness, or happiness]

- *is this: the testimony of our conscience*—where you make judgments between morals [see Relational Concepts’ *Conscience* brochure]
- *that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you*—Paul spoke to them, not with the motivation the world has (such as “to deceive”), but with a motivation that comes from God (such as, “to tell the truth).

*Verse 13—For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end*—Paul’s letters were not meant to deceive anyone. He writes exactly what is on his mind and what he wants them to understand him to mean.

*Verse 14—just as you also partially did understand us*—the Corinthians had part of Paul’s story, and now he will tell them the rest of it, and hopes they will listen and understand *until the end* (v. 13).

- *that we are your reason to be proud* [lit. “reason for exaltation,” i.e., the reason for joy, gladness, or happiness]
- *as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus*—Paul and the saved Corinthians are the joy, and reason for happiness in the day of the Lord Jesus.

**Application**—In the next verses, Paul’s motives, for his decision to not come to Corinth, are attacked. Sometimes, a Christian’s dealings with other believers must not only be done in the right

way but must also **be seen** to be done in the right way. That is, your motives, **why** you are doing it, must be explained.

*Verses 15-16—In this confidence*—that he was not making a false worldly promise (which he did not intend to keep), but rather that he was truthful when telling them of his true intentions to come.

- *I intended at first to come to you*—i.e., to come to Corinth (in the south of Greece) on his way to Macedonia in the north of Greece. In 1 Corinthians 16:5-7, Paul said he intended to come to Corinth, and not just pass through, but stay awhile, perhaps *even spend the winter*. But at this first visit, on the way to Macedonia, Paul was met with strong opposition and public insult (2 Corinthians 2:5; 7:12; 12:21). It was a painful visit for him (1:23–2:4). So he changed his intended plan of 1:15, and his word from 1 Corinthians 16:5-7. Instead, he sailed from Macedonia to Ephesus (Acts 20: 3f). Therefore, some of the Corinthians were charging him with indecision and failure to keep his word. So his credibility as an apostle of Jesus Christ was at stake.
- *so that you might twice receive a blessing, that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you*—his original intention was just to go to Corinth on the way back from Macedonia (1 Corinthians 16:5), but now he says he wanted to also go on the way to Macedonia, thereby giving the Corinthians two favors of God by Paul’s presence and his teaching from God.
- *and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea*—Paul was collecting money to help the believers in Jerusalem, Judea (1 Corinthians 16:3). It also sounds like Paul was perhaps desiring that some of the Corinthians accompany him with the gift to Jerusalem, as others were from Asia, etc. But no Corinthians are listed in the group who actually accompanied him (Acts 20:2-4).

*Verse 17—Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?*—lit. “when I therefore was thus intending [to change my plans], did I act with *the* fickleness [of which he is now accused]. “Fickleness” has a definite article *the*. “Fickleness” means to be undependable, fair-weather, i.e., making decisions with human, fleshly motives.

- *Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?* This is the charge of duplicity (deceit, fraud, double-dealing, underhandedness). If this is Paul’s character, how can his apostleship be trusted? They insinuate that his message is just as unreliable and unsure “as he is.”

This question will occur again in chapter 3 and in 4:4. But here Paul replies:

(1) *Verse 18—But as God is faithful*—Paul appeals to God the Father’s character. He is a covenant-keeping God. He is the guarantor of His promises. ... *through Him is our Amen* [“so be it”] (v. 20).

- *our word to you is not yes and no*—as God’s apostle, Paul’s word is faithful, as God is faithful. He is not fickle.

(2) *Verse 19—For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him*—Just as the Father is not fickle, neither is His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were not preaching themselves, they were preaching Christ among the Corinthians.

(3) *Verse 20—For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes*—Lit. “for all the promises of God find their affirmation in Him [Jesus].” That is, in Christ, the Old Testament finds its fulfillment.

- *therefore* [with the result] *also through Him* [Jesus] *is our* [Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy] *Amen* [“so be it”]
- *to the glory of God through us*—through the spoken utterance of “amen” they give praise to God, i.e., the “amen” of worship points to God’s confirming work in these three men

(4) *Verse 21—Now He who establishes us with you*—it is God who confirms [the One who guarantees, who fulfills a promise] both us [the three men] and you [Corinthian believers] in our relationship to Christ.

- *in Christ and anointed us is God*—In Greek, this is a word play—in Christ [“the anointed One”] God has anointed Paul, Silvanus, Timothy. It draws on the Old Testament, where prophets, kings, and God’s servants were anointed with oil. It is a setting apart of a person to serve God, such as Paul’s apostleship.

*Verse 22—who also sealed us*—i.e., put God’s stamp of ownership on them

- *and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge*—a partial payment in advance given as security.

**Application**—Paul is writing as a person whose reliability had been questioned, and not without reason. He had decided it was wiser to alter his plans to visit Corinth as he had originally stated he would. He wants to make sure they don’t question Christ’s reliability. He wants to explain the reason for his change of plans, although many of our questions regarding that are unanswered. But what is made very clear is God’s own character, Christ’s person, and the Christian experience of life-in-the-Spirit. I think this is a good example of how our character, and therefore the reputation of God Himself, is on the line with the decisions we make—especially if we do not keep our word when we say we will do something. If we cannot keep our word in a particular situation, it better be an unusual thing and not the norm. We should be trustworthy people. And if we can’t keep our word, make sure the other person understands the reason, especially the motive, so they don’t misinterpret.

Here we see a description of the three persons of the Godhead involved in our salvation and sanctification: God the Father guarantees our relationship to Him through anointing us in Christ and sealing us with the Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation.

## Chapter 1:23 to 2:11

Now we read of the actual reason for Paul's change of travel plans.

There are several views as to the circumstances of the church in Corinth to which Paul is referring. The view that seems the most obvious is that there is a man among the believers, who has influenced the believers to attack Paul personally and as an apostle. This man used Paul's changing of plans to add fuel to his fire of attack against Paul. I do not think this is the immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5 because that man's sin was his own immorality, it was not a personal attack against Paul. I also think it was not some kind of civil matter, going to court, as addressed in 1 Corinthians 6, for the same reason.

The exact details are not known, but it seems there was an attack against Paul and his apostleship ministry during his second visit to Corinth. It seems that this man influenced many believers, who needed to repent of not only siding with this man in his attack against Paul but of their alienation of Paul in his disciplinary reprimand of this man (see 2:2, 4; 7:8, 11, 12). Paul's concern was for the state of his relations with the church at Corinth. He had written a "tearful letter" (which we do not have, but it is referred to in 2:4) which had the result of their repentance and being won back to "his side," as reported to him by Titus (7:6-7).

*Verse 23—But I call God as witness to my soul*—Paul is not saying an oath, which is a promise of some future action. Rather, he is stating that God is a witness of Paul's heart and intentions and that Paul is telling the truth.

**Application**—Paul recognizes that God knows our hearts and motives, not just our actions, and will one day judge all those things (1 Corinthians 4:5).

- *that to spare you*—to show mercy, to leave unhurt, to be lenient to
- *I did not come again to Corinth*—indicating the grounds of the accusation against him—his fickleness (verse 17).

*Verse 24—Not that we lord it over your faith*—lit. "this does not mean that we are ruling over your faith"—his motive is not to be domineering

- *but are workers with you for your joy*—even though, as an apostle, Paul could certainly lord it over them—yet he sees himself as a worker together with them for their joy—not for his own self-satisfaction.

**Application**—Paul has some responsibility, as their spiritual teacher, for working for their joy, but believers also have a responsibility for working for their own joy. Joy that comes from sin confessed, and godliness pursued (2 Peter 1), etc.

- *for in your faith you are standing firm*—Even though they seemed to be abandoning Paul, they were not abandoning their faith in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ which was preached to them by Paul (Galatians 1:7-9).

*Verse 2:1—But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again*—Paul desired for the Corinthians to have joy (1:24). But when he visited last time, both Paul and they experienced pain. Therefore, because the situation was not resolved, he decided to not visit them again because it would be another painful visit, both for him and for them.

*Verse 2—For if I cause you sorrow—referring to the tearful letter (2:4) and its immediate impact (7:8), and the situation that caused Paul to write as he did.*

- *who then makes me glad [because of his repentance—verse 6-7] but the one whom I made sorrowful?—lit. “the person who made me sorrowful”*

*Verse 3—This is the very thing I wrote you—it can’t be our 1 Corinthians but another letter, written after Paul’s visit, written in “sorrow” and hand delivered by Titus (7:7ff). We do not have this letter. [So 2 Corinthians is really 3 Corinthians.]*

- *so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice—Paul looks ahead to a future visit during which he expects an occasion of rejoicing.*
- *having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all—i.e., he’s confident the situation is taken care of, so he and the believers in Corinth will have joy together*

*Verse 4—For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears—here we see a glimpse of Paul’s inner life at the time his letter was written and sent. At first he regretted causing them sorrow, but then he didn’t regret it because their sorrow was only for a while and it led to the point of repentance for you (7:8-9).*

- *not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you—the immediate purpose was to make them sorrowful, but the underlying purpose was his love [often called “tough love” today]. Paul loved them enough to cause them sorrow, so they would repent, and share in his joy for them.*

**Application**—It’s a very hard thing to practice tough love—to cause sorrow over someone’s sin, with the purpose that they would repent and be restored to the joy of fellowship. It’s a risk for righteousness. They may not repent. Walt Henrichsen says, “Confrontation is one of the most significant expressions of love.” He also said: “Most Christians believe in going to heaven but they have no eternal hope. The reason I believe that is because people risk in the direction of their hope. Where do most Christians you know take their risks? For example, we buy lottery tickets and make business investments, but we don’t risk taking a stand for righteousness when an extended family member gets remarried.”

*Verse 5—But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you—this man caused sorrow to Paul, and not exaggerating, to some degree, he also caused sorrow to all the believers in Corinth.*

*Verse 6—Sufficient [or “great,” “enough”] for such a one is this punishment—or to “censure,” i.e., reprimand or rebuke. This would refer either to (1) its severity or (2) its duration. Perhaps he was excluded from the church for from the love feast Communion.*

- *which was inflicted by the majority—this could be the majority of the believers in Corinth or the majority were those who had continued to side with Paul.*

*Verse 7—so that on the contrary—the “censure” worked rather quickly in that he has repented already, so don’t keep on with the censure. Now different action is required—*

- *you should rather forgive and comfort [encourage] him—forgiveness and encouragement rather than censure. Another reason this is not the man in 1 Corinthians 5, of whom Paul says to deliver him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (death) and not to even eat with such a one.*
- *otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow—it might lead him to abandon his faith altogether. Here we see Paul’s love for this man, in his remaining in the faith and in fellowship with other believers.*

*Verse 8—Wherefore I urge you*—the readers may have thought Paul would endorse their action and “affirm” whatever action they had taken. Instead, Paul, almost in an apostolic way, “encourages” [same Gk. word for “comfort”] them, as Paul wants them to “comfort/encourage” this man (v. 7).

