

# INTRODUCTION AND 2 CORINTHIANS

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## Introduction

### ***I. General Remarks***

A. Scott Hafemann states in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, "The letter we call '2 Corinthians' is widely recognized as the most difficult to understand among Paul's letters."<sup>1</sup> Whether you agree or not, the fact it is widely perceived that way lets you know we are heading into deep water. The journey may be difficult, but I hope the reward is great.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 19.

B. Like all of Paul's letters, 2 Corinthians is an "occasional" document, meaning it was written to a specific group of Christians in a specific situation or circumstance. If one is to hear correctly what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today in 2 Corinthians one must first hear correctly what he said in that letter to the church in Corinth. A significant part of that effort is gaining some understanding of the circumstances surrounding the letter.

C. It is easy to idealize churches in the apostolic era, to think they were free of struggle, conflict, and problems and that ministry in those days, especially for the apostles, was a walk in the park because all were of one heart and mind. That was and is the ideal, and there were mountaintop experiences among Christians then as today, but the church of every generation is made up of flawed, sinful human beings, who, though redeemed, continue to struggle with life in the overlap of ages, life on this side of the consummation. Paul had great hardships in his ministry, and it is a testimony to the power of God's Spirit that he endured them.

## **II. City of Corinth**

A. Corinth was located at one end of the narrow isthmus that connects the Peloponnese with the rest of Greece. It was well positioned for trade and commerce, being at the convergence of the two major roads and close to two ports: Cenchreae to the east on the Saronic gulf (about 6 miles) and Lechaem (or Lechaion) to the north on the Corinthian gulf (about 2 miles).<sup>2</sup> The claim that vessels and cargo were regularly transported across the isthmus over the four-mile stone roadway known as the *diolkos* has been shown to be unlikely.<sup>3</sup>

B. The history of the city is in two parts. The wealthy and ancient city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. It survived in a much-diminished form, with people essentially living among the ruins, until it was re-founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 BC.<sup>4</sup> It was Old Corinth that had the many temple prostitutes mentioned by the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (64 BC – AD 24) and that had developed the reputation for sexual vice (so much so that the Greek verb *korinthiazō* – to act like a Corinthian – meant to engage in sexual immorality). Sexual sin was undoubtedly abundant in New Corinth, but it was probably no different than other similar cities.

C. The new city quickly became prosperous and attracted many people. The Romans officially dominated the city with their laws, culture, and religion, but not

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<sup>2</sup> Chad Brand, ed., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 341.

<sup>3</sup> David K. Pettegrew "[The Diolkos of Corinth](#)," *American Journal of Archaeology* 115 (2011), 549–574; see also, David K. Pettegrew, *The Isthmus of Corinth* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 144-146.

surprisingly, in the first century AD there was a heavy influence of Greek culture.<sup>5</sup> There was also a substantial Jewish presence in the city.<sup>6</sup> The city was religiously diverse. It not only had Roman and Greek religions and Judaism but also had various mystery cults from Egypt and Asia.

D. Corinth's population in Paul's day is estimated to be about 80,000, with another 20,000 in the rural areas outside the city.<sup>7</sup> The city attracted large crowds of tourists every two years during the Isthmian Games. This was "a popular religious and athletic festival involving, for instance, musical and literary competitions, contests in public speaking, contests involving horses (e.g., chariot races, skills in chariot driving, men leaping on and off both horses and chariots), various kinds of footraces, the pentathlon, and boxing."<sup>8</sup>

E. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, Hafemann gives the following summary, based on a 1996 study by Timothy Savage, of what Greco-Roman culture stressed in terms of social status:

In regard to sizing up one's peers, Savage observes that in Paul's day Greco-Roman society stressed (1) a rugged individualism that valued self-sufficiency; (2) wealth as the key to status within society; (3) a self-display of one's accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others; (4) a competition for honor that viewed boasting as its natural corollary; and (5) a pride in one's neighborhood as a reflection of one's social location. These values combined to create a populace for which self-appreciation became the goal and self-gratification the reward.<sup>9</sup>

F. Religion was viewed in Greco-Roman culture as a means to health, wealth, and social standing, and its value was measured by the power of its deity to deliver those things to its adherents. Hafemann states, drawing again on Savage's work:

The various religions attracted followers by providing visible displays of their gods at work, as seen in the "success" of their members. "The more powerful one's god the more strength one expected to receive and manifest." In the same way, on the popular level orators gained a following not primarily by virtue of their content, but by their ability to captivate their audiences with powerful and entertaining deliveries. In

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<sup>5</sup> Johannes Wessels, *Paul's Approach to the Cultural Conflict in Corinth: A socio-historical study* (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2017), 43; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3:2692-2695; Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 131; Robert S. Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 56.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Keener (2014), 3:2694-2695.

