

Chapter 7:2-16

Paul is now resuming his appeal of 6:11, 13, *our heart is opened wide ... open wide to us also*. He is arguing that the Corinthians, not he, are responsible for their poor relationship at this point.

Verse 2—Make room for us in your hearts—“in your hearts” is not in the text, but the context (6:11) makes it obvious.

- *we wronged no one*—these three Gk. phrases are past tense, preceded by a negative substantive—In Paul’s mind, he is totally innocent. There is not a single instance in which he wronged [or harmed] anyone. By placing “no one” at the end of each phrase, he is emphasizing that there is no reason for them to be alienated from him.
- *we corrupted no one*—“ruined” either financially or morally. For example, he may have been accused of urging people to abandon practices that were lucrative but unchristian. Or he may have been charged with “taking” people’s money in order to help the believers in other countries. Perhaps even charged with keeping the money himself. Some believers could have used their new freedom in Christ as a license to sin (Romans 3:8; 6:1; Galatians 5:13), Paul being then accused of influencing them. Also, the Jews could have charged Paul with not keeping the “Law.” People could have (and usually do) put wrong assumptions or interpretations on some of the actions he did. But from Paul’s standpoint, he did not “ruin” anyone.
- *we took advantage of no one*—or “exploiting.” For example, as we saw in chapter 2, the believers had overreacted to Paul’s injury and had disciplined a man with extreme harshness. Paul told them they went too far, and caused the person excessive sorrow and to affirm their love for him (2:7-8). His enemies probably were making the most from that.

Verse 3—I do not speak to condemn you—Titus had brought word back to Paul of the Corinthian believers’ concern for him (7:7-16). Paul has been hurt by the Corinthians, but he does not consider *them* his enemies. He is not accusing them. He is seeking to clear himself.

- *for I have said before [6:11] that you are in our hearts*—Paul’s deep affection for the Corinthian believers
- *to die together and to live together*—Paul may be thinking of the concept of death and the resurrection, as he has mentioned it earlier in the book. But more likely, he is referring to his own physical death and his life—his commitment to them, even to death.

Verse 4—Great is my confidence in you—hearing the report from Titus, Paul had confidence that the Corinthian believers were doing the right thing, i.e., repenting and following God (in the next verses)

- *great is my boasting on your behalf*—and he told others they would do the right thing.
- *I am filled with comfort*—hearing good news, especially of someone’s repentance, brings comfort
- *I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction*—Paul evidently was still suffering from something, maybe situations in other places, etc. Yet he was still overflowing with joy in the midst of suffering.

Verse 5—For even when we came into Macedonia—This seems to connect to 2:13, *I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia* (northern Greece).

- *our flesh had no rest*—it seems that “flesh” in this context means his physical body. He was tired. He had no rest physically. Until he found out, when Titus returned,

how the Corinthian believers had received his “painful” letter, he probably couldn’t sleep, for example.

- *but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without*—refers to battling or quarreling—whether with believers or unbelievers there in Macedonia
- *fears within*—wondering how the Corinthian believers responded to his “painful” letter. Perhaps even fear over why Titus hadn’t shown up yet.

Verse 6—But God, who comforts the depressed [“downcast”]—a reminder of 1:3, 4 that it is God who comforts. He uses people to do so. However, that same person could come and not be a comfort. If we are comforted, it’s because God has comforted us.

- *comforted us by the coming of Titus*—Now the Corinthian believers are being informed that Titus has returned safely to Paul with their news.

Verse 7—and not only by his coming—his actual presence, safely from his trip

- *but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you*—The response of the believers to Paul’s “painful” letter to them, was a comfort to Titus. That they repented and turned to God, and Paul’s apostolic ministry to them, was good news. So Titus was in a good situation there. It’s always stressful when you have to deal with sin and bad news. But it is a comfort and joy when the news is good. And that joy was then shared with Paul. I can imagine him running up to Paul with the good news—rather than dragging his feet if the news was bad.
- *as he reported to us your longing* [for Paul]—they desired to see him again
- *your mourning*—possibly for the grief they had caused Paul, that he didn’t want to come and had sent Titus instead, or referring to the “painful” letter which Paul had to write to them
- *your zeal for me*—an enthusiasm for Paul, in his apostolic office—rejecting the false apostles
- *so that I rejoiced even more*—That Titus returned to Paul was cause for joy, but that Titus brought a good report was a cause for even more joy.

Verse 8—For though I caused you sorrow [pain] *by my letter*—Often called the “painful letter.” Paul does not attempt to skirt the issue that his rebuke caused them pain.

- *I do not regret it*—meaning he’s not changing his mind that he caused them pain. Rather, he considers their pain as an important part of their repentance (v. 9).
- *though I did regret it*—perhaps the thought that they would not repent
- *for I see that that letter caused you sorrow*—No one wants to cause sorrow in and of itself. But sometimes sorrow or pain are necessary to produce a better result. For example, you give a child pain in having a vaccination shot, but it is for the better result of not having the disease. Here, Paul caused the Corinthians pain for the better result of their repentance.
- *though only for a while*— lit. “for an hour,” reminding us of 4:17, momentary light affliction compared to eternal weight of glory.

Verse 9—I now rejoice—He did regret it for a while (v. 8), but now rejoices

- *not that you were made sorrowful*—Paul is not happy that they had to go through pain in and of itself
- *but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance*—Paul rejoices that the pain had the right consequence—it led to their repentance, i.e., a change of mind
- *for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God*—Godly grief, or sorrow, is a grief that leads individuals to view their conduct as God does. It leads to repentance.
- *so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us*—One loss is that Paul would not have returned to see them. More likely, though, he is referring to wood, hay, and

stubble, i.e., worthless, works that are burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and are not rewarded.

Verse 10—For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation—i.e., it leads to life. They reacted by turning back to Paul’s message and away from the false prophet. Repentance is changing your mind and changing the direction you are heading.

- *but the sorrow of the world*—This sorrow includes pain and regret, but not repentance (change mind). Worldly sorrow is usually the result of the unwelcome consequences of sin. This person may even try to avoid similar future actions and their consequences. But that person feels to deep remorse over actions taken against God. Repentance involves the whole person—knowing, feeling, and willing. It is more than an emotional reaction. “Recognition of sin by itself is not repentance; it may be defiance. Nor is sorrow for sin repentance, if it be alone in the mind; it may be remorse or despair. Abandonment of sin, by itself, may be no more than prudence” (*Word Commentary, 2 Corinthians*, p. 233).
- *produces death*—Important is the effect of the sorrow. Death is alienation from God vs. sorrow that leads to repentance, a turning toward God.

Application—For example, compare the sorrow of Esau (Genesis 27:38; Hebrews 12:16, 17) and the sorrow of David (Psalm 51:1-19). Or contrast the sorrow of Judas and Peter (see Matthew 21:30, 32; Luke 22:31-34). “If death is to be defined at all, it must be by contrast with salvation ...” (Denney).

Verse 11—For behold—“see,” draw attention to something

- *what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you*—eagerness to restore the former relationship with Paul
- *what vindication of yourselves*—“apology” but with stronger meaning, they wanted to give an account of their actions, even if they had to admit guilt
- *what indignation*—perhaps at themselves, perhaps at the offender, perhaps at the false prophets
- *what fear*—probably fear of God because of how they treated His Apostle, Paul
- *what longing*—to be restored to good relationship with Paul
- *what zeal*—probably against the offender in 2:6-8
- *what avenging [punishment] of wrong!*—again, probably referring to 2:5-6
- *In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter*—i.e., Paul is declaring them not guilty because they are disassociated from the offender.

Verse 12—So although I wrote to you—referring to the missing “painful” letter (2:9)

- *it was not for the sake of the offender*—not the man of 1 Corinthians 5 or 6. But there was a specific man (2:5, 6, 7, 8, 10), which seems to be different than the “intruders” of chapters 10–13.
- *nor for the sake of the one offended*—Paul
- *but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you*—Writing the “painful” letter to them was for the purpose of having the Corinthians see their indebtedness to and loyalty toward the apostle. Perhaps they had not realized how much the situation had deteriorated. So his letter to them was to sort of “shock” them into the reality of the situation.
- *in the sight of God*—Both Paul’s reconciliation (2:10) was in the sight of God, and so was the Corinthians’ reconciliation.

Verse 13—For this reason we have been comforted—Paul’s theme of “encouragement” in 7:6 and his opening comments in 1:3-7.

¶ [Beginning a new paragraph, but continuing info about Titus in 7:6] *And besides* [“in addition to” or “over and above”] *our comfort* [encouragement]

- *we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus*—Paul is eager to show how Titus’ joy increased his own joy. He uses a word meaning “beyond measure” and adds “even much more.” Titus’ being joyful meant that he had received a good report from the Corinthian church. The earlier treatment of Timothy (see 1 Corinthians 16:10-11) at the hands of the Corinthians probably caused Titus to doubt he would have a good reception by them, making him harder to convince. So his joy meant much more.
- *because his spirit has been refreshed by you all*—at their good reception of Titus and at their commitment to Paul and the Gospel.