- *to reaffirm* [support, endorse] *your love for him*—two sides of love—one to cause sorrow leading to repentance and the other side to forgive and encourage once there is repentance.

*Verse 9—For to this end also I wrote*—here is another reason for this letter

- *so that I might put you to the test*—both in the issue of the attack against Paul, in the causing of sorrow leading to repentance of the man initiating the attack, and forgiveness after he repented—all these were tests of the believers. Paul wrote that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of wickedness (Ephesians 6:12).
- *whether you are obedient in all things*—i.e., stay loyal to Paul, as God’s chosen apostolic leader, who is giving them instruction from the Lord.

**Application**—There are no victims and no accidents. Look at your situation as a test from God—are you going to be obedient in **all** things? We are not to test God, but God tests us.

*Verse 10—But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ* —to forgive someone doesn’t mean they deserve forgiveness. Rather, we forgive because, as believers, we are in the presence of Christ.

**Application**—Christ is watching us and will judge our actions and our motives. He said to forgive, it is a command He has given us. We are to forgive *as God in Christ also has forgiven you* (Ephesians 4:32). He’s not asking us to do something He hasn’t already done for us!

*Verse 11—so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes*—Satan’s work would succeed if: (1) the offender refused to repent, given the censure the believers inflicted on him, (2) the offender were to be lost to the church due to being *overwhelmed by excessive sorrow* and/or (3) the believers refused to forgive and encourage the offender.

**Application**—Satan knows what can and does divide believers. But we also know what he knows, so we *put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11f).

## Chapter 2:12-13

This short paragraph links to 7:5 where the arrangement to meet Titus at Troas on his return from Corinth is picked up in narrative form. On not finding Titus, Paul moved across to Macedonia, there the storytelling is resumed in 7:5ff. So the narrative breaks at 2:14 and is completed in chapter 7. The verses of 2:14–7:4 are a long section describing Paul’s apostolic ministry.

*Verse 12—Now when I came to Troas—*Troas is the Asian port city for sea travelers going to Macedonia (Acts 16:8, 11; 20:5). This journey is not recorded in Acts and took place after Paul’s “trial” in Asia at the end of Acts 19.

- *for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord—*we don’t know exactly what this “door” looked like, but obviously, people were becoming saved in Troas as Paul preached the Gospel.

*Verse 13—I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother—*who was supposed to meet Paul in Troas with news from Corinth as to how they responded to the “sorrowful letter” which Paul had sent to Corinth with Titus.

- *but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia—*it could have been by boat, or if it was winter, overland. So it was the two men missed each other. This trip is usually identified as the one in Acts 20:1.

**Application**—I think it is interesting that, if judged pragmatically and by circumstances, Paul had “open door” for evangelism in Troas. Yet, he left Troas for the sake of meeting Titus and knowing how the church at Corinth responded to his disciplinary letter.

It seems like there is a hierarchy here. Believers living in obedience to God’s Word are more important than evangelism. In fact, it is one of the points of evangelism. Salvation is not just about getting people to heaven. It’s to have people living godly lives and giving praise and glory to God through their obedience to His commands in His Word.

## Chapter 2:14 to 3:6

*Verse 2:14—But thanks be to God—*God is praised for the following reasons:

- *who always leads us in triumph in Christ*—He always (without exception) leads us “in a triumphal procession” in Christ—here we see Paul’s paradox of “strength-in-weakness” that he develops in the book. There is a man among the believers in Corinth who has attacked Paul, and led others with him. Paul has written a sorrowful letter to them, but Titus has not returned with the reply. But Paul’s strength in this weakness is that God always leads us in triumph in Christ. How? He now explains ...
- *and manifests through us*—God lit. “is making known,” i.e., to “make clear,” “to become visible” His knowledge through us. It is “making known ... the knowledge of Him.”
- *the sweet aroma*—the aroma can be sweet, yet to those who smell the aroma, it could be sweet or not sweet (vv. 15-16). Yet from God’s perspective, it is the aroma of life, so it is sweet. And to those of us who receive it, it is sweet.
- *of the knowledge of Him in every place*—In light of 4:2, we see that the true “commendation” is for the person who makes known the truth of the Word of God, who makes known the knowledge of God in every place.

**Application**—As Paul has already said, this situation is a test (2:9) to see whether the believers in Corinth would be obedient to the Word of God. Now we see that our response of obedience is the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God being “smelled” in your particular testing situation. For example, the testimony of the VanRyns and Cherek’s in the mis-identity of their daughters. Jesus told a parable in which He said, *He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much* (Luke 16:10). From God’s perspective, little things are as much of a test as big things!!

*Verse 15—For we are a fragrance* [“odor”] *of Christ* [the “anointed One,” perhaps alluding to the smell anointing oil would have]—As a believer, we have the “odor” of Christ and the message of the Gospel everywhere we go

- *to God*—As believers, we send the sweet aroma of Jesus Christ in our lives up to God. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, *For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.*
- *among* [surrounded by] *those who are being* [a participle meaning, “those on the way” to being] *saved*—it is the message of salvation to those who are on their way to receiving Christ
- *and among* [surrounded] *those who are perishing*—it is the message of damnation to those who refuse to receive Christ

*Verse 16—to the one* [who does not receive Christ] *an aroma from* [spiritual death on earth] *death to* [eternal] *death*—the odor actually becomes a fume that brings forth death

- *to the other* [who receives Christ] *an aroma* [sweet fragrance] *from life* [spiritual life on earth] *to* [eternal] *life*
- *And who is adequate* [able to do, capable of, sufficient] *for these things?*—The answer, of course, is: no one! Again the paradox of strength-in-weakness. We are not adequate in ourselves. Our adequacy comes from God (see verses 5-6).

*Verse 17—For we are not like many*—“For” is important—Paul is making a contrast between himself (and Timothy and Silas) in verse 16, as the aroma of God, and the man

(and men like him) who were influencing believers away from the Word of God and Paul's apostleship ministry among them

- *peddling the word of God*—lit. “hucksters (who) act for profit.” The verb combines two meanings: (1) to dilute wine with water and (2) to make a profit by selling shoddy goods. That is, these false teachers are diluting or distorting the Word of God, and their motivation is to make a profit from it. Paul refers to these in Galatians 1:6-9.
- *but as from sincerity*—“judged by sunlight.” When pottery had cracks, some would fill them with wax, to deceive the people buying them that the pottery was okay. But when you held it up to the sun, you could see through the wax. So the pottery was “sun judged.” Thus the meaning of genuine, not dishonest.
- *but as from God*—Paul's message was direct revelation from God Himself (Ephesians 3:1-11).
- *we speak in Christ*—It's not just who or what you are, it's what you say. Romans 10:14 says: *How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?* You must speak the Gospel.
- *in the sight of God*—The results are not up to us. But obedience is our decision. God is watching to see if we are obedient to His Word.

**Application**—In 5:9 Paul wrote, ... *we also have as our ambition ... to be pleasing to Him*. Jesus said, ... *for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him* (John 8:29). Of course, we aren't perfect as Jesus was, but do we even have it as our ambition to be pleasing to God in all we do!?

*Verse 3:1*—*Are we beginning to commend [to present for approval] ourselves again?* —We don't know when the other commending of themselves he referred to occurred. It could be the letter of 1 Corinthians, or the lost letter.

- *Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?* —Letters for credibility were commonly used (see Acts 9:2; 22:5; 18:27; Romans 16:1). The Greek word for “commend” is used 16 times in the New Testament, 13 references are in Paul, who uses the word 8 times in 2 Corinthians. Again, it is alluding to the issue of Paul versus the false teachers in Corinth. They evidently came with some letters of commendation from someone. Paul refers to this in 11:21-33.

*Verse 2*—*You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men*—The Corinthians' changed lives are evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel Paul had brought. Anyone, anywhere could “read” it.

*Verse 3*—*being manifested [shown] that you are a letter of Christ*—i.e., “authored by Christ”

- *cared for [administered by] by us*—Although acknowledging the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, yet it was Paul (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) who delivered the message to the Corinthians.
- *written not with ink*—i.e., something physical, as the tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments (Exodus 31:18)
- *but with the Spirit of the living God*—This is the only place in the Bible that this title for the Holy Spirit is used. This is part of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is a covenant God made with Israel, but we receive the benefits of that covenant—God's Spirit in our hearts. It's a spiritual covenant rather than a physical covenant, like the Mosaic Law was.
- *not on tablets of stone*—on which many things were written at that time, but a specific reference to the Ten Commandments, initiating the Mosaic Law.
- *but on tablets of human hearts*—The Holy Spirit teaching us the things of God in our hearts.

So the contrast:	ink	Holy Spirit
	tablets of stone	tablets of human hearts
	Covenant of the Law	New Covenant

*Verse 4—Such confidence we have through Christ toward God*—Paul’s confidence is twofold: (1) God made him a minister of the new covenant (3:6) and (2) Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians (2:4).

*Verse 5—Not that we are adequate* [sufficient, qualified] *in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves*—Here we see again his main idea of the contrast of human weakness and God’s strength or sufficiency. From God’s perspective, we are weak, not qualified to serve Him. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:9, *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

- *but our adequacy* [sufficiency, qualification] *is from God*—Paul is now answering the question in verse 2:16—*Who is adequate for these things?* As humans, we are weak. We are not sufficient. Our strength and sufficiency are from God (12:9).

*Verse 6—who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant*—Moses, for example, was a servant of the Law. Now Paul is a servant of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It wasn’t Paul’s decision—he didn’t even know the new covenant was in effect. It was all God’s doing. (See Ephesians 3:1-12.) It seems like the false teaching Paul was combating was perhaps Jewish in nature, promoting obedience to the Law.

- *not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*—Paul has said a similar thing in Romans 2:29 and 7:6. The writer of Hebrews says: ... *in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (10:3-4). Life did not come through the Law but through the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:10).

In this section, Paul is on the defensive, not just of his life but of his ministry. And beyond that, there is the question of where is the authority in ministry?