<sup>7</sup> George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Guthrie (2015), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Hafemann (2000), 25.

Savage's words, "They honored the one who preached with flair, force and pride."<sup>10</sup>

G. These cultural trends were magnified in Corinth, which in Ben Witherington's words, became a magnet "for the socially ambitious . . . [for] status-hungry people."<sup>11</sup> Gordon Fee describes Corinth as "the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."<sup>12</sup> To quote Hafemann again:

The "self-made" Roman "freedmen," who had applied the hard labor of their former slave status to the business of making it in this new Roman colony, were known for being crassly materialistic, self-confident, and proud. The atmosphere of sports that filled the air with its pride, competition, and exaltation of heroes, not to mention that Corinth was the entertainment center of Greece, exacerbated all of this.<sup>13</sup>

H. Greek and Roman cultures valued rhetoric and oratorical skill, which easily deteriorated into a celebrity status and following, something like we see with Hollywood celebrities today. Carson and Moo state "that at Corinth this inherent tendency in the rhetorical tradition mingled with the structure of social climbing and the love of status to turn favorite rhetors into heroes, and audiences into fans."<sup>14</sup>

### **III. Occasion of the Letter<sup>15</sup>**

A. Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). He stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple that had recently moved to Corinth after being expelled from Rome under the edict of Emperor Claudius, and supported himself as a tentmaker or leatherworker.

B. The Jews in Corinth dragged Paul before the proconsul Gallio and charged Paul with persuading people to worship God contrary to the law, but Gallio refused to entertain what he saw as a religious dispute. Paul remained in Corinth a good while after that, his total stay exceeding 1½ years (Acts 18:11, 18), during which time he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

C. After seeing the church well established, Paul sailed from Cenchreae to Caesarea, stopping off briefly at Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila who had accompanied him. He then went up and greeted the church in Jerusalem and returned to Antioch. This is now probably A.D. 51/52. He spent a short time with his home

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<sup>10</sup> Hafemann (2000), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 20, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Hafemann (2000), 27.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 427.

<sup>15</sup> Drawn in significant part from Carson and Moo (2005), 366-370, 420-425.

congregation in Antioch before heading out again on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:18-22), probably in A.D. 52.

D. Paul probably arrived back in Ephesus in the summer or fall of that year. He had a very fruitful ministry and was there over 2 ½ years, until the summer or fall of 55 (Acts 19:8, 10, 20:31). Sometime after Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (probably in the fall of 51) and before he arrived back in that city (probably in the summer or fall of 52), Apollos came to Ephesus, knowing only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more accurately, and Apollos then went to Corinth with a letter of recommendation from the brothers in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-19:1). During Paul's absence from Corinth, Apollos and others, probably including Peter, built on the foundation he had laid there.

E. While at Ephesus, Paul learned of certain problems in the Corinthian church and wrote them a letter in which he forbid them to associate with immoral people. This letter has not been preserved, but we know about it from the reference to it in 1 Cor. 5:9. Paul must have been speaking in the context of church discipline, but some of the Corinthians apparently interpreted his words in a very general sense (1 Cor. 5:9-10).

F. Afterward Paul received more reports and a letter from the church, which prompted him to write 1 Corinthians, probably in A.D. 54. We see from 1 Corinthians that the spiritually immature believers there had formed partisan groupings that claimed to follow this or that leader. In addition, the church was marred by abuses of the Lord's table, immorality, lawsuits, uncertainties about the place of marriage and the propriety of eating food sacrificed to idols, a warped view of charismatic gifts, and a spiritualized view of the resurrection. Segments of the church were disenchanted with Paul and resistant to his leadership.

G. When Paul sent 1 Corinthians, it was his intent to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (late May) probably of 55 and then to visit Corinth by way of Macedonia (16:5-8), which would put him there sometime in the winter (1 Cor. 16:6). When he formulated those plans, he felt no urgency to get to Corinth. After all, he was in no hurry to leave Ephesus since the "great door for effective work" (1 Cor. 16:9) was still open there.

H. After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul decided it would be better to visit Corinth twice, once on the way to Macedonia and once on the way back (2 Cor. 1:15-16). He then learned, perhaps when Timothy returned (1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10-11; 2 Cor. 1:1), that conditions at the church had become critical, due in part to the arrival of "Judaizing intruders" from Judea who presented themselves as leaders (2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15, 22).