Verse 14—For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame [you did not embarrass me]—

- *but as we spoke all things to you in truth*—as Paul asserted in 1:12-14
- *so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth*—Titus was convinced of what Paul said concerning the Corinthians because of how they received him.

Verse 15—His affection abounds all the more toward you—so much so, that Titus initiated another visit to the Corinthians (8:17).

- *as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling*—anxiety over the duty required of a person—perhaps even before Titus’ visit, guilt was beginning to work on their consciences.

Verse 16— I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you—this completes the thought begun in 7:4. Paul is satisfied that the Corinthians have understood the message and the mission as he does. This lays the groundwork for the next chapters about the collection for the believers in Judea. Chapters 8–9 are an opportunity for the Corinthians to demonstrate that confidence in a practical way.

Application—There are three great joys in this passage: (1) the joy of reconciliation, (2) the joy of seeing one’s faith and confidence in someone else justified, and (3) the joy of seeing someone who is loved, accepted and treated well. These are some of the most joyful verses written by Paul.

The power of God is seen at its best when a relationship between two parties is restored. First, between an individual and God and second, between two human beings. For Paul, the restored relationship was a new beginning. Although an individual had opposed him, he can now count on the loyalty of the Corinthians.

Chapter 8:1-24

While it is true that I am a missionary and am supported through a ministry, I get paid a salary and am responsible to give just as every other believer is. So I have tried to present these two chapters as a giver, not as a receiver.

Verse 1—Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you—the Macedonians are held up as an example or model of giving

- *the grace of God*—grace is giving us something we don't deserve. This looks ahead to verse 9, where Christ's self-offering is seen as the act of supreme "grace."
- *which has been given in the churches of Macedonia*—A Roman province in northern Greece, from Apollonia in the west to Philippi in the east. Paul describes this giving in Philippians 4:15-18.

(1) *The Macedonians are shown to be an example of giving to encourage the Corinthians to do likewise. When we see others give, it encourages us to give.*

Verse 2—that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality[generosity]—There is this paradox—deep poverty (rock-bottom) in contrast to overflowing wealth, a generous spirit, whose giving is not measured by the amount given but by the sacrifice of the gift.

Verse 3—For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability—their giving was not out of their excess, but “to the limit” and beyond it, i.e., out of their limited resources.

(2) *Being able to give, even in deep poverty—even beyond their own ability—is a result of the grace (favor) of God.*

- *they gave of their own accord*—Paul didn't have to request their giving. It was their idea to give.

Verse 4—begging us—“please,” rather than Paul begging them to give

- *with much urging*—Paul's word for “comfort” or “encouragement”
- *for the favor*—“grace”
- *of participation* [lit. *koinonia*, i.e., “fellowship”]
- *in the support of the saints*—“ministry,” “service”—Paul wrote in Romans 15:25-27, *I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia [Corinthians] have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ... For if the Gentile have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.* The Jerusalem saints sent out the missionaries, who brought the Gospel to the Corinthians.

(3) *Giving to support/help other believers is a privilege, a grace, a fellowship with other believers.*

(4) *The givers begged for the favor of that participation. It was not those in need who were begging (in this case, the Jerusalem believers). If you are helped spiritually by someone, you have a debt to them, to help them in some way. Although in this case it was the giving of money, there are other ways to give also—time, hosting a Bible study, helping to do a project, encouragement, giving a good word to someone in support of someone else.*

Verse 5—and this, not as we had expected—Paul must have expected some sort of contribution, but that hope was far surpassed by their attitude in giving.

- *but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God*—thus showing their support of Paul’s apostolic mission

(5) Giving is the result of sanctification, a result of giving yourself and your desires to God. Therefore, it’s a realization of laying up treasure in heaven is more important than laying up treasures here on earth.

Verse 6—*So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well*—Paul wants Titus to collect money from the Corinthians also.

Verse 7—*But just as you abound in everything—*

- *in faith*—not saving faith, but faith in living the Christian life
- *and utterance*—words, speech, perhaps referring to speaking in tongues, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14
- *and knowledge*—understanding of the Gospel and Paul’s teaching (such as in 1 Corinthians)
- and *in all earnestness*—diligence and effort
- and *in the love we inspired in you*—perhaps referring to Paul’s encouragement for them to reaffirm their love for the erring brother (2 Corinthians 2:8).
- *see that you abound in this gracious work also*—Paul is calling them to the action of giving. Giving is an expression of being a believer. Just as you pursue faith, love, knowledge, you should also pursue being a giver.

(6) As a believer, you should be growing in faith, in knowledge, in love, etc. But you should also be growing in giving. Give some thought, prayer, and Bible study to this subject.

Verse 8—*I am not speaking this as a command*—although Paul could have commanded them, yet he appealed to them instead

- *but as proving through the earnestness of others*—i.e., the example of the Macedonians
- *the sincerity of your love also*—the truth of their love, i.e., love is not abstract, it is to be shown in your actions, especially of giving to others in need

(6) What you give is what you decide to do. To not give is not optional. But what you give is optional.

Verse 9—*For you know*—this is not new information. This is something you already know.

- *the grace* [undeserved gift] *of our Lord Jesus Christ*—Christ’s full title, to give weight to the grace. Also, this is usually Paul’s greeting in his letters, but here it is more theological, as a work of *our Lord Jesus Christ*.
- *that though He was rich*—this obviously refers to Christ’s pre-existent status in heaven (see Philippians 2:6; Galatians 4:4).
- *yet for your sake He became poor*—that is, He became poor by choosing to accept our earthly life, which is “poor” compared to the riches of heaven. Jesus was our example so we will part with our earthly (rich) goods for the benefit of others in need (poor).
- *so that you through His poverty might become rich*—Jesus did that for you, not just coming to earth, but giving His all on Calvary, so we would have the riches of life with Him, both here on earth and in heaven.

(7) Paul uses Jesus as an example. He was rich in heaven, but He became poor for your sake. He is not asking you to do something which He has never done. He gave up everything for you.

Verse 10—I give my opinion in this matter—not that it is less Scripture, but rather he is again stressing that he is not ordering them to do this

- *for this is to your advantage*—it is a spiritual advantage, both in this life and in eternity
- *who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it*—sometime a year earlier, when Paul was evidently with them, they already had a desire to give to the believers in Jerusalem.

Verse 11—*But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it*—They desired to do it, now it was time to actually do it.

(8) Desiring to give is good. But you need to actually do it.

- *by your ability*—it seems Paul is not expecting them to give as sacrificially, as the Macedonians did

Verse 12—*For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have*—No one is criticized for not giving what he does not possess. Or that their modest means does not allow for exceptional sacrifices.

(9) To begin with, look at what you have, and give out of that. It is even greater to give out of poverty, but we are not in that situation (yet).

Verse 13—*For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction*—it doesn't help if they give so much that they now become in need of help from others

- *but by way of equality*—not that everyone is completely equal financially, but see v. 14

Verse 14—*at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality*—it's just at the present moment, the Corinthians have an abundance, so they should share with those in need (in this case, the believers in Jerusalem). Someday, the opposite may be true—the believers in Jerusalem may share their abundance with the needy Corinthians.

(10) This is part of Christianity. It keeps the needy dependant on God to meet their needs. It keeps those with abundance humble, and being used by God to meet the needs of others. As often happens in families, those with abundance help those in need.

Verse 15—as it is written, “HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK”—This is a quote from Exodus 16:13-36, the story of gathering the manna. The point seems to simply be that provision and need ought to be matched.

(11) The mistake is thinking that what you have you earned or you deserve. NO. What you have is a gift from God. A stewardship. He's watching what you are going to do with what He's given you. He's also watching those believers in need—whether those with abundance will help those without. It's practicing Christianity. It's part of the judgment for our rewards. Are you spending your

money on wood, hay, and straw stuff or are you investing it in silver and gold eternal treasures? The choice is yours. If you want to, spend it on wood, hay, and straw stuff, but just remember, it will all one day be burned up. At the Bema Seat of Christ, He won't be asking you the quality of your couch, or what name-brand clothes you wore. They don't impress Him!

Verses 16-17—But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord—Paul is pleased with the eagerness of Titus to return to the Corinthians.

Verses 18-19—We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness—This man who will accompany Titus is (1) a believer, (2) well-known among the believers in all the cities, (3) he has actually been appointed by the believers to accompany Paul and Titus in the collection of the money for the Jerusalem church, (4) and his presence shows the readiness of Paul and others to help with getting the money to Jerusalem [but we don't know who he is—though many men have been suggested, men such as Barnabas or Luke].

Verse 20—taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift—Paul was taking all the needful precautions so as not to have his honesty come under suspicion.

Verse 21—for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men—As Paul has already mentioned several times in the book, he is acutely aware that everything he does is in the sight of God (1:23; 2:10, 17; 4:2), and his desire is to be pleasing to Him (5:9), knowing he will appear before Christ in judgment for his actions (5:10). But he also wants to do what is right in the sight of men, i.e., to handle this money in an honest way, with integrity.