Paul’s opponents (2:17) evidently regarded themselves as “servants of Christ” (11:23) and came to the city with “letters of commendation” as their authority. Paul’s ministry looked ineffectual in comparison. So Paul defends himself, while at the same time attacking the basis of accreditation that his rivals trusted. He rejects the use of “written letters.” By contrast, Paul says that the Corinthian believers are his testimonial, where God’s Spirit has worked in their spirit, producing a newness of life.

Paul’s ministry is not of his own doing. God enabled him to serve Him. Life comes from the Spirit. To rely on the Law, is to chose death. The message of Christ forces a person to choose. C. S. Lewis says there are only two classes of people: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, “thy will be done.”

# Chapter 3:7-18

In this passage, Paul will contrast the old and new covenants.

## 1. The Law set the standard, but offered no power to reach it.

*Verse 7—But if the ministry of death*—In verse 6, Paul said, *for the letter kills*. Now he says it's a ministry that leads to death. Therefore, in verse 9, it produces *condemnation*. The Law did this by setting a perfect standard, but men and women, who are sinfully weak, were unable to attain it. The Law is good (Romans 7:12), but we are sinful (7:14). *... by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful* (7:13). Before the Law, Abraham was not breaking the Law when he lied. But after the Law, lying (sin) became sinful. Lying went from being a sin done in ignorance to also sinning by disobeying a command to not lie.

- *in letters engraved on stones*—It seems that in verses 1-3 Paul is referring to the letters of commendation the false teachers had. But he is now referring to the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God on stone which Moses received (Exodus 31:18).
- *came with glory*—Moses' face would have some kind of radiant light after he talked with God (Exodus 34:29f). The Greek word for "glory" occurs 19 times in chapters 1–8, of which 15 references are in chapters 3–4. This word is more of a theological word in this passage than it is a graphic description.
- *so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face*—It wasn't that it hurt their eyes (like looking at the sun), but that they were afraid to look at his face (Exodus 34:30).
- *fading as it was*—Paul will come back to this fact in the next verses, but it is important to his case now that Moses did not retain that glory. But his face would once again shine after he went in to speak with God (34:33-35). The longer he was away from God, the more the glory faded. The intensity was directly connected to Moses' being in God's presence.

*Verse 8—how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?*—This may refer to Christ's Second Coming in glory, but for Paul, the future has already begun in the age of the Spirit, which is a foretaste of what is to come. With the Spirit indwelling believers, we are always in the presence of God, therefore, the glory does not fade. It is always with us.

*Verse 9—For if the ministry of condemnation has glory*—the Law was a reminder of sin (Hebrews 10:3). It could not cleanse your conscience (9:9) and it could not make you perfect (10:1). It was a ministry of condemnation. YET, when Moses received it from God, Moses' face shown with glory.

- *much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory*—Through the shed blood of Christ on the cross, we are made righteous (something the Law could never do) (Hebrews 9:14; 10:10, 14). Therefore, this ministry is *much more*, it *abound[s] in glory*, compared to the glory Moses received.

## 2. The Law had an honorable purpose, but it was only temporary.

*Verse 10—For* [or "thus it is quite true that"] *indeed what had glory*—Moses' face

- *in this case*—compared to the ministry of righteousness, not compared to other things
- *has no glory*—Up to the moment of Christ's shed blood and the giving of the Spirit, Moses having glory from being in God's presence was very important for the

significance of the Law. But now there is a new brighter and enduring glory, which makes Moses' glory look like no glory at all.

- *because of the glory that surpasses it*—Paul says it is ... *the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord* (Philippians 3:8). Illustration: At night, the moon has radiance—it's a point of light in the dark. But when the sun comes up, the radiance of the moon has no radiance because the radiance of the sun surpasses it—the brightness of the sun actually turns the whole sky into brightness.

*Verse 11—For if that which fades away*—The radiance of Moses' face would fade until he went back into the presence of God. Then his face would radiate once more.

- *was with glory* [i.e., God's glory was displayed], *much more that which remains is in glory* [i.e., is glorious, i.e., the righteousness we possess from the shed blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit living in us, it remains]

**Application**—Just as the glory faded from the lawgiver's face, so the glory of the Law has faded. It has given way to a glory which has come to stay, the glory of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. The glory of God should not be sought now in the Law or the Temple or the priesthood but in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6; Titus 2:13; John 1:17; Hebrews 8).

**The conclusion: Christian ministry is meant, by divine intention, to supersede the old Judaic ceremonial order.**

### **3. The Law is a barrier between God and the people of Israel, both in Moses' day and in Paul's.**

*Verse 12—Therefore having such a hope*—that the glory remains

- *we use great boldness in our speech*—When Moses' face radiated the glory of God, the people listened to him, as *he commanded them to do ...* (Exodus 34:32). He had the authority of God seen on his face. So Paul, because the glory of Jesus does not fade but remains, had great boldness to speak with the authority of God all the time. For example, at any moment of any day, we have the boldness of the authority of God to speak the salvation message to whoever will listen.

*Verse 13—and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away*—Moses had moments of glory. But the glory on his face faded when he went away from God's presence, as a suntan fades when you are away from the sunlight.

- It seems that it was not Moses' fault, but the sons of Israel would *look intently* at the glory on his face when it started to fade. It seems then they thought he lost his authority as leader over them when the glory faded. But Moses was their leader with the commands of God, whether his face radiated or not. So to keep the people from doing that, Moses put a veil over his face so they couldn't see the glory fading. So in keeping the veil on, Moses kept his authority over the Israelites. The purpose of the veil was to hide the fading glory. The veil actually became a barrier which hid the truth from the Jewish people.

*Verse 14—But their minds were hardened*—Jesus *opened their* [the disciples'] *minds to understand the Scriptures* (Luke 24:45). Jesus spoke in parables so the some of the Jews would not understand and repent (Matthew 13:10-15). In Romans 9:18, Paul wrote, *He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.*

**Application**—Only those elected by God will be saved. That also means that there are those who are not elected, and they will not be saved. God hardens their hearts so they will not believe. See 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, for example.

- *for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted because it is removed in Christ*—the Jews don't see that only in Christ is the veil lifted and the glory of the old covenant seen as faded away. A veil over their hearts (v. 15) keeps them from seeing the faded glory of the Law.
- When Moses spoke to God, the veil was removed. So in our relationship to Christ, the veil is removed.

*Verse 15—But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart—the false teachers in Corinth were ... those who take pride in appearance and not in heart* (2 Corinthians 5:12). Paul was interested in their heart. The false teachers had Moses as their model and the Law as their law. The very thing for which they prided themselves acted like a curtain to separate them from the truth of Jesus Christ. They never saw the Law as speaking of Christ, so they rejected Him and killed Him. Jesus said, *for if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me* (John 5:46). After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to two on the road to Emmaus and *beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures* (Luke 24:27).

**Application**—For example, today many people see their religion or good works as having value to God. But it's those very things that keep them from repentance and turning to Christ. *All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment* (Isaiah 64:6).

*Verse 16—but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*—Even Moses did not wear a veil in the presence of God (Exodus 34:34). The very act of a person turning to the Lord means that the veil that was hiding Christ from them has been taken away.

**Application**—During the Tribulation, God will begin to turn the hearts of the Jews toward himself, so in the Millennial Kingdom, *declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Jeremiah 31:34).

Today, in our age of Grace, *there is no distinction between Greek and Jew,... but Christ is all, and in all* (Romans 3:22; 10:12; Colossians 3:11). The Age of Grace is primarily a ministry to the Gentiles. The Jews, to some extent, still have a veil over their hearts. But in the future Millennial Kingdom, it will be the Jews who believe in Christ.

**Application**—Anyone who is a follower of a cult or religion has a veil over their hearts that makes it hard to believe in Christ. For example, a follower of Islam has much in their mind and heart to unbelieve in order to even consider Jesus Christ as their Savior. There is a false idea that if a person is seeking God, they will become greater followers of their own religion. The opposite is true. If a person is seeking God, they will reject their own religion. It took a supernatural appearance of Jesus to Paul to get him to turn away from Judaism and have faith in Jesus.

*Verse 17—Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* [i.e., “freedom”]. Paul seems to be making a parallel of “freedom” with “*great boldness in our speech* in verse 12. When the Jews read the Moses story, they read that Moses went in to find communion with God. But these Jews are still veiled, so that access is denied them, unlike Moses whose veil was removed in God's presence. But when we seek the

Lord by the Spirit, it is the Spirit of the Lord that grants us access to God. It's a freedom in Christ. Hebrews 10:19-22 says, *since ... we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near ...*

*Verse 18—But we all, with unveiled face*—It's kind of like we've all become a Moses in that as believers we all have unveiled faces in the presence of God.

- *beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*—i.e., *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 Corinthians 4:4-6; see also Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:18; Philippians 2:6). Looking in a mirror, we should see the glory of Christ, not the glory of ourselves.
- *are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory*—This transformation is the process, *to be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:1-2), with the goal of being *conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:29).
- *just as from the Lord, the Spirit*—The agent of process in the Lord's Spirit indwelling us.

So Paul says that believers in Christ live in a new age where “glory” is seen in the Father's Son and shared by those who believe. It is the Spirit's work to transform believers into the likeness of Christ.

⇒ That's freedom/liberty (v. 17)

⇒ That's hope (v. 12)

⇒ That's boldness of speech (v. 12)

⇒ That's knowing the glory of Christ remains, it doesn't fade. The Holy Spirit doesn't leave (v. 11)

## Chapter 4:1-18

*Verse 1—Therefore*—Rather than referring to the immediate previous context, it seems to refer to the next phrases

- *since we have this ministry*—the ministry of the New Covenant as outlined in chapter 3, especially verses 6, 8, and 18.
- *as we received mercy*—his conversion was receiving mercy
- *we do not lose heart*—i.e., not discouraged, see also verse 16. Because of Paul's salvation and his ministry of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, who are partakers of the New Covenant, he is not discouraged by other things

*Verse 2—but*—the negatives in this verse are in contrast to the positives of verse 1

- *we have renounced* [Gk. from two words: “say” “against”] *the things hidden because of shame*—i.e., “shameful acts that are hatched in secret.” Paul says a similar thing in Philippians 3:19, ... *whose glory is in their shame* ...
- *not walking in craftiness*—i.e., cunning, trickery, or pretense (to try to make something that is not true, seem true)
- *or adulterating the word of God*—Paul is charged with diluting the Old Testament (the Word of God at his time), perhaps by his use of the Old Testament, claiming “the veil” was removed by Christ (3:14-16)
- *but by the manifestation* [lit. “open declaration”] *of truth*—
- *commending ourselves to every man's conscience*—Paul's ministry is validated by the Gospel he proclaims, so he can appeal to every man's conscience.
- *in the sight of God*—Most important, Paul knows everything he says and does are in the sight of God, which is more important than in the sight of men.