1. The identity and nature of these recently arrived opponents is much debated. It seems they were Greek-speaking Jews from Judea who recognized Jesus to be the Christ but who had some kind of Judaizing agenda,<sup>16</sup> meaning they urged the Gentile

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 33-36.

Christians to adopt certain aspects of Judaism. Their approach apparently differed from that of the Judaizers in Galatia, however, as Paul does not here mention circumcision. As Judaizers of some kind, they were motivated to join with those seeking to undermine Paul's authority.

2. Hafemann says of these particular opponents:

From their perspective, being a member of the new covenant *and a Jew* was the key to experiencing the full spiritual blessing that God has for his people. This meant that for the members to become full-fledged members of God's people they had to trust in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah *and* become part of God's chosen people, Israel, in accordance with the Sinai covenant. Only then could they expect to experience God's covenant promises completely.<sup>17</sup>

3. Murray Harris sees an alliance between two groups of opponents. He states:

Our overall conclusion is this. Paul's opponents were probably Jews from Judea – perhaps Jerusalem – who came to Corinth as self-appointed agents of a Judaizing program. They claimed to be Christian, illegitimately invoked the authority of the Twelve, and found common cause with a group of Corinthian "proto-Gnostics" in their attempt to undermine Paul and his apostolic work.<sup>18</sup>

I. Because of the situation in the church, Paul made an emergency visit to Corinth. Though it seems he spared the rod mentioned in 1 Cor. 4:21 (see 2 Cor. 10:1-11), the visit was painful for both the Corinthians and Paul (2 Cor. 2:1-3). For whatever reason, Paul found it necessary to leave the situation in Corinth unresolved and return to Ephesus.

J. At some point, one of Paul's opponents in Corinth defied him openly, attacking him in personal and deeply insulting ways (2 Cor. 2:5-8, 10; 7:12), and this apparently was tolerated by the church. Many think this attack occurred during the painful visit (I used to be among them), but Murray Harris makes a good case that it occurred soon after Paul left Corinth and was reported to him.<sup>19</sup>

K. In keeping with his new plans, Paul presumably told the Corinthians early in the emergency visit that he intended to visit them again on his way to and from Macedonia. But the emergency visit turned out to be such a distressing and unproductive clash, only to be followed by the personal verbal assault that was reported to him, that Paul decided it would be better to delay his next visit until *after* his trip to Macedonia (to revert to the original itinerary).

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<sup>17</sup> Hafemann (2000), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 87.

<sup>19</sup> Harris (2005), 226-227.

L. After returning to Ephesus and being informed of the personal attack, Paul sent Titus to the Corinthians with the "severe letter" referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8-12, a letter Paul wrote out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears. Paul assured the Corinthians of his love for them but also laid down the standards he expected in the churches and sought to determine if they would meet those standards (2:9). He also demanded the punishment of the person who had opposed him so maliciously (2:3-9, 7:8-12). This letter was not preserved.

M. Titus presumably let it be known that he had plans to meet Paul in Troas or Macedonia with news of their response, which told the Corinthians that Paul had changed his plan to visit them on the way to and from Macedonia (or perhaps Paul noted his change of plans in the letter). This opened Paul to charges that he was fickle, untrustworthy, and indifferent to the feelings of the church, which leads him to explain the change of plans in 2 Cor. 1:12 - 2:2.

N. Titus also had the responsibility, depending on the Corinthians' response to the severe letter, to organize the collection for Jerusalem (8:6) to which the Corinthians initially had been willing to contribute. Their participation in this would not only bless the poor in Jerusalem but would signal their fellowship with Paul and the apostolic church.

O. Shortly after the riot recorded in Acts 19:23 - 20:1, Paul left Ephesus for Troas (2:12-13), where he hoped not only to preach the gospel but to meet Titus returning with news of Corinth. When Titus did not show, Paul headed for Macedonia (2:13), apparently in keeping with a contingency plan he had with Titus.

P. In Macedonia, Paul encouraged the Christians (Acts 20:1-2) and organized the collection for the Jerusalem believers (8:1-4, 9:2). The Macedonian churches were themselves facing "the most severe trial" and "extreme poverty" (8:2). When Paul got there, Titus had not shown up, so Paul still had no idea how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (7:5).

Q. Titus soon arrived, and Paul's distress turned to joy because the church at large had responded positively to Paul's strong words (7:6-13). The majority had repented of their rebellion against Paul's apostleship. There was a segment, however, that continued to resist his authority and gospel, and 2 Corinthians is shaped by the presence of both groups.