Verse 22—We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you—a third member of the traveling party. (1) He is another unnamed brother, (2) whom Paul has often tested (I assume in the handling of money), (3) he has been proven to be honest and diligent in many things, not only the handling of money, and (4) now he is even more diligent to come to the Corinthians because of his confidence in them and their willingness to give.

Verse 23—As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you—Titus has a close relationship to both Paul and the Corinthians. as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ—the other two men are sent from the churches, with the highest recommendations from them

Verse 24—Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you—i.e., with their gift to the Jerusalem believers.

(12) You need to check out who you give to. They should be responsible, honest, full of integrity in the handling of money, and should actually be doing ministry. You are responsible for your gift before God—that it is truly used in the work of ministry and not mishandled. The less you know them, the less you know what they do with the money.

Chapter 9:1-15

Verses 1-2—For it is superfluous [unnecessary] for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints—Paul had already spoken to them about giving to the Jerusalem believers.

- *for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them—It has been a year since they agreed to this giving. The difference between the Corinthians and the Macedonians is that the Macedonians actually followed through and gave. But the Corinthians said they wanted to, but needed the discipline to actually follow through and give.*

(13) Not to sound too obvious, but agreeing to give, planning to give, pledging to give, are not the same as actually giving.

Verses 3-5—But I have sent the brethren [from 8:6, 17-24], in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; otherwise if any Macedonians come with me [Paul] and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness—

(14) The reason we end up not giving is because we covet the money for ourselves. Here's a question to ask: Is my gift being affected by my own covetousness?

Verses 6-10—Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

(15) God gives to believers who give. The reaping will correspond to the proportions (bountifully not sparingly) and spirit (cheerfully not grudgingly or under compulsion) of the giving. [If part of your reaping is abundance, it is for sowing to “every good deed,” not for what you covet.] Again, the point is that giving is part of your sanctification, just as Bible study and prayer are.

- *Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion*

(16) I should not judge what you give, and you should not judge what I give. Giving is an individual decision. Your giving should be done with thought and design. Some give by accident or hastily at a given moment (and may even regret it later—or after some thought, would have given more).

- *for God loves a cheerful giver*

(17) What an opportunity to do something that God loves!!! We should give, not only from our pocketbook, but from our heart, being glad we have the ability and opportunity to give. God loves that!! How can we lose doing something that God loves for us to do?!?!

- *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.” Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness—In an illustration taken from nature, if a farmer wants a good harvest, he must sow a lot of seed. One is dependent on the other.*

(18) The One who supplies what is needed is God alone. God supplies the seed and the bread, and God alone enlarges the harvest that results from righteous, generous giving. There is some kind of reward in this life—righteousness, “peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). And there is some kind of reward in heaven—“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).

Verses 11-12—you will be enriched in everything for all liberality

(19) Like the grain illustration, you may enjoy your grain immediately by eating it right away. Or you may sow it, and like the grain, it may be hidden in the dirt for a while, but some day, it will sprout and bear a harvest of fruit, and you will be enriched in your giving. Like the seed that is sown, it produces many more seeds to be sown. Instead of being just a person who gives, you actually become a generous person (in other areas of your life, too).

- *which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.*

(20) Giving to other believers in need, produces much thanksgiving to God who provided for their need.

Verses 13-14—Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

(21) If you give toward a need, you are more likely to pray for those in that need because you have an investment in them. Also, those who receive your giving will also pray for you in gratitude for your generosity.

Verse 15—Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

(22) “Thanks” is the Greek word charis, meaning “grace,” “favor.” It’s the grace (favor) of God, His indescribable [cannot be adequately described with words] gift—Paul was thankful for the Corinthians’ gift for the believers in need in Jerusalem, but even more he was thankful for the gift God has given—“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (8:9).

The Corinthians did send a gift to the believers in Jerusalem—Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26).

Chapter 10:1-18

There is no easy transition to these last four chapters. Paul is now going to deal with the difficult subject of the false apostles, and he's put this off until the end of the letter. The false apostles had to be challenged and the Corinthians had to have devotion only to Christ and His apostle.

Verse 1—Now I, Paul myself—up to now in the book, Paul has said “we,” referring to himself and Timothy or Titus. But now he is speaking only from himself, asserting his apostolic authority, which is the central theme of these last four chapters.

- *urge you*—an earnest request, an appeal, to plead for something (though as an apostle, he could have commanded them)
- *by the meekness*—mildness in behavior, not harsh
- *and gentleness of Christ*—often meaning speaking softly or not raising one's voice—this could refer to Christ's life (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12-14). The point here, is that the meekness and gentleness of Paul was modeled by Christ. However, the false apostles said, “*his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible*” (10:10). According to the world's view, they criticized Paul for that very meekness, and saw it as bad (unimpressive and contemptible).
- *I who am meek when face to face with you*—in person, Paul was not harsh or severe
- *but bold toward you when absent!*—but in his letters, Paul was firm in purpose, like iron, courageous, confident, taking risks in addressing issues which may result in them disassociating themselves from him.

Verse 2—I ask—to ask with urgency, to plead, to beg

- *that when I am present*—the prospect of Paul's future visit to Corinth
- *I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous*—the idea here, it seems, is that when Paul comes in person, he doesn't want to have to be bold, as he is in his letters, in addressing these issues.
- *against some*—these could be the false apostles themselves, or some of the Corinthians who were following them
- *who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh*—who think Paul speaks and acts with worldly, fleshly motives (as they—the false apostles—do, such as in 10:12)

Verse 3—For though we walk in the flesh—we are humans, living in the world

- *we do not war according to the flesh*—the weapons the world uses, for example, are learning, personal influence, impressive credentials, rhetorical polish (1 Corinthians 1:26; 2:1). Paul introduces the idea that we are in a warfare—a spiritual warfare for men's souls, with spiritual enemies and spiritual purposes.

Verse 4—for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh—as just mentioned in v. 3

- *but divinely powerful*—proclaiming the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) and prayer (Ephesians 6:17-18).
- *for the destruction of fortresses*—strongholds.

Application—The battle is hard because we are not going against something simple and weak. (Jesus said, ... *the flesh is weak*—Matthew 26:41. The flesh is susceptible to worldly weapons of warfare: like learning, personal influence, rhetoric, etc.) We're trying to destroy strongholds! “The demolishing of ... the stronghold built through persuasiveness of speech ... to divert and deflect the mind from honoring God” (*Word*).

Verse 5—*We are destroying speculations*—conclusions without evidence, *even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God ... but they became futile* [pointless, useless] *in their speculations* (Romans 1:21).

- *and every lofty thing*—proud, self-important, elevated (in the world’s eyes)
- *raised up against the knowledge of God*—they suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... *professing to be wise, they became fools* (Romans 1:18, 22). Their own “wisdom,” unrighteousness, and lusts are all raised up against the knowledge of God [i.e., truth, knowledge, understanding, reason, the Word of God].
- *and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*—i.e., “to take as a prisoner of war.”

Application—When you realize your thought is worldly, it is against what you know to be true from the Word of God, in prayer immediately take that thought to God, confess it as sin, and declare to God your desire to be obedient to Him.

Verse 6—*and we are ready to punish* [“avenge,” i.e., the wrath of God directed against the enemies of His people—Numbers 31:2; Deuteronomy 32:43; Revelation 19:2] *all disobedience*—some think this is punishment of the Corinthians believers because they had defected from following Christ, but when there is repentance and obedience, there is no need for punishment. It seems more likely to me that once Paul knows the Corinthian believers have repented and are obeying Christ, then he will turn his attention to the false apostles and avenge them for what they did to the Corinthians.

- *whenever your obedience is complete*—the Corinthian believers who defected, repent, and return to the Gospel and obedience to Christ (and Paul, as Christ’s apostle).

The False Apostles Confronted—10:7–11:15

Verse 7—*You are looking at things as they are outwardly*—This could be translated:

- In an ironic sense—*You see only the end of your nose*— or *you are looking only on the surface of things* —possibly referring to verse 1 and the Corinthians judging by outward appearances, and finding Paul unattractive OR
 - As a question: *Do you look on things after the outward appearance?* As mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:1, they were oriented to externalities and worldly wisdom, so they were fair game to the false apostles OR
 - As an imperative: *Look at what is in front of you*—Paul wants the Corinthians to consider what Paul’s presence meant when he came and brought them the Gospel—their own salvation is right in front of them.
- *If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s*—If the Corinthians were confident they were in Christ, i.e., were believers
 - *let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we*—they need to at least acknowledge that Paul himself is also in Christ, is a believer. Paul shares in that relationship.

Application—We must remember, foremost, that we belong to Christ. He is the One who is important, not ourselves. Then we must at least consider that those who differ from us may belong to Christ, too, and should be treated as though they do. We profess the same faith, walk by the same rules, build upon the same foundation, and hope for the same inheritance. But if they are not doing that, discern it (judge it—Matthew 7:15-20), and do not fall under their influence.