*Verse 3—And even if our gospel is veiled*—Evidently Paul was accused of proclaiming a Gospel that was not easily understood

- *it is veiled to those who are perishing*—But if it is not understood, it's because those who do not believe, do not understand it. It's “veiled” to them. One thing we learned from 3:14 is that *they minds were hardened* by God so that they won't believe. One way He does this is by allowing Satan and the things of this world to blind them (v. 4).

*Verse 4—in whose case* [i.e., those who are perishing] *the god of this world* [i.e, Satan] *has blinded* [so they are unable to see] *the minds* [the reasonings] *of the unbelieving*

- *so that*—with the purpose of
- *they might not see the light* [illumination] *of the gospel*—Satan is trying to keep people from understanding the Gospel—so he changes it, he distorts it, he contradicts it, etc.
- *of the glory* [*shekinah*] *of Christ* [compared to the glory of Moses, which faded—3:13]—the Gospel is Jesus and His death on the cross.
- *who is the image of God*—we were created “in” the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Jesus “is” the image of God.

**Application**—I think it is interesting how complicated the world's systems are (controlled by Satan, the god of this world), with the end purpose to blind people so they won't see the light of the Gospel of Jesus. For example, think of the complexities of the whole theory of evolution. All those complexities are nothing in and of themselves. It's the product of evolution that Satan is interested in—that people won't believe in Jesus.

*Verse 5—For we do not preach ourselves*—something of which Paul was accused of doing (3:1; 5:12)

- *but Christ Jesus as Lord*—We are accountable to Jesus for the moral direction of our lives (see Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11; Colossians 2:6, for example). He is the Lord of your life.
- *and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake*—Jesus is the Lord and Master. Paul is a bond-servant. A servant of God on High is greater than any earthly glory or position.

*Verse 6—For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness”*—Many verses say this (Isaiah 42:6, 16; 49:6; 60:1-2), but it is not direct quote of a passage. With the sin of Adam, the world became a spiritually dark place. But Jesus came as the Light, and *the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [overcome] it* (John 1:5). It’s an interesting illustration. Darkness cannot overcome light. Darkness is simply an absence of light. Yet light can overcome darkness.

- *is the One who has shone in our hearts*—Man is spiritually in darkness with no source of light. God is the initiator and source of light, and that Light is Jesus Christ. When you believe in Jesus, He puts light in your heart so you can see Him.
- *to give the Light of the knowledge*—The purpose of the illumination is to impart knowledge.

**Application**—I recently heard a speaker praising the passion of the younger people today (he acknowledged that “righteousness was important” but passion seemed to trump it in his speech. Paul wrote, ... *they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge* (Romans 10:2). Here in verse 6, Paul says God shines *in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*. If you don’t have the right knowledge, you may have zeal and/or passion for the wrong thing!

- *of the glory of God in the face of Christ*—again, as contrasted to Moses’ face, which was veiled so people wouldn’t see the glory was fading. In Christ, there is no veiling—either of Christ’s face or of our minds. Paul’s point is that in this new age, the fulfillment of God’s glory is found, not in the Old Testament Mosaic covenant, but in Jesus Christ, who IS the image of God, His form.

**Application**—It is the temptation of every preacher to preach himself and every teacher to teach herself or himself. It’s the temptation of us all—to elevate self. But we are servants. It’s Jesus who is to be elevated. Does the hammer take credit for building a building? Does a servant leave a legacy?

**The Gospel is the Christian’s true treasure. We who believe in Christ are only containers of the Gospel, and not glorious ones at that.**

*Verse 7—But we have this treasure*—the glory of the light of Christ

- *in earthen vessels*—shining in our hearts—yet Paul seems to be bringing up his next topic of our *mortal flesh*. Some suggest the imagery here is of small simple earthen pottery lamps, cheap and fragile, that were used to hold oil for light to shine out of, similar to those cheap red flowerpots common today.

**Application**—Clay pots have nothing in which to boast. The treasure gains nothing from the pots. If anything, the pots gain from the glory of the treasure. If you put a beautiful bouquet of flowers in a simple clay pot, then all the focus is on the flowers. If you put it in a beautiful decorative pot, then the pot competes with the flowers for glory. Don’t think of yourself as a beautiful container—in competition with the true treasure. Even the apostles were clay pots.

- *so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves*—the point is that it is God who is great, He gets the glory, not us. We are the fragile

pottery jar from which the light is shining forth. Again we see his theme idea that we are weak but God is strong.

**Application**—This reminds us of Gideon’s army (Judges 7:15-25). When the pots were broken, then the light shown brightly. When we are broken through adversity and suffering, God’s power is revealed and He is glorified. It is not by exalting the clay pots that His glory is shown but by the breaking of the clay pot.

**The suffering which a Christian experiences may seem like it will break us, but it will never destroy us or defeat what God purposes to accomplish through it.**

*Verse 8—we are afflicted* [lit. “hard-pressed” or squeezed] *in every way, but not crushed* [destroyed], like a submarine that went too deep

- *perplexed* [didn’t understand the reason something was happening], *but not despairing* [complete loss of hope]—we may not understand why something is happening, but that doesn’t mean we lose hope in what we do understand about God

*Verse 9—persecuted* [usually used of Christians being attacked] *but not forsaken*—Paul was abandoned by people, yet he never felt himself abandoned by God. Like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon, God is with us even through fiery furnaces and lions’ dens

- *struck down, but not destroyed*—even if we were to be physically killed, our soul would not be destroyed.

**Application**—God uses our suffering to take us beyond our own capacities, so that we will turn to Him for strength and survival. His power sustains us, so that He will receive the praise and glory.

**The suffering we are called to endure, which will never destroy us, is the divinely appointed, irreplaceable means by which God manifests His life in our mortal bodies.**

*Verse 10—always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus*—Jesus was constantly dying to self. He emptied Himself, i.e., “turned off” His deity. He *humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:6-8).

- *so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*—But in that weakness of continually facing death, the life of Jesus was also shown in His body. Jesus said, *If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me* (Luke 9:21-26). *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you* (John 15:18-20). See also Acts 14:21-22; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 4:12-13.

**Application**—We need to die to fleshly desires. We need to deny ourselves. Instead, we spend our time giving in to our fleshly desires. Then God brings suffering into our lives. All of a sudden, those fleshly desires that were so important yesterday, hold no desire for us today. Suffering turns our eyes toward God.

*Verse 11—For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh*—this seems to be almost exactly what verse 10 said.

*Verse 12—So death works in us*—Paul’s suffering and constantly facing death—this was his authenticity—not miracles, not mysticism, not smooth talk, etc. but his suffering because of his message.

- *but life in you*—Paul’s sufferings made it possible to bring the life-saving Gospel to the Corinthians

**Breaking the clay pot should not result in our silence, but it should become the basis for our proclaiming boldly the Good News of the Gospel.**

*Verse 13—But having the same spirit of faith—that the writer of Psalm 116 had. This is a Psalm about life and death. [Verse 15 is the well-known verse, *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.*]*

- *according to what is written [in Psalm 116:10], “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE”*—What you say reflects what you believe. And if you do believe the gospel message, you have to speak. You can't keep that to yourself. If your silence is the result of your shame or fear (of death, for example), then it is evil (see Luke 9:21-26).
- *we also believe, therefore we also speak*—facing death did not keep Paul from speaking forth the Gospel. He believes the Gospel, so he must speak about it.

*Verse 14—knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus—see 1 Corinthians 15:12-19*

- *will raise us also with Jesus*—at the Rapture—1 Thessalonians 4:14
- *and will present us with you*—Paul and the Corinthian believers will be raised together with Jesus at the Rapture

**Being broken as an earthen vessel means dying to one's self so that we can serve others and glorify God.**

*Verse 15—For all things are for your sakes*—Paul already said all these things were *for Jesus' sake* in verse 11. So we see that Paul sees what is for the believers' sake is also for Jesus' sake. It's not only for when they die and are in Jesus' presence. It's also for this life, as he will say in the next words.

- *so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people*—i.e, the Gospel
- *may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God*—Paul isn't in this for his own glory. He wants many people to believe so many will give thanks so that God will receive much glory.

**Application**—False apostles are self-serving, seeking power, glory, and personal gain for themselves. Paul and faithful servants of Christ are, like Christ, sacrificing themselves for the good of others and the glory of God. The false apostles appeal to men on the basis of the flesh, focusing on satisfying fleshly lusts. But Paul calls on saints to take up their cross daily and follow Christ.

*Verse 16—Therefore*—Earlier Paul recalled God's mercy (v. 1). Now he recalls God raising Jesus from the dead (v. 14). It's for those reasons ...

- *we do not lose heart*—because of the hope of the resurrection to a new immortal body and because in our soul/spirit we are being renewed
- *but though [but even if] our outer man is decaying*—the wear and tear on our physical bodies. One man said, “subject to a thousand troubles and under the sentence of death.”
- *yet our inner man is being renewed day by day*—we already are building an eternal existence as we grow spiritually. It's a dichotomy (the contrast between two things that are opposed or entirely different).

*Verse 17—For momentary*—it's a moment compared to eternity

- *light affliction*—compared to the “eternal weight of glory,” whatever affliction you endure on earth will seem light. For example, the pain of a shot is light compared to actually getting the disease.
- *is producing for us*—it's not suffering in general (that all humans endure because of the curse), but that which produces godliness, *so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh* (v. 11).
- *an eternal weight of glory*—it's “glory,” it's a “weight of glory,” and it's “eternal,” and

- *far beyond all comparison*—lit. “far beyond measure.” Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, *Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

*Verse 18*—while [i.e., “provided”] *we look* [i.e., “regard as your aim” or “gaze”] *not at the things which are seen*—if you keep your eyes on what you can see, i.e., the suffering of our physical bodies, you will get discouraged.

- *but at the things which are not seen*—spiritual, eternal things, God Himself. As illustrated in Joshua 5—Joshua got his eyes off Jericho, which he could see, and onto Jesus Christ, bowing before Him, giving up his will to God’s will to be done.
- *for the things which are seen are temporal*—transient, they pass away, as our mortal bodies will pass away
- *but the things which are not seen are eternal*—like God is. Peter said, ... *Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him ...* (1 Peter 1:8). Jesus said, “*But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matthew 6:20-21). When you have an eternal perspective, your heart will change.