#### ***IV. Unity of the Letter***

A. Many scholars have argued that 2 Corinthians is a composite of two or more separate letters that were pieced together by an unknown editor. There are serious



problems with that claim, which is why "[r]ecent scholarship . . . has increasingly supported the unity of 2 Corinthians."<sup>20</sup>

B. The most significant issue in this regard is how to understand the change in tone in chapters 10-13. Paul probably started writing 2 Corinthians soon after receiving Titus's encouraging report but received more bad news about the church before completing it. His tone changed after chapter 9 because he then received news of a counter-offensive that had been launched against him by the Judaizing intruders. Paul does not state that he received new information, but that would have been obvious to the Corinthians by his specific references to the new charges against him.

## **V. Purposes**

A. Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles identify four major purposes for 2 Corinthians 1-9.<sup>21</sup>

1. Paul's change of travel plans made him vulnerable to the charge he was unreliable and unworthy of trust. He needed to defend his reliability and explain the reasons for his change of plans.

2. He wrote to encourage the Corinthians to restore the man they had disciplined for verbally attacking him.

3. He wrote to clarify the nature of his apostolic ministry and his qualifications for that ministry.

4. He wrote to encourage them to fulfill their pledge to contribute to the offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

B. Hafemann writes:

In [2 Corinthians] Paul both comforts and encourages the majority of the church, while at the same time defending his apostleship in order to strengthen those who have repented and to win back the recalcitrant minority. Moreover, behind the Corinthians lurk Paul's opponents, whom Paul does not address directly, but who are the most direct source of the problem. Paul's goal in writing, therefore, is to prepare for his next visit to

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<sup>20</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, *2 Corinthians*, Teach the Text (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 4. He says (p. 243, fn. 5):

Recent studies arguing for the unity of 2 Corinthians include Bieringer, "Plädoyer"; Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*; Amador, "Revisiting"; Vegge, *2 Corinthians*. Among commentators, recent advocates include Witherington, *Conflict and Community*; Lambrecht, *2 Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Epistle*; McCant, *2 Corinthians*; Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*; Garland, *2 Corinthians*; Matera, *2 Corinthians*; and Harris, *Second Epistle*.

<sup>21</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 481.

the Corinthians in which he will have to judge those who persist in their rejection of him and his gospel.<sup>22</sup>

13: C. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles say regarding the purpose of chapters 10-

Paul's defense of his apostolic authority becomes much more intense. Paul was no longer confident that the Corinthians would recognize the false apostles for what they were or that they would reaffirm his own apostolic authority. Paul wrote these chapters to urge the Corinthians to reject the false apostles and their message and to embrace again the gospel that Paul had preached. Paul also wrote to announce his plans to make a third visit to Corinth. Finally, he wrote to urge the Corinthians to examine their faith to determine whether it was authentic.<sup>23</sup>

## **VI. The Church**

It was predominantly Gentile but quite diverse. It included Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves, and freedmen. In the words of Gordon Fee:

Thus, the picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were almost certainly at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, . . .<sup>24</sup>

## Text

### **I. Introduction (1:1-11)**

#### **A. Salutation (1:1-2)**

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through [the] will of God, and Timothy, the brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth [along]**

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<sup>22</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letter to the" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>23</sup> Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles (2009), 481.

<sup>24</sup> Fee (2014), 4.

**with all the saints who are in all Achaia: <sup>2</sup>grace to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. Paul is an apostle of Christ by the will of God. He was chosen to be God's instrument for spreading the gospel, particularly to Gentiles. His authority derives from the Lord himself (10:8, 13:10), which is why opposing him is such a serious matter.

2. Timothy joins with Paul in sending the letter, not in writing it; he is in accord with what Paul has written. Timothy, of course, is one of Paul's co-workers, a person well known to the Corinthians (Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19).

3. Paul does not write to the "church of Corinth" but to the "church of God in Corinth." Congregations are local expressions of the universal church that belongs to God. Implicit in the fact the church belongs to God is that it should listen to one who has been chosen as a messenger by God.

4. "Saints" are simply "holy ones," meaning Christians, God's people. Achaia is the Roman province in which Corinth was located. Paul includes all the saints in the surrounding area who presumably would have ready access to the letter and who would be in the sphere of Corinthian influence.