Verse 8—*For even if I boast* [about being in Christ] *somewhat further about our authority*—as an apostle and his ministry in Corinth

- *which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you*—Paul’s authority as an apostle of Christ, was to tear down strongholds against the knowledge of God (v. 4) not tearing down the believers themselves. Rather, his ministry to them was

for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). But the Corinthians were being held in the stronghold of the false “knowledge” of the false apostles. And Paul did want to tear that down.

- *I will not be put to shame*—lit. “discredited by it,” i.e., he was not ashamed to use his authority as an apostle to tear down these false strongholds, rather he was using that authority (boasting in it).

Because the Corinthians were impressed with external appearances and worldly wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:1), they had fallen prey to the false apostles. In order to win them back to Christ and Paul’s ministry, Paul had to engage in what he found personally repugnant—self-commendation. But his goal was not personal self-enhancement but to restore the Corinthians as followers of Christ.

Verse 9—for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters—it seems Paul says this in anticipation of what the false apostles will accuse him of in v. 10—that his bite (personal presence) did not equal his bark (letters). It’s true, his letters contained commands, such as handing men over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5)—that’s pretty frightening. And Paul expected his letters to be read, to be given the proper attention, and be acted upon.

Verse 10—For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible [of no account, not persuasive]”—Paul was not a polished speaker by design as well as default (11:6; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). He didn’t want them to be swayed by his polished style. He didn’t want the attention to be on himself, but on Christ. However, the false apostles relied on their appearance and polished style to convince people.

- There seems to even be a charge that Paul chose the safety of distance rather than personal encounter with them. The false apostles had the advantage of being in Corinth, and they attacked Paul because he was absent—they even charged that he preferred it that way. They had even used to their advantage Paul’s change of travel plans in 2:1, his failure to come to Corinth as he said he would.
- In fact, in the ears of some (being swayed by the false apostles), Paul’s rhetorical ability was nonexistent and his public presentation of the message moved them to contempt and scorn. Thus they reasoned he could not be a true apostle, and he had no valid claim to “authority.”

Verse 11—Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are [lit., “will be”] also in deed when present—These issues, especially the false apostles, came up when Paul was gone, so he wrote the letters. But he is more than willing to address these same issues when he comes to Corinth. He is consistent in his beliefs and authority.

Application—However, now centuries later, we are so thankful for Paul’s letters that we can also read. “The words of St. Paul are not dead words, but are living creatures that have hands and feet to carry away a man” (Luther). For example, we have journals of parables that Dave’s father wrote. He’s gone, but his journals are still here. It’s good to write things down for future generations.

Verse 12—For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding—when you compare yourself to another person, the result is a foregone conclusion—you find yourself well-qualified and praiseworthy! However, Paul’s conclusion is—you are without understanding.

Comparing yourself to another person is an inadequate standard of measurement. We are to compare ourselves to Jesus Christ. He will be the judge, He sets the standards.

Application—Have you ever noticed that when we do compare ourselves to other people, it's always to those who do not excel us? That way, we always look better, and can have pride in ourselves. Pride is the enemy of spiritual growth!! If you already think you are good, you cannot confess sin and grow. It's why people don't receive Christ as their Savior—they think they are already good and don't need a Savior.

Verse 13—But we will not boast beyond our measure [beyond proper limits], but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure—Paul's ministry was not his idea. He was called by God to go to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8). So he can "boast" within that sphere which God portioned out for him, because it was not him, it was God who sent Him and gave him the authority to go to the Gentiles. to reach even as far as you—and God's specific plan was for the Gospel to go to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Verse 14—For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ—Paul was the first missionary to arrive in Corinth—he staked out his claim to them. Paul was sent from the apostles in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:6, 7). So these false apostles (also from Jerusalem) were invading Paul's territory, so to speak, with a false gospel.

Verse 15—not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors—Paul would not boast in areas in which others had labored. But because he was the first on the scene in Corinth, with the true Gospel, he had the right to defend his ministry among them.

- *but with the hope that as your faith grows*—as the Corinthians mature as believers
- *we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you*—in two possible senses: (1) as the Corinthians matured spiritually, Paul's ministry grew, as he continued to teach them and (2) the Corinthian believers would be a home church from which Paul would travel further west, as he desired, to Rome and even to Spain (Romans 15:23-24).

Verse 16—so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you—Paul was a missionary, and the heart of a missionary is always "out there." But first, Paul had to get the Corinthians' house in order before he could continue with the Gospel to the West.

- *and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another*—

Verse 17—But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD—a quote from Jeremiah 9:24, *but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.*

Application—Everything you have spiritually is directly and only from God. It is not the result of any human. It is only God's grace. Self-commendation and the praise of men count for nothing (Matthew 6:2, 6, 16; Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

Verse 18—For it is not he who commends himself that is approved—Of all flattery, self-flattery is the worst. It is self-deceit. Read Jeremiah 17:5-10.

- *but he whom the Lord commends*—You will stand before the Bema seat of Christ for judgment, so make your goal to please Him (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Chapter 11:1-33

Verse 1—I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me—Paul’s foolishness is not because he is foolish. Rather, it’s by design. He’s doing it on purpose because he’s been driven to defending himself by the attack of the false apostles. It is “wisdom” to the world, but to Paul and to believers, it is “foolishness.”

Verse 2—For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy—This term comes from the character of Yahweh in the Old Testament, portrayed as the sole husband of Israel (Hosea 1–3; Ezekiel 16; Isaiah 50:1-2; 54:1-8; 62:5), and Israel as His bride. This same analogy is in the New Testament between Christ (husband) and the church (His bride). [See Ephesians 5:25-27.]

- *for I betrothed [pledged] you to one husband*—believers are united to Christ and to no other alongside or in place of Him. It’s exclusive. Not to many husbands. Just to one.
- *so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin*—Paul’s responsibility, as their spiritual father, is that they might be as a pure virgin, i.e., not defiled by any ungodliness, something other than the Gospel or Jesus (see next verses).

Application—As we learned in Ezekiel 8, God does not allow worship of Himself to be blended with other religions or other religious practices. Today, our culture, and therefore, Christianity itself, *are filled with influences from the east*, just as the Israelites were (Isaiah 2:6). The U.S. president’s inauguration had them. And many Christians today practice yoga, acupuncture, bio-pro chips—all these are practices of pantheistic religions. We are to be pure before Christ, dedicated to serving Him alone. [See the RCI web topics “Acupuncture,” “Yoga,” “Karate,” etc.]

Verse 3—But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness—Paul is comparing the Corinthian believers with Eve. Instead of resisting Satan (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9), as Eve listened to him and was enticed by his “craftiness” [cunning, trickery], so the Corinthians tolerated the devil’s representatives in Corinth (vv. 4, 14-15).

Application—Satan is crafty, cunning [skilled at achieving one’s ends by deceit]. His objective is to deceive you, and he is skilled at doing that! “Different strokes for different folks.” What will deceive you may not deceive me, and vice versa. But he knows us all, and what will work with each person. Not because he is all-knowing (a characteristic only of God), but because he is experienced in observing mankind for thousands of years.

- *your minds will be led astray*—this is not merely meaning separation, but with the verb it implies both a corrupting influence (i.e., leading to ruin) and a seduction from what is right and pure. And this happens in your mind. What you think in your mind controls your emotions and your will. Paul said in Romans 12:1-2 that as believers, *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*
- *from the simplicity*—Paul is not saying that devotion to Christ is simple. It most definitely is not. It is from the Greek word meaning “singleness,” i.e., **only** devotion to Christ. Don’t add or take away anything from what the Scriptures say about Christ. Don’t blend it with other religious beliefs. For example, the mishna of rabbinical Judaism adds oral traditions and interprets the Mosaic Law using those oral traditions [see January 09 “Women’s Corner”].
- *and purity*—as described in verse 2. It’s like having a glass of clean, clear water. If you add coffee grounds to it, for example, it is no longer pure. Adding anything to what the Bible says about Christ, makes it no longer pure.

- *of devotion to Christ*—wholehearted commitment to Christ

Satan's objective? To get you away from a single, pure commitment to Christ.

Verse 4—For if one comes—lit. “he who comes.” It's evidently one particular person who came on his own, i.e., he was not sent for by the Corinthians, and he was not sent by someone else, from the Jerusalem believers, for example. He was without godly or human authorization. He just came to them.

- *and preaches another* [lit. different, rival, alien] *Jesus whom we have not preached*—Jesus as described in the Bible was humble, came to serve and give His life a ransom, a crucified and risen Lord, God incarnate, calling people to righteousness. A different Jesus would be denying the deity of Christ, for example.
- *or you receive a different spirit which you have not received*—it does not mean the Holy Spirit because that would assume a Trinitarian teaching. Rather, it seems to mean their attitude (spirit) of Christian living was a contradiction of Paul's teaching (on weakness). These false teachers were promoting the wisdom of the world, a spirit of self-glorification, not self-denial, credentials, not servanthood, strength, not weakness.
- *or a different gospel which you have not accepted*—the true Gospel is faith in the shed blood of Christ on the cross for your sins. A false gospel would have to do with works.
- *you bear this beautifully*—lit. “you put up with right well.” Paul had already warned them to not be yoked with unbelievers (6:14–7:1). And these false teachers (or false apostles), Paul says are disguised as servants of righteousness (11:15).