**Application**—It is the invisible things that we truly value more than physical things. For example, love, hatred, gentleness, peace, reliability, bitterness, etc. But do we value eternal things over physical things—enough to deny our fleshly desires?

## Chapter 5:1-15

*Verse 1—For we know*—whether he is referring to the previous verses in chapter 4 or other teaching, this is not new information but something that the Corinthians are already made aware of.

- *that if the earthly tent*—i.e., our human body, suggesting a temporary dwelling
- *which is our house*—who we are, our spirit and soul, is dwelling right now in a human body, which is temporary
- *is torn down*—i.e., “dismantled”—our human body ceases to exist—either by death or by translation at the Rapture. This must happen before we can get our new eternal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:12-28). This connects these verses to 4:16, where he described our physical bodies as “decaying.”
- *we have a building from God*—in contrast to a temporary tent, our eternal body is described in permanent terms—a building
- *a house*—the dwelling of our spirit and soul—who we are, i.e., our personality, our name, i.e., our identity. On the Mt. of Transfiguration, Moses (dead for 1500 years) and Elijah (dead for 800 years) were still known as “Moses” and “Elijah.”
- *not made with hands*—i.e., it is wholly made from God, no human eggs and sperm, etc. Jesus also described His resurrection body as temple ...*made without hands* (Mark 14:58).
- *eternal in the heavens*—our new bodies will be eternal, not temporary, and they are in the heavens, not the earth.

*Verse 2—For indeed in this house we groan*—while alive in our human body, we groan, because of the suffering, because our bodies are decaying.

- *longing to be clothed*—the grammar here indicates a longing to put on over what is already on, i.e. like an overcoat. Also, Paul changes his metaphor from tent/house to clothing. What Paul desires is to be translated at the Rapture, to skip dying—don’t we all long for that!?
- *with our dwelling from heaven*—our immortal, eternal body

*Verse 3—inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked*—There are two bodies—our temporary, mortal, earthly body and our eternal, immortal heavenly body. But if you die, there is a time when you have neither body because we get our eternal bodies at the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:40ff; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). Paul wants to be clothed in his eternal body. He doesn’t want to die and have that time where he does not have an eternal body (i.e., he’s naked). However, that does not mean that we are not with God. [Remember, on the Mt. of Transfiguration, Moses (dead for 1500 years) and Elijah (dead for 800 years) were still known as “Moses” and “Elijah,” even though they do not yet have their eternal resurrected bodies.] The next verses stress this very thing. To be absent from the body is to be present with God (v. 8). However, we do not get our eternal bodies until the Rapture. I think Paul’s point here is that he doesn’t want to die but wants his earthly body to be translated at the Rapture into his eternal body. However, he isn’t despairing about dying because he knows at death he will be with God.

*Verse 4—For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan*—as mentioned in verse 2.

- *being burdened*—very strong desire, beyond the groaning.
- *because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life*—This is similar to 1 Corinthians 15:54 where death is swallowed up in victory. Paul’s desire is to be at the Rapture, where his earthly body is swallowed up with the eternal body. If you die instead, you are in heaven with a spiritual body—kind of, “already (no earthly body) but not yet (no eternal body).”

We're in a state of waiting for the Rapture and the resurrection, when we receive our eternal bodies. So Paul sees that interim time as being "naked." However, it's not out of despair because we will be with God. But it is still a time of anticipation of receiving our eternal bodies. Paul longs for the ultimate result: *what is mortal will be swallowed up by life*. The hope of believers is the same—whether dead or alive—that we will be changed into an immortal eternal body.

Evidently, because the Rapture had not happened, the believers in Corinth were wondering what happens to those who have already died. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 Thessalonians 4 and now here. He wants these believers to be assured, *knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus* (4:14).

*Verse 5—Now He who prepared [created] us for this very purpose is God—that we would have our eternal bodies in eternity with God.*

- *who gave [past tense, accomplished act] to us the Spirit as a pledge [a down payment, with the assurance the rest of the payment will come]—i.e., God has prepared us for our eternal life, it is our purpose, not this life on earth. That's why Jesus said, Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven* (Matthew 6:19-20). Our purpose is for eternity, not for here on earth. Earth is just a temporary place until we can get to eternity. "This world is not my home, I'm just a'passin' through ..."

*Verse 6—Therefore, being always of good courage—i.e., "we are confident" —it seems here that Paul is making sure there is no misunderstanding of what he has been saying. While he prefers to be Raptured, so his eternal body overcomes his earthly body (like an overcoat overcomes clothing), he doesn't want anyone to be worried about what happens at death (the "naked" time he talked about—when we have neither an earthly body nor an eternal body).*

- *and knowing that while we are at home in the body—[notice that now Paul has dropped all use of metaphors]—we are alive on earth, in our physical bodies, which are fragile and temporary, yet not in despair because of the pledge of the Spirit God has given us, we live in hope for life eternal.*
- *we are absent from the Lord—we are absent from God only in our "body" sense. We are still in communion with God while in our human bodies, but we are not face-to-face with God. For example, it's like you are on a business trip. You probably phone home, you e-mail, you text, but you long for the time when you are face-to-face with your loved one.*

*Verse 7—for we walk [i.e., "live," present tense] by [i.e., by means of] faith, not by sight—Christ and the Holy Spirit are invisible, They are not absent. We have confidence that Christ is real, but not seen (1 Peter 1:8-9). Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1).

*Verse 8—we are of good courage, I say—Paul repeats this phrase from verse 6. "We are confident," whether in our human body (we have the pledge of the Holy Spirit) or out of this body (we are at home with the Lord).*

- *and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord—*
  - After making a case that Paul did not want to die and be in that "naked" state of not having a physical or eternal body, Paul now seems to contradict that and says he "prefers" to be in that "naked" state.
  - This does not mean that Paul has a death wish. He states several times that his ministry here on earth was important to him (4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; 1 Corinthians 9:23ff; 2 Timothy 4:7; Philippians 1:21-26).

- Perhaps because of several situations where he almost died (2 Corinthians 1:8-11), Paul thinks he may experience death, rather than the Rapture, after all. So if the choices are death or Rapture, then he chooses the Rapture. But if the choice is life here on earth or being with God, he chooses being with God.
- This is a very important verse. It shows that from the moment your soul/spirit leaves your earthly body, you are immediately with God. There is no soul sleep. There is no purgatory. There is no interim existence.

Verse 9—*Therefore*—a conclusion to the points he’s been making

- *we also have as our ambition*—i.e., “to aspire,” “to devote oneself zealously to a cause”
- *whether at home or absent*—whether we are *at home* in heaven with God in a spiritual body (not yet an eternal body) or in our physical bodies (*absent*)
  - Was Paul suggesting that the dead in Christ, the persons in a state of being with Christ, could possibly not please Christ, i.e., that we will still be struggling morally? No.
    - For one thing, if that were true, it would lessen the attraction of being at home with the Lord.
    - Second, the judgment of verse 10 is restricted to things done in the physical body, not things done after death.
    - Third, nowhere in Scriptures is there even a suggestion that there is any kind of moral striving once we leave our physical bodies. There is NO purgatory, where there is a “purging” of sins after death so one can go to heaven. See Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; Hebrews 9:27.
  - So it seems that Paul is saying that regardless of how the “end” comes, whether through death or through translation at the Rapture, believers are responsible for their moral conduct right up to that “end” moment.
- *to be pleasing to Him*—because of the next verse. It is Christ who will be the judge of what you do and what you think (1 Corinthians 4:4-5). It is really quite simple. We shouldn’t ask “What would Jesus do?” How could we possibly know that?!? What we need to ask is, “Would Jesus be pleased with what I am thinking right now?” “Would Jesus be pleased with what I am seeing right now?” “Would Jesus be pleased with what I am reading right now?” “Would Jesus be pleased with what I am doing right now?” Whether we are in this body or in heaven, our aim is to please Jesus.

Verse 10—*For we must all*—“we” i.e. believers during the church age, “must” it’s for sure, there’s no way of getting out of it, “all” i.e. every single one of the believers during the church age.

- *appear*—not in the simple sense of “showing up” but in the sense of being laid bare, to see the true nature of one’s character.
- *before the judgment seat of Christ*—This is our motivation for being pleasing to Christ. The Greek word for “judgment” is *bema*. Many Greek cities had a high platform in the middle of the city where judgments were made. They were called the “Bema Seat.” The life of faith does not mean you do not need to be obedient.
- *so that each one*—judgment is not en masse, but in each case, one by one. No church, no Bible study group, no any group stands in judgment. Only individuals.
- *may be recompensed*—i.e., “to receive one’s own,” “to receive back,” or “to get back for one’s self,” “in proportion to his deeds”
- *for his deeds in the body*—lit. “what he has done in the body,” which would include both deeds, words, and motives (1 Corinthians 4:4-6).
- *according to what he has done, whether good or bad*—If one’s work turns out to be gold, silver, and costly stones, you will receive your reward (1 Corinthians 3:14; Matthew 16:27). If you build your Christian life with only wood, hay, or straw, you’ll still get to

heaven but you will suffer the loss of rewards (1 Corinthians 3:15). Because Paul said to have as your goal to be pleasing to Christ, the reward for that would be building with gold, silver, and costly stones.

*Verse 11—Therefore, knowing—i.e., “therefore, since we know”*

- *the fear of the Lord*—Jesus said, *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matthew 10:28). It seems to me that Paul has that fear of God, not only for himself but for others, therefore, *we persuade men*. It's believers who have a fuller understanding of hell. It should motivate us to share the Gospel with others.

**Application**—We should fear God. Fear will make us obedient. It would be great if love would make us obedient, but it doesn't. The less you fear God, the more likely you will be to negotiate on keeping His commandments. Often 1 John 4:18 is quoted: *perfect love casts out fear*. But John defines “love” as keeping God's commandments. So if you perfectly keep God's commandments, you have nothing to fear.