5. "Grace" refers to God's unmerited favor; "peace" refers to the peace that comes to man as a result of his having, through grace, peace with God. He identifies the source of this grace and peace as God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Moyer Hubbard comments:

The customary opening greeting in Greek letters of this period included the word *chairein* ("Greetings!") followed by a prayer for the health of the recipients. . . . In a clever play on words Paul Christianizes this standard greeting in his letters by exchanging *chairein* with the similar sounding *charis* ("grace"). The addition of "and peace" echoes the salutation of Hebrew and Aramaic letters (*shalom*, "peace").<sup>25</sup>

**B. Gratitude for divine comfort (1:3-7)**

**<sup>3</sup>Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our affliction so that we are able to comfort the ones in any affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

**<sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so through Christ our comfort also abounds. <sup>6</sup>And if we are afflicted, [it is] for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, [it is] for your comfort, which is working in [your] endurance of the same sufferings which we**

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<sup>25</sup> Hubbard (2017), 10.

**also are suffering. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you [is] firm, knowing that as you are sharers of the sufferings, so also of the comfort.**

1. Paul begins with an expression of gratitude to God, declaring that he, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is worthy of praise.<sup>26</sup> It is easy to overlook the meaning and significance of Jesus' title "Lord." That word has lost its impact in our culture, and in the words of one commentator, "has become one of the most lifeless words in the Christian vocabulary."<sup>27</sup> Inherent in the baptismal confession noted in Rom. 10:9 that "Jesus is Lord" is that one belongs absolutely to him and owes him absolute loyalty and obedience. That is why Jesus said in Lk. 6:46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?"

2. The focus of Paul's praise here is the fact God had comforted Paul and his companions in all the hardships, dangers, persecutions, and anxieties he experienced in carrying out his apostolic commission (1:8-10, 4:7-12, 11:23-29). God sometimes comforts by relieving the hardship (e.g., 1:8-11, 7:5ff), but other times he does so by convincing us that everything will be fine in spite of the hardship (i.e., provides the strength and encouragement to endure – see, 1:6).

3. Paul is already responding to the notion that his suffering was a strike against his apostleship, a sign of God's disfavor. He does so not for his own ego but because it was important for the Corinthians and the cause of the gospel that his authority as an apostle not be subverted. In describing God as the Father of all compassions (or mercies) and the God of all comfort, Paul is correcting implicitly the notion that God's servants are immune from suffering. If that were so, there would be no need for God's comforting.

4. The afflictions Paul endured in his ministry were an extension, an overflowing, of Christ's suffering into his life, so rather than being a strike against his authenticity as an apostle his suffering was a mark of his solidarity with the Lord. And his afflictions were matched by a corresponding degree of comfort from God so that, as Christ's suffering worked for the benefit of others, he and his companions could be vehicles of God's comfort to others.

5. More specifically, Paul says in v. 6 that the afflictions he and his companions endured and the corresponding comfort they received from God was for *the Corinthians'* comfort and salvation. Rather than use his suffering to attack him, the Corinthians should be grateful that he has endured it so as to bless them.

6. The divine comfort Paul and his companions have directed to the Corinthians is at work in the Corinthians' endurance of the things they are suffering because of their allegiance to Christ. Perhaps Paul is referring to relational conflicts from

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<sup>26</sup> The adjective εὐλογητός is "a term having to do with being 'worthy of praise or commendation' (GELNT 430)." Guthrie (2015), 64.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred Plummer, quoted in David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 59.

being Christians in a town immersed in paganism and licentiousness or from standing for the truth in a church that is divided on the matter.

7. Paul tells them in v. 7 that his hope is firm that they will endure in the faith in the face of whatever hardships they are experiencing for Christ, knowing that God is supplying for them the comfort needed in those hardships.

### **C. Deliverance from a deadly peril (1:8-11)**

**<sup>8</sup>For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about our affliction which took place in Asia, that we were exceedingly burdened, beyond [our] power, so that we despaired even of living. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, [we] ourselves had within ourselves the sentence of death, so that we might not have confidence in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, <sup>10</sup>who delivered us from so great a death [threat]. And he will deliver [us], [he] in whom we have hoped [that] he will deliver [us] yet again, <sup>11</sup>as you also join in helping by petition on our behalf, so that thanks may be given by many persons for the gift [given] to us through many [prayers] on our behalf.**

1. Paul provides a recent specific instance of grave affliction that he endured and regarding which he was comforted by God's deliverance. We can only guess to what Paul is referring by "afflictions which took place in Asia," but a reasonable guess is that it was tied to Jewish opposition to Paul that was stirred up by the riot in Ephesus mentioned in Acts 19:23-41. In his address to the Ephesian elders, Paul refers to having been severely tested by the plots of the Jews (Acts 20:19).