Verse 5—For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles [the 12 apostles]. The false apostles evidently claimed some connection to the apostles in Jerusalem. (We don't know if they did have that connection or not—although we know the apostles did not send them.) Without demeaning the apostles, Paul claimed an equal rank with them. His basis for this claim is in verses 22ff.

Verse 6—But even if I am unskilled in speech—he was not an orator, which was important to the Corinthians (10:10). However, his plain speech put the emphasis on the meaning of the words he was saying rather than the showy, smooth-talking, manipulative words the false teachers used.

- *yet I am not so in knowledge*—His words did have weight. **What** he said was more important than **how** he said it.
- *in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things*—they could not deny the transforming message Paul gave them (1 Corinthians 4:15; 9:1-2).

Application—It's dangerous to be impressed by rhetoric without biblical content or sometimes with lies. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Verse 7—Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?—When Jesus sent the 12 out, He told them to get their shelter and food from those to whom they ministered (Luke 9:3-4; 10:4-6). Evidently, this was practiced in the early church by the missionaries (1 Corinthians 9:4-6), and it was followed by the false apostles in Corinth. However, Paul did not do that. He supported himself without getting “ministry” money from the believers to whom he was ministering (1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

*Verse 8—I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you—*sometimes he did receive unsolicited money from other groups of believers, people who really couldn't afford to be giving (Paul felt like it was robbing them), such as the believers in Philippi (Philippians 4:15-16).

*Verse 9—and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone—*when Paul first arrived in Corinth, he made tents (Acts 18:3-5).

- *for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need—*and then Paul didn't have to make tents, but could devote himself completely to the ministry.
- *and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so—*Paul intended to not take any money from the Corinthians for his own support. One thing this did was to separate him from the false teachers, who were getting money from the Corinthians. (However, he did get money from the Corinthians, but it all went to the support of the believers in Jerusalem.)

Application—Paul came to them as a servant of Christ, offering the Gospel “free of charge.” That is, He wouldn't be accused of the ulterior motives of seeking money from them. Money always clouds motives! For example, when we travel overseas, we don't give anyone we are teaching money because then you don't know whether they are coming to try to get money or they really want to get the teaching.

Verse 10—As the truth of Christ is in me [i.e., kind of an oath that he is telling the truth]

- *this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia—*southern Greece, where Corinth was located. His boasting, i.e., his defense of his right to minister in Achaia will not be restricted or cut off.

Verse 11—Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!—evidently the charge of the false apostles was that Paul did not love the Corinthians because he would not accept money from them. Or possibly they understood his not taking money from them as a sign of disfavor or his preference for other churches, from whom he did receive money. But his assertion is that he does love them, and he calls God as a witness to that fact.

*Verse 12—But what I am doing I will continue to do—*i.e., to not take money from them for his own support, be a servant, give the Gospel of Jesus Christ

- *so that I may cut off [to prune or to amputate] opportunity from those who desire an opportunity—*the target of these words were *those who desire an opportunity ...*, i.e., so he can cut off these false apostles from influencing the Corinthian believers
- *to be regarded just as we are in the matter [they were boasting that they are doing the same work as Paul is] about which they are boasting—*But they have no right to be in Corinth, infiltrating the Corinthian church.

*Verse 13—For such men are false apostles—*An apostle is “one who is sent.” But these men just showed up. They were not sent by anyone, especially not by the Twelve. “False” is the opposite of “true” apostles. It's to reverse the meaning. They are not sent ones.

- *deceitful workers—*they are not who they appear to be. They are crafty, crooked
- *disguising [masquerading] themselves as apostles of Christ—*they work as hard at promoting error as the apostles work to present the truth. They do as much to undermine the kingdom of God as the apostles do to establish it. According to outward appearances, they appear as apostles of Christ, but in reality they are sent by Christ's great enemy, Satan.

Verse 14—No wonder—do not be surprised at that, like master, like man

- *for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*—Satan can change his form to look like *an angel of light*, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness. Where Paul got this idea is not certain. Satan did not do this in Genesis 3 (in fact, we do not read that the serpent was Satan until Revelation 12). The closest reference would be Job 1:6-12, but, again, it does not say Satan changed himself into an angel of light. There are pseudepigraphical accounts of Satan changing himself into the form of an angel. But nowhere is there the idea that he disguises himself as an angel of light. So this would be Paul's account, as direct revelation from God.

Verse 15—Therefore it is not surprising if—“it's no great surprise then if”—It is a surprise that Satan's emissaries had already infiltrated the group of believers in Corinth. But what is not a surprise is that his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness, because Satan does that himself when he wants to.

- *his servants also disguise* [masquerading, changing the outward form] *themselves as servants of righteousness*—Jesus said they were like whitewashed tombs—clean and white on the outside but full of decay and death on the inside (Matthew 23:27-28). Their claim is to be a servant of righteousness, but their behavior shows them to be servants of Satan. Their disguise worked well enough that it enticed and corrupted the Corinthian believers.
- *whose end will be according to their deeds*—their judgment doom is sure (1 Corinthians 3:17). They have done Satan's work, and they will receive his fate.

Application—(1) Even though they are disguised, we are still responsible for not being deceived and not following these false teachers. It's not easy. The more you study God's Word, the less you will be deceived (John 17:17). (2) God is not deceived by them. God knows who they are and what they are doing, and they will be judged for that some day.

Verse 16—Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish—not in the sense of a dim-witted person or clown but one who lost the correct measure of himself and the world around him.

- *so that I also may boast a little*—forced to defend himself. Kind of a role he's playing of doing something which he normally would consider foolish.

Verse 17—What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would—Paul made clear in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 that the wisdom of God seems as foolishness to the world.

- *but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting*—he is deliberately putting himself in the place of those whom he wants to expose.

Verse 18—Since many boast according to the flesh—the Corinthians persisted in looking at things from the world's point of view. A distinction between God's view and the world's view. The world boasts in outward display, reliance on things “seen.”

- *I will boast also*—he is forced to call some significant facts to their attention.

Verse 19—For you, being so wise—obviously, Paul is speaking with irony.

- *tolerate the foolish gladly*—“sweetly put up with,” meaning their acceptance of the false teachers

Verse 20—For you tolerate [put up with, bear with, endure] *it if*—An emphasis on the repeated “anyone,” i.e., “the one who.”

1. *anyone enslaves you*—those who set themselves up as masters, claiming the Corinthians as their slaves.
2. *anyone devours you*—“to eat up,” greedy, exploiting them for personal gain

3. *anyone takes advantage of you*—“lays hands on” or “takes,” i.e., “violate, deflower.” The believers are the virgin bride of Christ seen as being seduced and raped (see verses 11:2-3).
4. *anyone exalts himself*—“is lifted up,” i.e., puts on airs, acts arrogantly and lords it over you.
5. *anyone hits you in the face*—it is an insulting assault, which at times in history meant a shoot-out.

Verse 21—To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison—Paul did none of that with the Corinthians, so that made him appear weak in comparison.

“They have tolerated these men, allowing themselves to be ordered about, robbed of their money (2:17), and duped by these false teachers—even to the point of being insulted by them in a way which any Jew would regard as a most humiliating experience—a blow on the face. Paul, in this tremendously sarcastic passage, now simply asks for a hearing as he will present his case. “What a pity we are not like that—you seem to prefer bullies” is his final thrust (v. 21).” [“Word” p. 366]

¶ *But in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself*—Paul is drawn into the contest, “What they are, I am also,” but “I am speaking foolishly” shows he is speaking ironically.

Verse 22—Are they Hebrews? So am I—this could mean a pure-blooded Jew, a speaker of the Hebrew language, or one born in Israel (not a Hellenistic Jew).

- *Are they Israelites? So am I*—a social and religious distinction, membership in the community of salvation-history and a share in God’s purposes
- *Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I*—it could be about the promises of God made to Abraham, but probably it refers to Abraham as the man of faith who left all to follow God.

Verse 23—Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so—Paul is a missionary-servant, with the apostolic “right” to bring the Gospel to Corinth. The false teachers cannot claim that.

- *in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death*—Paul seems to be comparing his experiences with the false apostles. No matter what they claimed, Paul says he experienced far more.

Verse 24—Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes—prescribed in the Mishnah, on the basis of Deuteronomy 25:2, 3, which gave the maximum as 40 lashes. But the Jews only gave 39 to make sure they didn’t miscount and go over the 40. It became a synagogue discipline.

Verse 25—Three times I was beaten with rods—a punishment given by a Roman magistrate (as in Acts 16:22). Paul was a Roman and supposed to be exempt from this punishment, but the Roman government did not always uphold the law.