- *but we are made manifest to God*—Nothing is hidden from God. He knows our actions, our thoughts, and our motives—and He will one day judge all of those.
- *and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences*—Paul hopes that the Corinthians see that Paul's motives are pure also. He came preaching only the cross, and did not claim to have any superiority based on eloquence or wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

*Verse 12—We are not again commending ourselves to you—i.e., he wasn't seeking praise for himself. But he had the dilemma of convincing the Corinthians of his faithfulness in presenting the Gospel because his ministry was being attacked.*

- *but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us*—for sure, Paul was putting himself forward as an example. But he was not doing this for glory for himself but rather that people could see He was a faithful and true worker for the Gospel, and that the Gospel would actually get the glory.
- *Proud or boast* is a (Greek) verb that is used 59 times in the New Testament, of which 55 are used by Paul, with 29 uses of the word in 2 Corinthians, especially chapters 10–13.
- *so that you will have an answer*—Paul (and therefore the Gospel) was being attacked. Paul wanted the pro-Paul people to have a defense from these attackers. Their answer was their own personal relationship with Paul and the testimony of their consciences (v. 11).
- *for those who take pride [boast] in appearance and not in heart*—Here we see the different sources of the two acts of boasting. Paul's opponents (mentioned in the “stern” letter which we do not have) boast in appearances. For example, it seems they attacked Paul because *his personal presence is unimpressive* (10:10) and that he is *unskilled in speech* (11:6). These are all things having to do with “appearance.” But Paul does not glory in outward appearance things. His qualifications have to do with his heart. In fact, in keeping with the theme of the book, outward weakness means the strength of God is at work. Ministry is not relying on clever speech, attractive appearance, etc.

*Verse 13—For if we are beside ourselves*—it is not “not in his right mind” meaning “madness.” If Paul meant that, he would have said that, as used in Acts 26:24-25. This same Greek word is translated in other places in the NT as “to be amazed” (Matthew 12:23; Mark 2:12, etc.). It's related to the Greek word for “ecstasy.” It seems that Paul may be referring to his experiences such as when he was caught up to the third heaven (12:2). Paul is not speaking of sanity and insanity. He is contrasting his ecstatic

experience as being between him and God, not something to be paraded before others (see 12:7). *it is for God.*

- *if we are of sound mind*, meaning rational and controlled thought and reasoning, *it is for you.*

*Verse 14—For the love of Christ*—Gk., not Paul’s love of Christ, but Christ’s love for us.

- *controls us*—Gk. “compels,” i.e., it’s a positive force (see Philippians 121; 3:7-11).
- *having concluded this*—based on the fact that Christ’s love compels him, this conclusion is a springboard into the rest of v. 14 and v. 15.
- *that one died for all*—aorist tense, a completed action in the past, it points back to the crucifixion as a historical event. However, the word “for” can be used as a representative or as a substitute. As a representative, Christ died for the sins of everyone. But as a substitute, Christ’s death is a substitute only for those who accept Him as their personal Savior. In the verses right before and after this, Paul is talking of believers, so it would seem that “for” is being used as a substitute.
- *therefore all died*—Of course he is not talking of physical death because the people he is writing to are still alive. As believers because of Christ’s death for us, giving us salvation, we are to die to self and live for Christ As Christ laid down His physical life for us, so we are to lay down our own lives and live for Him. Jesus said you ... *must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me* (Matthew 26:34).

*Verse 15—and He died for all*—repeated from v. 14.

- *so that*—with the purpose. There was a purpose for Christ dying in payment for our sins.
- *they who live might no longer live for themselves*—Before we were believers, our old sinful self was the center of our reference. But now we have a new life centered upon Christ.
- *but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf*—It’s impossible to have a dead Savior. Again, we see the substitutionary aspect of Christ’s death—it was on our (believer’s) behalf.

**Application**—So Paul’s defense is that the love of Christ, sent Him to the cross to die instead of us, as a payment for our sins. That love is what compels Paul, it’s the force in his life and ministry. Paul is not living for himself, for his own glory. He is living for Christ and his ministry is making Christ known to unbelievers for salvation and to believers for sanctification. He lives for Christ. So should we!

In this section, there are two reasons presented as to why we should live for Christ:

- (1) The fear of God—that God knows our actions, thoughts, and motives and one day we will be accountable to Him for everything we have done while in this life.
- (2) The love of Christ for us—which sent Him to the cross to die as payment for our sins.

Therefore, we persuade others to believe the Gospel. Therefore, we live not for our own selfishness but deny our fleshly desires and live for Christ. Have His morals, have His objectives, have His view, have His righteousness. Have this aim: *to be pleasing to Him.*

## Chapter 5:16-21

*Verse 16—Therefore from now on*—the transition from the human life organized without reference to God and His purposes to the new life we now have in Christ.

- *we recognize no one according to the flesh*—Knowing someone on earth is narrow, it's temporary, it's passing away, it's not eternal. For people who are not believers, recognizing other people, i.e., having awe of them, is important to them. For example, are we impressed by meeting the president of the USA? God says, *Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?* (Isaiah 2:22). *For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself* (John 5:26). See the contrast?!
- *even though we have known Christ according to the flesh*— i.e., when Jesus was alive and walked on the earth. Maybe there were some in Corinth who were claiming they were somehow special because they actually saw Jesus when He walked the earth. Yet Paul sees that as a limited appreciation of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, which could be a roadblock in the way of faith in Him as Lord of all creation and Savior.
- *yet now we know Him in this way no longer*—Now we know Christ as the crucified and risen Lord.

**Application**—It's the mistake of rabbinical Judaism, which emphasizes Jesus' life on the earth, when He presented Himself as the Messiah to the Jews. Paul says we know Jesus in this way no longer. He is now the crucified and resurrected Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. [See "How Jewish Do You Have to Be to Understand the Bible?: An Evaluation of the Hermeneutics of Ray Vanderlaan" by Chuck May at [www.relationalconcepts.org](http://www.relationalconcepts.org)]

*Verse 17—Therefore*—Because Jesus died and rose again

- *if anyone is in Christ*—i.e. have received Jesus as their personal Savior (John 1:12)
- *he is a new creature*—it's not that we have a new way of looking at life. We are not renovated. No, you **are** a new creation.
- *the old things passed away*—things such as sin and death, but especially the power of the flesh and its viewpoint of living life without reference to God and His purposes
- *behold, new things have come*—living life with reference to God and His purposes, denying the flesh, walking by the Spirit, understanding the Bible.

*Verse 18—Now all these things are from God*—In God's sovereignty, we know everything is from Him. But Paul is talking specifically about the *new things* that have come as a result of our relationship with Christ—they are from God.

- *who reconciled us to Himself*—God was the initiator, the one originating reconciliation, causing the reconciliation, and receiving the results (us) of the reconciliation. The aorist tense of the verb is past tense, completed action.
- While the English word "reconcile" means to make peace with or to restore relations with someone, the Greek word here means "to change." It's true that we are reconciled (at peace with) to God, but that's because we are changed. When Jesus died on the cross, every person who ever lived was changed so that they are **able to be saved**. There are many theological things that happened at the moment of Christ's death. For example, God was satisfied with Christ's payment (propitiation), Christ's death was a substitute for us, we were redeemed, etc. And mankind was changed so that they are able to be saved.
- *through Christ*—Christ was the agent of reconciliation.
- *and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*—however, we still need to be saved, i.e. to personally receive Christ's payment for our sins (John 1:12). [Chair illustration]

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

- “There is something in God as well as something in man which has to be dealt with before there can be peace. ... ‘Reconciliation’ in the New Testament sense is not something which *we accomplish* when we lay aside our enmity to God; it is something which *God accomplished* when in the death of Christ He put away everything that on His side meant estrangement, so that He might come and preach peace. ... The serious thing which makes the Gospel necessary, and the putting away of which constitutes the Gospel, is God’s condemnation of the world and its sin; it is God’s wrath *revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* (Romans 1:16-18). The putting away of this is ‘reconciliation’: the preaching of *this* reconciliation is the preaching of the Gospel. ... the Gospel is not good advice, but Good News. ... It is not the main part of his [Paul’s] vocation to tell men to make their peace with God, but to tell them that God has made peace with the world. ... If we cannot say, Here is reconciliation, receive it,—then for man’s actual state we have no Gospel at all.

When Christ’s work was done, the reconciliation of the world was accomplished. When men were called to receive it, they were called to a relation to God, not in which they would no more be against Him—though that is included—but in which they would no more have Him against them. There would be no condemnation thenceforth to those who were in Christ Jesus. ... God was putting away His own condemnation and wrath. When this was done, He could send, and did send, men to declare that it was done; and among these men, none had a profounder appreciation of what God had wrought, and what he himself had to declare as God’s glad tidings, than the Apostle Paul.”

[“Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians,” pp. 154-55]

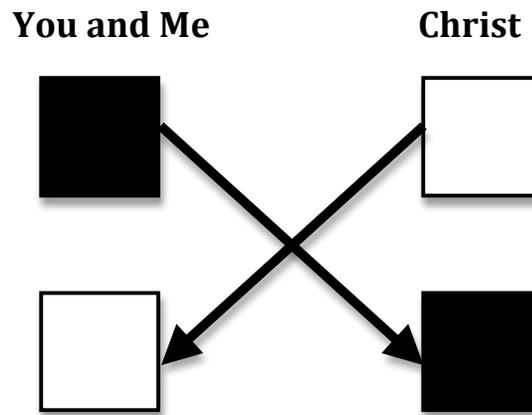
*Verse 20—Therefore—because God has committed this word of reconciliation to us*

- *we are ambassadors for Christ*—representatives, envoys, delegates, promoters
- *as though God were making an appeal through us*—making an urgent request. God has chosen, in our age, to make Himself and the Gospel known through humans (Romans 10:13-15). Not just the testimony of how we live, we must speak the Gospel.
- *we beg you*—plead, beseech
- *on behalf of Christ*—in the place of or as a spokesperson of
- *be reconciled to God*—it’s a person’s free will choice. God made the provision through the death of Christ for our sins. He is offering grace to us. This is something that was not done in the Old Testament. Sometimes God gave grace or mercy, but it was not offered to people. Today, not only is it offered, but as ambassadors for Christ, we are to beg people to receive Christ and be at peace with God.

*Verse 21—He—God the Father made this happen, it’s a supernatural thing*

- *made Him who knew no sin*—Jesus Christ, the God-man, with no sin at all
- *to be sin on our behalf*—the innocent One took all our sin on Himself and paid the consequences of that sin with His blood on the cross
- *so that*—for the purpose

- *we might become the righteousness of God in Him*—that we might become that clean righteousness of God Himself, through Christ's death.



## Chapter 6:1-13

In this section, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to reconcile with him.

*Verse 1—And working together with Him* —i.e., “co-workers” with God or Christ (see 1 Corinthians 3:9).