2. Whatever these hardships were, the situation was so bad that Paul was convinced in his own heart that he was going to die; his missionary career was going to be cut short with urgent projects left incomplete. Humanly speaking, his situation was absolutely hopeless; there was no way out.

3. Paul says that their sense of certain death was permitted to help shift their confidence from themselves to God who raises the dead (which, figuratively, is what happened to Paul). The impotence of one's own wisdom and ability is most clearly exposed on the threshold of death, the point of utter helplessness. Their deliverance was so dramatic and so clearly God's work that it enhanced their confidence that God was not ready for Paul's labor to cease.

4. Paul therefore is confident that God will continue to deliver him from perils in response to prayers on his behalf, that he will continue to say "yes" to those prayers. As a consequence, many people will give thanks to God for delivering Paul in response to their prayers.

## **II. Paul's Conduct Explained (1:12 - 2:13)**

### **A. Introduction (1:12-14)**

**<sup>12</sup>For this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience, that with frankness and sincerity of God, [and] not in fleshly wisdom but in [the] grace of God, we behaved in the world and even more so toward you.**

**<sup>13</sup>For we do not write to you anything other than what you read or indeed understand, and I hope that you will understand completely,**

**<sup>14</sup>just as you also understood us in part, that we are your boast, even as you also [are] ours on the day of [our] Lord Jesus.**

1. Paul says he is proud of the fact, which he knows at the core of his being, that he and his companions conducted themselves with frankness and godly sincerity in their dealings with the world in general and with the Corinthians in particular. They did not act in keeping with worldly wisdom, meaning they were not devious and insincere, but in keeping with the grace of God. God's grace given to them in Christ motivated them to act as God would have them act, and reliance on that grace in their ministry, reliance on God's gracious working through them in their ministry, freed them from the pull "to cheat," to try to produce results by underhanded means. They would do what was right, act with integrity in all matters, and leave the results to God.

2. Paul firmly denies the insinuation, apparently smoldering in some quarters of the church in Corinth, that his letters were duplicitous, that he wrote in such a way as to mask his true meaning or intentions. Paul says he writes what he means, that his letters contain nothing other than what they read. By adding "or indeed understand" I think he is suggesting that at least some of the misrepresentations of his meaning are not good faith misunderstandings but a deliberate twisting of what he wrote to use against him.

3. Just as the Corinthians have come, through Titus's visit, to a partial understanding of the actions and intentions of Paul and his companions, he hopes they will come to understand completely, through what he goes on to write, that he and his companions are their boast, the noble messengers through whom they were included in Christ, just as the Corinthians will be Paul's boast on judgment day.

a. Paul elsewhere mentions that when he is called to account before God he will take pride in the fruit of his apostolic ministry, those who have been brought to faith in the gospel through his faithfulness to his commission (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:19-20; Phil. 2:16, 4:1).

b. The implication is that they will not come to this complete understanding for which Paul hopes until the points at which they continue to misunderstand his actions and intentions are cleared up. He sets out to do this in the following paragraphs.

## **B. Canceled Visit Explained (1:15 - 2:2)**

**<sup>15</sup>And in this confidence, I was intending to come to you first, so that you might have a second benefit; <sup>16</sup>that is, [I was intending] to go to Macedonia through you and to come to you again from Macedonia and to be helped on my way to Judea by you. <sup>17</sup>So by intending this was I then being fickle? Or do the things which I intend do I intend according to [the] flesh, so that there may be with me the "Yes, yes" and the "No, no"? <sup>18</sup>But God [is] a trustworthy [witness] that our word to you is not "Yes" and "No." <sup>19</sup>For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No"; rather, in him has been "Yes." <sup>20</sup>For as many as [are] the promises of God, in him [is] the "Yes"; therefore, through him the Amen is also [spoken] by us to God for [his] glory. <sup>21</sup>Now the one who makes us firm along with you in Christ and has anointed us [is] God, <sup>22</sup>who also has sealed us and has given the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.**

**<sup>23</sup>Now I call God as a witness, upon my own life, that in order to spare you I did not again come to Corinth. <sup>24</sup>Not that we exercise lordship over your faith; rather, we are coworkers for your joy, for in the faith you have stood firm. <sup>2</sup> For I decided this in myself, not again to come to you in grief. <sup>2</sup>For if I grieve you, then who [is] the one who makes me glad except the one who is grieved by me?**

1. Instead of returning to Corinth as he had intended, Paul had sent the severe letter by way of Titus. The congregation generally received that letter well and repented of their rebellion against Paul's apostleship, but a segment of the church grumbled that it was too harsh and suggested that Paul was unreliable, which implies he was without clear direction by the Spirit, and indifferent to the feelings or needs of the church. Since this affects his credibility as an authentic apostle, and thus the credibility of his message, he tackles these issues.