- *once I was stoned*—one instance recorded in Acts 14:5, 19, usually done by the Jews to those they considered to be blasphemers or adulterers.
- *three times I was shipwrecked*—don’t know about these. Acts 27 would have happened after this writing.
- *a night and a day I have spent in the deep*—in general, there was a fear of the unknowns on the ocean.

Verse 26—Paul repeats “danger” 8 times in this verse for emphasis. He did not experience these dangers as a private person or a tourist. They were all as a “servant of Christ.” *I have been on frequent journeys,*

- *in dangers from rivers*—natural barriers to be crossed or forded, often difficult at flood stage
- *dangers from robbers*—they traveled in packs to attack unprotected travelers
- *dangers from my countrymen*—fellow Jews (Acts 9:23, 29; 13:8, 45; 14:2, 19; 17:5; 18:6, 12; 20:3, 19; 21:11, 27).
- *dangers from the Gentiles*—attacks were less severe and less frequent (Acts 16:20; 19:23)
- *dangers in the city*—a place where people live, in contrast to the wilderness
- *dangers in the wilderness*—area with only a sparse population
- *dangers on the sea*—shipwrecks, as already mentioned
- *dangers among false brethren*—a expression used by Paul. It seems like it is at the end of the list to drive home to the Corinthian believers that their hospitality to such people is a source of great grief to Paul. These men are his rivals, and worse, they are Satan’s agents.

Verse 27—*I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights*—this could be because he worked at night teaching (Acts 20), or from keeping a vigil, such as at the jail in Philippi (Acts 16:25), or from praying and worry about the believers.

- *in hunger and thirst, often without food*—rather than fasts (a Jewish custom), it was probably because of his travel schedule and his frequent imprisonments
- *in cold and exposure*—lit. “nakedness” which would mean loss of dignity and shame (see Genesis 2:25; 3:7, 10, 11; Revelation 3:18).

Verse 28—*Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches*—especially the Corinthian believers, obviously

Verse 29—*Who is weak without my being weak?* —For example, citing the concern for the believers in v. 28. Weakness is a kind of neutral condition.

- *Who is led into sin without my intense concern?* —Sin, however, is something for which a person is accountable.

Verse 30—*If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness*—the list of things Paul has suffered are the results of weakness, not strength. He describes the very things his opponents ridicule.

Verse 31—*The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying*—he is telling the truth, compared to the false apostles who are servants of Satan, the father of lying (John 8:44).

Verses 32-33—*In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes [these names give historical credibility to Paul’s story] in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands*—in a final contrast, the false apostles or even the Corinthians themselves would glory in scaling walls and conquering, but Paul sees himself as being let down a wall in a basket.

Application—Some (like the false apostles) would see this as a experience of humiliation and disgrace, yet Paul saw it as God being with him and delivering him. Depends on if you take the world’s view or God’s view!!!

Chapter 12:1-21

Verse 1—Boasting is necessary—Paul evidently thought it was the best way to overcome the opposition of the false apostles to himself and his ministry.

- *though it is not profitable*—it has no eternal or spiritual value in and of itself—and what boasting Paul does do is about his weaknesses, not his “strengths” (things of which the false apostles—and the world—boast).
- *But*—it seems like Paul feels he is forced to share this most intimate and sacred event with the Corinthians, even though normally he would not have mentioned it because he is not given to boasting about his experiences
- *I will go on to visions and revelations*—not all revelations require visions—but here he is talking about both. Some revelations were just verbal, for example.
 - These are in the plural, so he had more than one of these, but is only going to talk about one of them. For example, in Ephesians 3:3 he talks about what he received through direct revelation from God.
 - These were not given to authenticate Paul’s apostleship. Some were given to him to write down new revelation—to write the Scriptures—or some were private, simply because God wanted him to know, possibly to help him through the many suffering he had. (Miracles confirmed apostleship and new revelation—Hebrews 2:3-4.)
 - They were not given to him to promote himself as “someone special.”
 - These are not something he sought or prayed for. Revelation happens when the person decides to give it, i.e., God decided to reveal Himself to Paul. Paul could not make that happen. God initiated it and brought it about.
- *of the Lord*—the Greek construction means that the visions and revelations could be both *from* the Lord and/or *about* the Lord.

Verse 2—I know a man—it is not questioned—Paul is referring to himself. But why does he use the third person? Paul is probably deflecting to the cause of what he went through, i.e., it was a way of emphasizing that he did nothing to obtain the vision. Rather, this was done to him by God.

- *In Christ*—this reference shows that he regarded this experience not as a consequence of his worthiness or his spiritual excellence but because he was *in Christ*. Therefore, the conclusion would be that this same thing could happen to anyone *in Christ* if God so chose for it to happen.
- *who fourteen years ago*—this would be sometime around 42-44 A.D. which seems to rule out every other visionary experience of Paul recorded in the New Testament (such as those recorded in Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-10, 17-21). We’re left to conclude that there is nothing that we know of Paul with which we can identify this experience.
- *whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows*—
 - It probably indicates that Paul was alone at the time, because if he was with someone and was bodily caught up, they would have told him about it.
 - By putting this parenthesis in his story, he was not taking a stand on the issue of “out-of-body” or “in-the-body” experiences. It’s simply not what he is talking about—yet he wants to make the point and does it in a parenthesis.
 - It seems like the fact that he mentions “out-of-body” shows that he believes there can be a separation of the body and soul, and the soul can go to heaven, and the soul is the person (with or without the body).
 - Also, it seems, therefore, that temporal (earthly) and spatial sensations were absent, i.e., he didn’t have a sense if he had a body or not.
- *such a man was caught up*—this phrase is only used by Paul, here and in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where Paul describes the Rapture as believers *we who are alive*

and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ...

- *to the third heaven*—the simplest explanation is that there is our atmospheric heaven, the heaven where the stars are, and then the heaven where God is. What is for sure is that Paul says he was caught up to the highest heaven, where God is. Heaven is seen as the “up” direction, and hell is seen as the “down” direction.

Verse 3—And I know how such a man—lit. *and I know that this man*. The addition of *and* indicates he is going to give us additional information.

- *whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows* —repeating what he said in verse 2. His use of the third person as well as his ignorance of whether he was in his body or apart from it seems to emphasize and downplay the fact that Paul finds no value for edification in his experience, i.e., it is not something he would boast about.

Verse 4— was caught up into Paradise—although I think there is an actual Paradise (also called Abraham’s Bosom in Luke 16:22 and where the thief on the cross went when he died—before Christ died and rose again—Luke 23:43—i.e., the gathering place of the Old Testament believers before Christ’s resurrection), Paul said he is using the word Paradise to refer to the third heaven. Often “Paradise” is used synonymously with “heaven,” which seems to be the case in Revelation 2:7. The LXX calls the Garden of Eden “Paradise” in Genesis 2–3. We must look for the author’s intended meaning, not the “dictionary” meaning.

— Paul seems to be sharing an event in his life which perhaps up to this time was unknown to anyone except Paul and Jesus.

- *and heard inexpressible words*—not because he could not translate them into an earthly language. What Paul means by this is in the next phrase ...
- *which a man is not permitted to speak*—God did not allow Paul to speak of these words. At first, we might think, “But these are the words of God—we want to know what they are.” But Paul was given much revelation from God that he did write down, and we do know a lot of what God said to Paul. In referring to these particular words, Calvin said he thought it was “to strengthen Paul by special means that he might not give way, but might persevere undaunted.” We don’t know how many times Paul probably received inner strength, for his ministry and what he suffered, as he remembered this event.

Verse 5—On behalf of such a man I will boast—he is referring to the experience rather than himself as the man. His purpose was to show that he is a legitimate apostle to whom the Lord has appeared in a unique vision.

- *but on my own behalf I will not boast*—Now we see Paul talking of himself in the first person. Yet he doesn’t want to boast about any personal strengths he has because then the Corinthians would focus on him, he would get the glory, instead of God getting the glory.
- *except in regard to my weaknesses*—We have two humbling experiences—Paul being let down from the wall in a basket (11:32-33) and the thorn in the flesh (12:7). Between these two is what is probably the highlight of Paul’s life—this experience that happened 14 years earlier. Paul has been in the future new world, possibly an experience no one else could share (up to this time—of course, much is revealed to the Apostle John some 30 years later). Paul cannot even be tempted to disobey God and speak of these things because of the thorn in the flesh God gave him. So all Paul can speak of are his weaknesses.

Verse 6—For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish—The false apostles were probably claiming to have visions, when they really did not have them (at least they didn’t have

them from God!). Paul could boast of his vision, and it wouldn't be a foolish lie. ... *for I will be speaking the truth.*

- *but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me*—Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to follow him because of some vision he has had. He wants to be weak, so that Christ will be strong, and they will follow Christ, not Paul. From Paul's perspective, yes, the experience was awesome—but he was just a visitor to heaven, and only briefly. Christ LIVES there. It is His abode. What is Paul in comparison to that?!?!? Nothing!!!!