- *we also urge you*—exhort, to strongly encourage
- *not to receive the grace of God in vain* [empty, useless, without result]—i.e. by failing to act upon what Paul has told them, and thus opposing his ministry. They did receive the grace of God, i.e., they were saved. But were they living for Christ? Jesus had died for them, but they had not yet died to themselves, as evidenced by the fact that they did not stand by Paul when he was attacked.

*Verse 2—for He says*—God was speaking in Isaiah 49:8

- **“AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU**—I think Paul quotes this verse from Isaiah to emphasize that God has a timetable, and this is according to that timetable. That is, salvation is initiated by God.
- **AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.”**
- *Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION”*—What was anticipated at the time of Isaiah, was a reality for the Corinthians. Isaiah’s quote was a prophecy of the Millennial Kingdom. However, when Paul quotes it, and it is part of the New Testament, we see a dual meaning to the prophecy. As Jesus is the Messiah Who brought salvation, in this sense, the salvation of the Millennial Kingdom has already come.
- *Behold, now ... behold, now ...*—Of course, it means salvation itself. Unbelievers should not think they have a lot of time to decide. You never know when your life will end. Now is the time to accept Christ. But there is also the sense that salvation has been offered and accepted, and **“now” is the time for dying to self**. Once you are saved, there are requirements or demands. Else, you have received the grace of God in vain. “Now” is the time to deny yourself and in obedience follow Christ. For example, I hired a man to put new shingles on my roof. I paid him a lot of money to do that. If he came and just sat in the yard all day, I’d say, “It was in vain that I hired him to do my roof.” Christ saved you and He expects a certain behavior from you. If you don’t have that behavior, then you were saved in vain. Salvation isn’t about you—it’s about God and His glory!
- This seems to continue from verse 1 with verse 2 as a sort of parenthesis.
- There is a series of participles (a word formed from a verb, used as an adjective): “working” in verse 1, “giving” in verse 3, “commending” in verse 4, etc. through verse 10.

*Verse 3—giving no cause for offense in anything*—Paul would not do anything to lead the Corinthians astray, which would then bring dishonor to God. Of course, the message of the Gospel itself is offensive to those who reject it (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11). But Paul is here talking about his own actions, that they would not discredit God or the ministry he has as God’s ambassador.

- *so that [purpose] the ministry will not be discredited*—An immoral or improper life quickly causes God to be mocked and blasphemed, and often leads a person to reject the Gospel.

**Application**—The fact that Paul suffered persecution and was not a skilled speaker, etc. led certain people associated with the true believers in Corinth to criticize Paul’s ministry and his authority as an apostle. These were people who looked at outward appearances for their authentication. In 11:13 Paul calls them *false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*. The believers in Corinth had to

decide who they were going to believe—these false apostles or Paul. Paul talked about his sufferings (starting in verse 4) as showing he was a true messenger from God. The false teachers pointed to those same sufferings and interpreted them as saying Paul was not from God. Today, we also have to decide who is teaching the true message of God and who is a deceiver. As we are approaching the End Times, there will be more and more false teachers, those who *disguise themselves as servants of righteousness* (2 Corinthians 11:15).

Verse 4—*but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God*—lit. “we commend ourselves **as** ministers do.” That is, Paul already considered himself a minister (servant) of God. He’s not out to prove he is a servant. Rather, because he is a servant, he can tell what he does as an example of the power of God (12:9). Paul does not want to promote his own person, but as a servant of God, he uses himself as an example.

- *in much endurance*—with much endurance (to patiently suffer something painful or difficult) describes how Paul met each of the sufferings listed next.

### **Paul’s Outward Trials**

- *in afflictions*—moments of trial. This word is used in 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:8, 17; 7:4; 8:2, 13, though not prominent in Paul’s other letters. Rather than a specific instance, this describes a way of life. Jesus said that for believers, affliction was part of our life being in the world (John 16:33). But Paul wrote that no afflictions can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35).
- *in hardships*—“anguishes,” “times of stress.” These are a necessity, but they are not synonymous with “blind chance” or fatalism. It’s a part of the privilege of serving God and His Gospel. For example, an athlete training for the Olympics has a lot of hardships—aches and pains and endurance as they train, but that is part of being an Olympian athlete.
- *in distresses*— lit. “straits,” i.e. a narrow place from which no escape is possible. There’s no way to avoid them, but there is a way of exit—at the end. These require much patient endurance to remain faithful through it all.

Verse 5—*in beatings*—*beaten times without number ...five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, ...* (11:23-25).

- *in imprisonments*—see Acts 16:23-40, for example.
- *in tumults*—“disorders” or “calamities,” see Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22; 17:5; 18:12; 19:23-41; 21:27-36.
- *in labors*—“fatigues.” Now Paul turns to his own voluntary suffering. Probably not labor in the sense of exerted effort but the weariness which follows the straining of all his power to the utmost (see Philippians 2:16).
- *in sleeplessness*—probably periods of time he went without sleep in order to minister, for example, Acts 20:11, where Paul talked all night until daybreak.
- *in hunger*—may be due to extensive travel, or his desire to not be a burden to anyone (see 2 Corinthians 11:9).

### **Paul’s Inward Personal Reactions**

Verse 6—*in purity*—complete integrity of life as well as moral purity, probably also purity of his intentions

- *in knowledge*—Paul uses his knowledge of God and the Gospel in the correct way—he uses it according to God’s will, not only to share the Gospel but to live it before his readers
- *in patience*—enduring without anger (James 1:19) or revenge (Romans 12:19), for example

- *in kindness*—Paul wrote that love is patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13:4). Paul genuinely loved the believers in Corinth, compared to the false apostles who were promoting their own interests (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 20; 12:14-17).
- *in the Holy Spirit*—at first, the mention of the Holy Spirit does not seem to fit this list of human sufferings and qualities. But perhaps in thinking of these things, Paul is reminded that he endures only because of the Holy Spirit living in him. All these things are possible “in the Holy Spirit.”
- *in genuine love*—sincere, not false. His love was not hypocritical.

### **Paul’s Preaching Ministry**

*Verse 7—in the word of truth*—i.e., the Gospel (see Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5)

- *in the power of God*—Paul’s convincing manner was not due to his own eloquence but to God’s power. You can be the most eloquent, but nothing happen, or you can say the simplest things. It’s God’s power when anything happens. In 12:12 Paul says, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*
- *by [through] the weapons of righteousness*—Paul lists the *breastplate of righteousness* as part of our armor for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:14). Positionally, we have the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), but righteousness lived out in your life every day is a huge spiritual protection. For example, if you’ve lied about something, you now have issues to deal with, and you’re weakened spiritually.
- *for the right hand and the left*—one idea is that the left held the shield for defense and the right hand held the sword for offense, or it could just refer to completeness. Righteousness makes you completely equipped for spiritual battle.

**Response to Paul’s Ministry**—series of terms that are opposites of each other

*Verse 8*—by [through] glory [good opinion] and dishonor [no regard for him]—these opinions can come from within Christianity and outside of it in the world.

- *by [through] evil report and good report*—In real time, this phrase would seem to occur before the previous phrase. A *good report* would lead to *glory*, and an *evil report* would lead to *dishonor*. A good report is dangerous because it can lead to pride and complacency.
- *regarded as deceivers and yet true*—Notice that he is not a deceiver, but some people *regard* him as a deceiver. Yet Paul claims to tell the truth, even though they regard him as deceiving. Paul himself calls the *false apostles ... deceitful workers* (11:13).

**Application**—So again, we need to ascertain who is teaching the truth and who is deceiving us. We need a **standard of measure—it is the Word of God**. We must test everything against the Scriptures. You may even be accused of being the deceiver. For example, if you do not tolerate sin (premarital sex, homosexuality, etc.) and take a stand for righteousness, then you will be accused of being against God. Today God is defined as “loving,” “forgiving,” “tolerant of sin.” Today, there is no sin and therefore no consequences of sin—therefore, no Savior!!!!

*Verse 9—as unknown yet well-known*—perhaps because he was not one of the 12 apostles, he was *unknown*, yet the believers in Corinth knew his message and the signs and miracles he did, which authenticated him as a true apostle.

- *as dying yet behold, we live*—This could refer to the many times he faced physical death, *yet behold* he’s still alive. Theologically, it could be referring to his dying to self (his sin nature), yet alive in Christ. His ministry called him to die both physically and spiritually, yet the power of God enabled him to live in triumph of what the future holds.
- *as punished* [“chastened,” a word used for Divine discipline] *yet not put to death*—perhaps referring to Psalm 118:17, 18. Paul’s opponents may have pointed to his

previous life as a Pharisee persecuting Christians and say his current suffering is God's punishment for his past life. But if this is referring to Psalm 118, then Paul is saying that God has chastised him, as a Father does his child, but not to kill him. Whereas, for example, the sin of the unrepentant in 1 Corinthians 5 was unto death. An example of chastisement we know of in Paul's life is when he was given great revelations from God, God gave him a *thorn in the flesh ... to keep me from exalting myself!* (2 Corinthians 12:7). The nature of discipline is not to punish past actions but to put one on the right path.

*Verse 10—as sorrowful* [“grief”—Paul uses this word 23 times, 18 of which are in 2 Corinthians] *yet always rejoicing*—There were many things in Paul's life that caused him grief: the lost state of his people, the Jews (Romans 9:2), other groups of believers (2 Corinthians 11:28), the Corinthians themselves: they were divided (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-9), immature (3:1-3), morally lax (5:1-8), selfish (11:17-34), reluctant to remain loyal to Paul (2 Corinthians 10–13). All this resulted in Paul saying, *out of ... anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears* (2:4). HOWEVER, Paul exhibited a “perennial spring of joy” [Tasker]. He was not overcome with bitterness. He wrote many times about rejoicing. For example, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4). He could rejoice because his perspective of his sorrow, and the reasons for his sorrow, were opportunities for God to work and get the glory.

- *as poor yet making many rich*—Paul was poor, yet he is spiritually rich in Christ.
- *as having nothing yet possessing all things* [“having all things to the full”]—In the world's eyes, Paul was homeless, penniless, hated, ridiculed, despised—he looked poor. Yet Paul rose above his “poverty” with confidence, hope, and certainty. It should be obvious to the Corinthians that Paul enjoys the kind of riches that only Christ could give.

*Verse 11—Our mouth has spoken freely to you*—lit. “I have let my tongue run away with me.” Because of his close relationship to the Corinthians, he feels he can speak freely to them.