2. Being confident that they did or would recognize that he and his companions were worthy objects of their pride, Paul had planned a double visit to benefit the Corinthians, on the way to and coming from Macedonia. He was neither divided about the matter ("yes and no") nor uncommitted to the decision (fickle). This was not some worldly ploy to gain an advantage by telling them what they wanted to hear.

3. To stress the point, Paul says that God is a trustworthy witness to the fact their word to the Corinthians was neither equivocal nor insincere ("yes and no"). God testifies to that in the fact he entrusted them to deliver the gospel of Christ, the ultimate in committed and unequivocal messages, God's definitive "yes" to all his promises.

a. Jesus is the one in whom all of God's promises are "yes" in that he is the door to the blessings and rewards of the consummated kingdom. In Jesus is the fulfillment of the promised Messianic age.

b. This is why, in corporate worship offered to God through Christ, Christians joyfully acknowledge this truth by saying "Amen" (which expresses agreement) when it is uttered (e.g., when Christ is praised). In so doing, we glorify God for his faithfulness.

4. Paul then cites (vv. 21-22) the fact that it is God who makes him and his companions, along with the Corinthians, stand firm in Christ, and who has consecrated them (anointed) and sealed them with the down payment of the Holy Spirit. His point seems to be that they, like the Corinthians, are God's possession and can be counted on to act accordingly, i.e., not to be fickle or double-minded.

5. In v. 23 Paul calls God as a witness that it was in order "to spare" the Corinthians that he changed his plans to return to them on the way to Macedonia.

a. Having said that, he hastens to clarify (v. 24) that he does not mean that he and his companions exercise lordship over their faith. Apparently some in Corinth thought Paul's group was guilty of "playing lord." They are not lords themselves but only servants of the Lord who work together to bring joy to the Corinthians.

b. As evidence of their working to bring the Corinthians joy, Paul cites the fact the Corinthians have (through the work of Paul and his companions, most recently the severe letter) stood firm in the faith. Alternatively, their standing firm in the faith is why Paul et al. continue working for their joy (they are fitting objects of apostolic ministry).

6. This parenthetical reference to the Corinthians' joy leads Paul to expand on the reason for his change of plans (2:1-2). He wanted to spare them (and himself) the agony and frustration of another sorrowful visit. If he had come to Corinth as planned, it would have been "with grief," meaning the grief of more misunderstanding and distrust rather than the kind of grief that leads to repentance.

7. Moreover, because his own joy is, to some extent, dependent on that of his congregations, to have inflicted this kind of spiritually unproductive grief on the Corinthians would have dried up a source of his own happiness.

## **C. The "Tearful/Severe Letter" (2:3-11)**

### **1. Motivation of the letter (2:3-4)**

**<sup>3</sup>And I wrote this very thing, lest when I came I should have grief from [those] of whom I ought to rejoice, being confident regarding you all that my joy is [the joy] of all of you. <sup>4</sup>For out of much affliction and anxiety of heart, I wrote to you through many tears, not that you should**



**be grieved but that you should know the love which I have abundantly for you.**

a. Instead of making a return visit on the way to Macedonia as he had planned, Paul wrote the "severe letter" rebuking them and demanding that they show their spiritual mettle by disciplining the person who had attacked him so viciously. His purpose was to remove the friction between them by having them reassert their allegiance to him, so that when he did pay them another visit it would be a happy one.

b. He wrote such a strong letter so that his next visit would bring him joy rather than grief, being certain the changes that brought him joy also would bring them joy. In other words, he called them to repent because he knew that his joy in their repentance is their joy also, even if they did not yet appreciate that fact. Contrary to many commentators, I do not believe Paul is saying that when he wrote the severe letter he was sure the Corinthians would respond positively to his appeal. There are indications in the letter that he was unsure of their response (2:4, 12-13, 7:5-9).

c. Paul wrote to them out of anguish over their spiritual welfare and shed many tears in the process. He knew that his words would inflict some pain, but he was no way lashing out at them or trying to even the score. He wrote what they needed to hear in the hope they would realize how much he truly loved them.