*Verse 7—Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason—*Again, the plural revelations, probably referring to more than just the vision he has just related

- *to keep me from exalting myself*—the word “exalting” only occurs in one other place in the New Testament. Paul uses it to describe the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) who exalts himself against God, i.e., to be independent of God as an act of pride (2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- *there was given me*—“given” is usually connected with what God does. It seems clear that Paul considers both the revelation experience and the thorn in the flesh as coming straight from God Himself.
- *a thorn*—“thorn” is “a sharp physical pain.” No one has given an explanation of what the thorn was that is generally accepted. Some have suggested his adversaries (the false apostles) were the pain—but that's not a physical pain. Some suggest it was Paul's wife (funny!!)—that, again, is not a physical pain, and there is no evidence that Paul was married. Some say a sight problem because Paul wrote with *large letters* (Galatians 6:11). Some say he had a speech impediment, explaining the phrase *unskilled in speech* in 11:6. But it doesn't seem like these both would be physical pain. What this thorn was remains a mystery. But what we do know is:
 1. It came to Paul about 14 years previously, after the vision of heaven.
 2. It's probably a physical disorder, but we can't say that positively.
 3. It seems that the Corinthians must have known to what he referred, but we are not to know that for sure.
 4. It was not a good thing. It was used to afflict Paul and cause him pain.
 5. But the thorn served a good purpose as a gift from God. It was “given” by Him to Paul, like it was a gift. It kept Paul from pride, a very great sin.
 6. It was an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power (v. 9).
- *in the flesh*—it seems obvious “flesh” here means Paul's physical body (not his sin nature, as some see this)
- *a messenger of Satan to torment me — to keep me from exalting myself!*—We know Satan can cause physical ailments (see Job 2:5; Luke 13:16). Also, in Revelation we are told over and over that power is given to Satan and his demons (from God) to harm the earth and the people of the earth, even to kill them (6:2, 4, 8; 7:2; etc.). It seems like that is the situation here. This pain originated with God, but Satan was the messenger bringing it to Paul. God's purpose for the thorn was to keep Paul from exalting himself instead of exalting God. Satan's purpose would be to discourage Paul, to defeat him, to get Paul to exalt himself in spite of the thorn—or even because of the thorn, out of anger or disappointment, etc.

Verse 8—Concerning this I implored [ask for mercy] the Lord three times that it [“the thorn,” not “he,” meaning either a person or Satan] might leave me—first, it reminds us of Jesus in the garden praying three times that the cup of suffering would pass from Him (Matthew 26:44). For sure, he's not suggesting that three times is a law to follow. But it does illustrate that Paul brought the matter to God, and after a time, he saw it as a “no” answer, accepted it, and quit praying that it would leave. The same for Jesus in the garden.

Verse 9—And He has said to me—the tense of the Gk verb is aorist (past tense) and perfect, i.e., it was said in the past, but it is ever sounding in his ears—it’s something he remembers and “hears” because of the answer. When he thinks of his “thorn,” He remembers what God said about it. God said it in the past, but the answer brought on-going comfort and strength for the present.

- *“My grace is sufficient for you* —the undeserved favor or gift of God. Rather than removing the thorn, God gave Paul grace in it, providing contentment in it. We know God loves us and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38). And *we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose ... for those whom ... He ... predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:28-29). We can endure the pain when we remember God loves us and is good to us (but He gets to define what “good” is). For example, it’s like a child who endures the pain of a shot or of an operation, being held in the arms of the mother he or she knows loves them and has their best interest at heart. God’s grace is enough to help you endure the thorn in your life.

Application—I find that sometimes people say they don’t have enough grace. However, God gives the grace when you need it. We have sufficient grace for what we need right now. When we need more, God’s grace will be sufficient then. It’s not something we stockpile. We move ahead, trusting God’s grace will be sufficient when we need it.

- *for [God’s] power is perfected [fulfilled, or brought to completion] in weakness*—It’s the paradox of the Christian life. When we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in the grace of God. “Divine power is scarcely perceptible in the impressive activities of the ecclesiastical potentates with whom Paul has to contend” (*Word Commentary*, p. 420). The fulfillment of God’s power does not come in heavenly visions and ecstatic demonstrations but in earthly weakness. Evidently the false apostles were claiming some sort of ecstatic experience, too. The difference is that Paul was not claiming some sort of healing of his “thorn” to provide a proof of the validity of his apostleship.
- *Weakness* appears 3 times in these 2 verses, and *weak* [verb] 1 time. “Paul understands his weakness Christologically” (*Ibid.*). Paul suffered for Christ. He knows Christ was weak when He suffered in His crucifixion—but Paul can also see the power of Christ’s resurrection. So in Christ’s suffering, God’s power was completed (13:4). So when Paul is weak, it is the best possible hope for the display of divine power.
- *Most gladly, therefore, I will rather [than boast about his ecstatic experience] boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me*—The power of Christ in Paul was more important than freedom from pain. Paul was assured that his *thorn* would not hinder his work for God. So instead of again asking God to remove it, he has the attitude that this *thorn* will be a means of giving God glory.

Verse 10—Therefore I am well content [he does not continue to ask God to deliver him from these physical pains] with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak [physically], then I am strong [spiritually]. Human suffering in and of itself does not display God’s power. We know and hear of many unbelievers who suffer tremendous pain. Rather, it is suffering because of being in ministry for Christ—for sharing the Gospel with unbelievers, for helping believers grow in Christ.

Application—For example, Paul is trying to combat these false teachers among the Corinthians. As a result of this, he suffers insults and distresses and difficulties from the Corinthians. The same will be true of you if you try to combat false teachers in the lives of your “Christian” friends and relatives. You will be weak physically (no amount

of rhetoric, etc. will convince them), but you can pray that God's power will flow through you as you witness, and you will grow spiritually. For Paul, God used his experience in the third heaven to help Paul be spiritually strong. God will bring things into your life that are an encouragement—whether it's a passage of Scripture, etc. to help you get your focus off yourself and on to Him.

I must also say—having less luxuries is not a “thorn” or suffering!!! I would love to have a Navigator car, but I'm not suffering because I drive a Honda!! Too often in America we describe suffering in terms of lack of luxuries. Paul's thorn was a physical pain, and the result was to keep him humble, keep him from pride because of his experience. The things he lists next are difficulties arising from ministry situations. For example, “difficulties” are not because his cell phone didn't work or the cleaning lady did not show up to clean your house this week.

Verse 11—I have become foolish—in boasting of his Jewishness, his experiences—all things that the world considers “wise,” but as Christians, we know they are foolish, they have no eternal or spiritual value.

- *you yourselves compelled me*—It wasn't Paul's idea. It's not what Paul did when he brought the Gospel to Corinth. Because of conditions among the Corinthian believers, Paul was in a struggle “with rhetorically trained opponents for the support of his rhetorically fastidious converts” (*Word*, p. 430). Because the Corinthian believers are following a teaching that is different than his own, Paul has been forced to act foolishly (to commend himself and his ministry).
- *Actually I should have been commended by you*—Paul was their spiritual father. They owed thanks and appreciation to him for their new life in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:15). The Corinthians were guilty of coming under the influence of the false teachers (11:3-4; 20), but they were also guilty of not commending Paul to them. Instead, they evidently were believing the false apostles' attacks of Paul's speaking ability, his personal presence, etc. (10:10).
- *for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody*—of course, the Corinthians' commendation was not the basis of his apostleship. He was called by God to be an apostle (Galatians 1:1). Therefore, he was not inferior to the other apostles because they were also called by God to be apostles. It's God, not who these men were or what they did, who caused them to be apostles. Without God, they would be nothing and do nothing.

Verse 12—The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles—Foremost in Paul's mind he considered the mark of a **true** apostle to be the changed lives of the people to whom he preached. Only God can do that (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). That's something of which the false apostles cannot claim.

- Also, his life and ministry were honest and pure, as mentioned many times in 2 Corinthians (chapters 11-13). Paul wanted the Corinthians to judge him based on these things, not the miracles or his ecstatic experience.
- Though Paul does not deny that God's workers may have the ability to do the miraculous. Hebrews 2:3-4 tells us that *After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles ...* Of course, Paul was bringing new revelation to the Corinthians—that the Gospel was going to the Gentiles, not just the Jews, and the miracles confirmed that it was new revelation from God. Paul was known for his healing miracles in the early church (Acts 13:11; 14:10; 15:12; 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:3-6, 8). It must have been hard for him, therefore, when he wasn't healed himself (of his “thorn”).
- However, because the false prophets were of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), they could probably do miracles, just as Pharaoh's magicians could also do miracles

(Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7). Part of the deception during the Tribulation is that *false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect* (Matthew 24:24).

Verse 13—For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches—they received the same Gospel, the same ministry, the same miracles, the same presence of Paul—all the other churches received, the Corinthian church received except one thing—

- *except that I myself did not become a burden to you?*—We're back to the subject of 11:7-9, that Paul did not take money from the Corinthian believers. But the reason he didn't take money from them was so he would not be like his opponents, the false apostles (11:18-19).
- *Forgive me this wrong!*—Obviously, he was speaking ironically.