- *Corinthians*—only here and in Galatians 3:1 and Philippians 4:15 does Paul address his readers by name. It shows his closeness to them.
- *our heart is opened wide*—“since you have enlarged my heart.” In spite of what troubles the people in Corinth have caused Paul, he still has them in his heart with great affection.

*Verse 12—You are not restrained by us*—lit. “We do not withhold affection from you”—in spite of the ill feelings of the Corinthians toward him

- *but you are restrained in your own affections*—lit. “we [Paul, Timothy] are restricted in your bowels” (“affections” is nice word for it in English). The organs are seen as the center of love and emotions. We might say, “I feel it in my gut ...” Because of the gossip about Paul that the Corinthians believed, Paul was squeezed out of their affections.

**Application**—A heart full of love and affection expands. A heart filled with selfishness and suspicion has a tendency to shrink.

- *Verse 13—Now in a like exchange*—“in return”—rather than a rebuke for the lack of love from the Corinthians, he asks for a return of his love, kind of a *quid pro quo*. Paul wants a fair exchange. The word is the idea of “sameness.” Paul is appealing to the Corinthians, asking that they return the affection for the affection he has given to them.
- *—I speak as to children*—the word “my” is not in the original. But in this context, where Paul is describing his love for the Corinthians, it seems like he is referring to

them as a father would his children. Paul has done this often times (1 Corinthians 4:14, 17; Galatians 4:19; 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1). He is not speaking in a sort of school-room language, as though they were small children.

- *open wide to us also*—you do the same to us, i.e., give them affectionate love.

Paul continues this thought in 7:2, but 6:14–7:1 seem to interrupt that thought.

## Chapter 6:14–7:1

### Breaking Spiritual Ties with the World

*Verse 14—Do not be [command] bound together [lit. “mismatched”] with unbelievers—*Mismatched comes from the verse that says to not breed together two different kinds of animals (Leviticus 19:19). Paul certainly does not mean that believers are to have nothing to do with unbelievers. He wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 5:10. To do that, *then you would have to go out of the world.* Rather, he means any action which would cause believers to link up (mate) with the world in thought or act must be avoided. Marriage would be an example of this mismatching (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). “Christian harmony cannot be expected to develop and Christian consistency cannot fail to be compromised when there is mismatching” [Word, 203]. So Paul is talking about close relationships, partnerships. If you have a business partner who is an unbeliever, you will one day have to compromise your Christian beliefs and morals to accommodate that partner. You must consider that as an employee—is this company one who will demand that I abandon my Christian values? Often, just in buying something in a store, you may be challenged to abandon your Christian values. For example, recently, in a computer store, the owner tried to get me to install one software on two computers instead of buying two softwares. His motives were good—he was trying to save me money. And it was tempting. But it would have compromised my Christian values.

**Application**—If you are bound together with an unbeliever, get out of that arrangement as quickly as you can. The exception is marriage. Paul specifically addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7:13-16. He says if the unbelieving spouse agrees to stay married, then stay married because it’s the best opportunity for the spouse to become a believer.

- *For*—the logical conclusion of the previous clause  
Paul now gives 5 rhetorical questions based on the previous clause. The answer to all these questions is “none.” It’s supposed to be obvious, that’s what “rhetorical” means. Paul gives a clear demand for a distinction between believer and unbeliever.
- (1) *what partnership [teammate, collaborator] have righteousness [right human living—keeping the law] and lawlessness [not keeping the law]*—see Romans 6:13-19
- (2) *or what fellowship [koinonia—people with shared interests or aims] has light with darkness?* A very clear metaphor. They are polar opposites. The aim of light is to see clearly. The aim of darkness is to not see at all. Believers are those who have been called out of darkness into the light (1 Peter 2:9; see also Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Ephesians 5:11-14). Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:4-9; 12:36; Luke 16:8). The unbeliever is destined for outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; 11:14). They do not have shared interests or aims!

*Verse 15—(3) Or what harmony [agreement, peace, oneness] has Christ with Belial [the personalized force opposed to God]*—Basically, he’s saying, can Christ and Satan be in agreement?

- (4) *or what has a believer [one who places faith in Jesus Christ] in common with [shared quality or standard] an unbeliever [someone who does not have faith in Jesus Christ]?*

*Verse 16—(5) Or what agreement [the opposite of contradict] has the temple [dwelling place] of God [from the next phrase, we see Paul is referring to the believer, whose body is the temple of God. See also 1 Corinthians 6:19.] with idols?*—The presence of

anything to do with idols causes the temple of God to be defiled and made unworthy of God.

- *For* [the reason why the Christian has no agreement with idols] *we* [who have faith in Jesus Christ] *are the temple* [dwelling place] *of the living God*—Jeremiah made this contrast between idols and the living God so beautifully in Jeremiah 10:1-10. Remember, this is a new idea to the believers in Corinth. They are used to gods being in physical temples, made with human hands (especially in the Greek world). This idea that their bodies are the temple of the living God is something they are still learning. [Actually, many Christians still have this idea that God lives in buildings—such as the song, “We are standing on holy ground.” You’ll hear someone say, “The Lord’s house ...” There is no such thing as a building which is the “Lord’s house”!! **WE** are the Lord’s house. Everywhere we go is holy ground, because God is there, dwelling in us.]

**Application**—Paul is connecting being bound with an unbeliever to being bound with idols. Remember what we learned in Ezekiel 8. The Jews still worshipped God in the Temple, but they also brought idols into the Temple. James called a believer who does that a *double-minded man, unstable in all his ways* (1:8). This is the danger. Not that you will abandon Christianity, but that you will **blend** the two things together. For example, practicing yoga, karate, and acupuncture, which are part of eastern religions. Reading a horoscope. Having a crystal or dream catcher dangling from your car mirror. You are bringing something unholy into the temple (your body) of God. You are profaning it. Illustration: labyrinth in Knoxville church.

- *just as God said*—probably a quote from Leviticus 26:11-12
- **“I WILL DWELL IN THEM**—God dwelled in the Old Testament Jews in that He dwelled in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, at the center of the people. But today, God is dwelling **in us**. This is a prophecy that is fulfilled in us.
- **AND WALK AMONG THEM**—God’s presence is here among us. He hears what we say, He sees what we look at, He knows where we are and what we’re doing.
- **AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD**—This is a promise from God.
- **AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE**— This presence of God comes with conditions—we are to be holy and not bound/partnership with evil. If God is your God, then He wants to be God! He does not want evil in His presence.

*Verse 17*—“*Therefore*—since believers and unbelievers have distinctive ways of life, and since believers are the temple of God, and since God promised to live among us, His people, God commands—

- **COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,**” *says the Lord*—this is a command. Do it now! It means “to go out,” “to come away from,” “to escape.” This is from Isaiah 52:11. —“If the people of God cease to be separate in moral holiness from the rest of mankind, they cease to be the people of God” [*Word*, 205]. A good example is Joseph. When tempted by Potiphar’s wife, He said, “*How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?*” and when she persisted, he *fled, and went outside* (Genesis 39:7-12). He refused and fled. Yes, later he was falsely accused and went to jail. But he obeyed God, and God never left him. Sometimes you will pay a price for obeying God, but His reward in heaven is great (see 1 Peter 2:19-20).

**Application**—For example, when the Israelites were in Egypt, they were covered in long hair and beards and smelled of sheep. The Egyptians shaved their bodies. So to the Egyptians, the Israelites were as “vomit” (Genesis 43:32; 46:34). The Israelites worked for the Egyptians, but they were not “bound” to them. [This was not true while the Israelites lived in Canaan. They were starting to be bound to the Canaanites, so God removed them to Egypt, where the Egyptians did not want to be bound to them. That

way, God was able to multiply the people, as Jews, without outside contamination.] Increasingly, as we are in the end times, Christians are becoming like “vomit” to the people in the world. The people of the world lie and steal, and when we won’t do that, they are insulted and angry with us. If you choose to live a holy life, pleasing to God, you will increasingly be morally separate from the world—and suffer for it. But God has called us for that very purpose.

- “*AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN*—It seems to me he is going beyond being in the midst of what is evil and here saying to not even touch anything that has anything to do with evil (for the Corinthians, it probably had to do with the food, etc. from the idol worship—see 1 Corinthians 10).
- *And I will welcome you*—approve of, “give the thumbs up,” i.e., *to be pleasing to Him* (2 Corinthians 6:9)

*Verse 18*—“*And I will be a father to you*—probably from 2 Samuel 7:14—

- *And you shall be sons and daughters to Me*—Paul inserted “daughters” into the original quote, possibly because spiritually, Paul saw men and women as equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28). [NT writers can use OT passages to mean something other than was used in the OT. When that happens, the NT is the inspired Word of God just as the OT is.]
- *Says the Lord Almighty*—This phrase is used many times in the OT, but it is used in the NT only here and 9 times in Revelation. This is similar to the way the OT prophets would end their prophecies. Paul seems to be stressing the fact that what he is saying is from God, not himself.

*7:1—Therefore*—“since then”

- *having these promises*—in verses 6:16b, 17b, and 18. There are many other promises, but Paul is referring to these particular promises he has just quoted (*I will welcome you ... I will be a father to you*).
- *Beloved*—a term of dearest affection that Paul has for the Corinthian believers
- *let us* [Paul is identifying himself with the Corinthian believers] *cleanse ourselves*—not to strive for holiness but to demonstrate that holiness is the result of salvation. A simple example: when a doctor washes his or her hands before going into the surgery, the washing doesn’t make him or her a doctor, it shows that he or she is the doctor. So cleansing doesn’t make us holy, it shows that we are holy, that’s why we want to be cleansed.
- *from all defilement* [poison, ruin, soil, contaminate] *of flesh and spirit*—Usually, Paul refers to “flesh” as our sin nature, which can do no good, and the “spirit” as our new nature which can do no sin. However, here he seems to be using the terms more loosely, i.e., indicating the totality of the human. We are to cleanse ourselves from everything that will ruin or contaminate our bodies or our spirits. For example, sex outside of marriage poisons both the body and the spirit—the totality of a person (see 1 Corinthians 6:12-19). This is the “negative” aspect.
- *perfecting holiness*—i.e., bring about sanctification, an advancement in holiness. This is the “positive” aspect.
- *in the fear of God*—It is the fear of God, whom Jesus said *is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matthew 10:28). It is *by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil* (Proverbs 16:6). As Walt Henrichsen has often said, If you don’t fear God, you will eventually compromise in obeying His commandments.