Verse 14—Here for this third time I am ready to come to you—i.e., come for his third visit

- *and I will not be a burden to you*—Paul will not abandon his policy—he will not take money from the Corinthian believers, so as to not give his opponents ammunition to attack him.
- *for I do not seek what is yours, but you*—we see Paul's affection for them
- *for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children*—as their spiritual father, Paul was responsible for giving to them, not them giving to him. It's like he is giving to them by not requiring money from them for his own support. (He's not saying that children should never help their parents, it's just the norm for parents to help the children. Paul did accept the help from other believers in other cities—Macedonia, Philippi.)

Verse 15—I will most gladly spend and be expended [sacrificing himself completely] for your souls—we see a paternal love not every father would show in reconciling with the Corinthians who have treated him so bad.

- *If I love you more, am I to be loved less?*—There is no limit to Paul's love for them, but sadly, there is a limit in their love for him.

Verse 16—But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit—Here is an even more serious charge against Paul—perhaps meaning that he swindled them out of the money he was saying was for the Jerusalem church. Don't know if this was a charge from the Corinthian believers or his opponents.

Verse 17—Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?—Paul vouched for the men he sent for the collection for the Jerusalem believers. Their reputations were such that they would be above suspicion (8:20-21). Here he asks whether anything they did was wrong.

Verse 18—I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he?—It seems this refers to the visit in 8:16-24, but don't know for sure, as Titus visited there several times. Paul asks the question in such a way that he expects a "no" answer. Titus did not take advantage of the Corinthian believers.

- *Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?*—well, if Titus did not defraud them, then it was foolish to think Paul cheated them. There's not much else he can say in his own defense. He's said it all.

Verse 19—All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ—As he has mentioned several times in the book, Paul is well aware that everything he does is in the sight of God and will be judged (5:10; 8:21; etc.).

- *and all for your upbuilding, beloved—*What Paul did was for the building up of the believers, not for enriching himself. Paul hoped to rectify the problems among the Corinthian believers before discipline became necessary (13:2). Such discipline would grieve him (12:21).

Application—Discipline is for the purpose of putting one back on the right path. It is usually painful. But the goal is always for upbuilding, not tearing down. It's for the ultimate good of the person, to make them a better, mature person.

*Verse 20—For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish [i.e., they are unrepentant] and may be found by you to be not what you wish [he has to discipline them]—*Paul has sent a “painful” letter and encouraged the believers to handle these sin issues themselves. But if they don't do it, then he will have to come and do it, with a “rod,” then he won't be what they wish he would be either.

- *that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances—*These seem to be sins that would result from the influence of the false teachers.

*Verse 21—I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you [because they did not repent]—*Such as happened on his second (painful) visit (2:1, 5; 7:2), where Paul was humiliated by the actions of a certain man. This time, it seems he would be humiliated by the people acting immorally and following false teachers—Paul would think he failed in his mission with them. He would have to use his apostolic authority, given to him by God for building up believers, to discipline them instead.

- *and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced—*These seem to be sins of sexual immorality, probably from their previous unbeliever lifestyles that have not been abandoned.

*Verse 13:1—This is the third time I am coming to you—*The first visit is in Acts 18:1. The second was the “painful visit” of 2 Corinthians 2:1. So this upcoming visit is the third.

- *Every Fact Is To Be Confirmed By The Testimony Of Two Or Three Witnesses—*These are the Jewish rules of evidence-giving. Jesus also applied this to the church age (Matthew 18:16). It seems that the first witness would have been Paul's second “painful” visit (2:1); the second witness was his “painful” letter he wrote them (sent via Titus); now the third witness would be on this third visit, if he has to use the rod of discipline because they have not repented.

*Verse 2—I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone—*Paul will not discipline those who repent, but there will be discipline for the unrepentant, he will spare no one.

*Verse 3—since [cause] you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you—*It's good to be discerning of those whose teaching you hear. But the test of truth is how it compares to what the Bible says, not if the rhetoric is polished, etc. The Corinthian believers applied the wrong tests to Paul, and found him lacking compared to the false teachers.

*Verse 4—For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God—*Being crucified on the cross was weakness. Those in the world would think that the cross was due to other’s powers or demonic powers. But Christ chose to be weak, i.e., it was not from a lack of power—God’s power was available to Christ at the cross, but Christ chose to not use it. Instead, Christ totally yielded up His will to God’s will. God’s power was displayed at Christ’s resurrection. He chose to be weak (death on the cross) so that God’s power would be even greater (resurrection).

- *For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you—*Because of Christ’s resurrection, we will live with Him. And because “in weakness,” i.e., fully dependent on God, Paul brought that message to the Corinthians, those who believed in Christ will also live.

Verse 5—Test yourselves—yourselves is in the emphatic position in Greek. The Corinthians have been testing Paul throughout the whole book. Now Paul says it is themselves they should be testing, not Paul.

- *to see if you are in the faith—*i.e., whether they were saved or not. Or perhaps he means whether or not they demonstrate by their lives that they are of the faith, i.e., they were repentant of sin, they recognize Paul as God’s true apostle. 1 Corinthians 16:13 translates it “stand firm in the faith.”
- *examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you — unless indeed you fail the test? —*he seems to be assuming they will pass the test. They are believers, they will stand firm in the faith, they will repent, they will welcome Paul with joy.

Application—If you are not actively seeking to grow closer to God, then you are moving farther away from Him (Hebrews 2:1). There is no being stagnant. If you do nothing to grow spiritually today, you will end the day further from God than you were yesterday.

*Verse 6—But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test—*Paul was not disapproved by God. It was the Corinthians’ standing before God, not his, that concerned Paul.

*Verse 7—Now we pray to God that you do no wrong [in God’s eyes]—*here we see Paul’s prayer

- *not that we ourselves may appear approved—*Paul’s motives are not selfish
- *but that you may do what is right—*repent
- *even though we may appear unapproved—*by the false apostles’ standards—judging by outward signs, rhetoric, etc.

*Verse 8—For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth—*Paul is powerless against the truth, the will of God (as was his experience on the road to Damascus—Acts 9:1-6). Whatever action he needs to take—either coming in “weakness” or in “power” to discipline, it will be in line with the truth of God.

*Verse 9—For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete—made “perfect”—*used only here in the New Testament, but it is close to the Greek word translated “aim for perfection” (2 Corinthians 13:11) and is used of repairing nets (Matthew 4:21). Just as parents want their children to grow up and mature, Paul wanted these believers to grow up and mature spiritually. He wants them restored to God and to himself.

*Verse 10—For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down—*Paul wanted to be spared the pain of disciplining those he

loved (2 Corinthians 2:2) and instead wanted to work with them for their joy (1:24) and for building them up. However, he was willing to come in apostolic authority to discipline them, even using severity, if it was necessary.

Application—This is how important it is to stop sin, not only for the sake of the one sinning, but because it spreads like leaven to others (1 Corinthians 5). Sin in the life of believers is a serious thing to God. Don't have the attitude that, "Oh, well, it's covered by the cross," and go your merry way. Sin needs to be repented of—confess it and turn from it. Paul wrote, *Should we continue to sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?* (Romans 6:1-2).

Verse 11—Finally, brethren—Paul closes his letter with a warmth—he doesn't consider the situation to be irreversible. He has hope.

- *rejoice*—if they obey Paul's advice and repent before Paul comes to them, then they can rejoice that God loves them, and so does Paul. They can rejoice that they have a remedy for the situation.
- *be made complete*—i.e., reconciled, restored to fellowship with God and Paul
- *be comforted*—be encouraged (1:3-7) and encourage one another
- *be like-minded*—not that they give up their individuality, but that they be one of mind—dedicated to the truth of the Gospel and Jesus Christ
- *live in peace*—it was the teaching of the false apostles that resulted in the divisions he mentioned in 12:20.
- *and the God of love and peace will be with you*—when you are right with God, then He promises you His peace (Philippians 4:6-7).

Verse 12—Greet one another with a holy kiss—A common greeting then among believers—Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14 (some say it was only between those of the same sex). A greeting that reminds us of being in the family of God, as you would greet your earthly family members. Notice it is called "holy," it was for the saints, and was not for any sexual reason. (Remember, Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss—Mark 14:44—simply to say, that it seems like it was a custom for that time and place.)

Verse 13—All the saints greet you—a reminder that the Corinthian believers are part of a larger body of believers.

Verse 14—The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit—of course, first we see the Triune God—the three persons of the Godhead. It's through the grace of Jesus, that we experience the love of God, and the fellowship of the Spirit between us and God and between each other as believers.

- *be with you all*—even us, believers centuries later.

"We ought not to underestimate what Paul is asking of the Corinthians. He is asking them to make the kind of decision we find so difficult ... decisions which are complicated by prevailing trends and attitudes. He is asking them to make the sort of decision the ancient Israelites had to make when they witnessed the battle between Hananiah and Jeremiah, to decide between two prophets both acting in character and one of whom must be disastrously wrong if only they could see which it was and what a wrong decision might mean (Jeremiah 28). That was the kind of decision which Paul was asking of them" (*Word Commentary*).