d. Christian love compels us to correct our erring brothers and sisters, but this is never easy to do. Herbert Farmer put it this way:

Love meets its most searching test when it is faced with the necessity of deeply estranging the loved one in order to bless him. And the more the love is pure and intense, the severer the test is, the more fierce the temptation to keep friendship at the cost of truth. When love is crying out for fellowship, it is the hardest thing in the world deliberately to pursue a course which you know for the time being will destroy it.<sup>28</sup>

## **2. Appeal to forgive the disciplined offender (2:5-11)**

**<sup>5</sup>Now if someone has caused grief, he has not [only]<sup>29</sup> grieved me but, to some extent (lest I exaggerate), all of you. <sup>6</sup>This punishment by the majority [is] enough for such a person, <sup>7</sup>so that on the other hand you should rather forgive and comfort [him], lest such a one should be swallowed up by more abundant grief. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, I urge you to confirm [your] love for him. <sup>9</sup>For indeed I wrote for this [purpose], that I might**

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<sup>28</sup> Herbert Farmer, *The Healing Cross* (London: Nisbet, 1939), 196.

<sup>29</sup> Harris states (p. 223), citing Zerwick § 445, "On occasion [Paul] uses the negative, not with an absolute meaning ('not at all'), but in a relative sense 'not so much,' or 'not primarily,' or 'not only' (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2 Cor. 7:12)." Thus NIV reads "he has not *so much* grieved me" and NET reads "he has not saddened me *alone*."

**know your quality, whether you are obedient in all things. <sup>10</sup>And to whom you forgive anything, I also [forgive]; for indeed, what I have forgiven -- if I have forgiven anything -- [it was] on account of you in [the] presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup>lest we be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.**

a. Paul's letter had called for the Corinthians to discipline the one who had attacked him (7:11-12). He did so because the attack was not simply a personal matter but involved his authority as an apostle, which authority had to be defended for the sake of the church. The attack not only grieved Paul, but also grieved the Corinthians to some extent, specifically when Paul's letter convicted them of their failure to have acted in his defense (7:11).

b. Harris says of the offender: "We conclude, therefore, that the ἀδικία [the wrong] was a verbal assault on Paul's person and authority carried out by a member of the Corinthian church at some indefinite time between the 'painful visit' and the 'severe letter.'"<sup>30</sup>

c. The Corinthians responded to Paul's directive and disciplined the offender, probably meaning that the group as a whole had disfellowshipped him. The offender suffered as a result, and presumably was brought to repentance, but some apparently wanted to continue or even increase his punishment. Paul instructs them to forgive this man and to encourage him by confirming their love for him. This would serve to assure him of God's forgiveness. The goal is not to overwhelm him in grief but to redeem him.

d. In v. 9 Paul says that he wrote to test their spiritual mettle, to see if they would acknowledge his divinely given apostolic authority. By disciplining the offender, they stood the test and proved their obedience in all respects (see 7:11-12). Now by ending the punishment they would be doing the same.

e. In v. 10 Paul assures them that the one they forgive has his forgiveness also. In other words, they need not worry that Paul might not approve of the reinstatement of the one who hurt him so badly. Having learned of the man's repentance from Titus, he has forgiven him. He downplays the degree of personal wrong by adding "if I have forgiven anything" in order to downplay the magnanimity of his mercy.

f. His forgiveness had been given at least in part for their good, that is, for the very purpose of facilitating the reconciliation, and in conformity with the judgment of Christ. A failure to reconcile with the penitent offender would have been to play into Satan's hands by allowing him to make off with one of the community's members.

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<sup>30</sup> Harris (2005), 227.

## **D. Assurance of His Concern for Them (2:12-13)**

**<sup>12</sup>Now after coming to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and a door having been opened for me by [the] Lord, <sup>13</sup>I did not have relief in my spirit because I did not find my brother Titus. Instead, having said farewell to them, I went into Macedonia.**

1. Paul assures his readers that, despite appearances to the contrary (i.e., change of plans and "severe letter"), he cares very deeply about them. After facing mortal danger in Ephesus, Paul left for Troas primarily to preach the gospel, and the Lord opened a door for him there (i.e., provided an opportunity for an effective work).

2. Despite the promising mission, when Titus did not show up in Troas with news of the Corinthians' response to Paul's letter, Paul was restless. So deep was his concern for the church in Corinth at this point, that he left the promising mission field of Troas and went to Macedonia (apparently in keeping with a contingency plan) to learn as soon as he could how Titus had been received. (Note: Paul spends a week in Troas on the return leg of his missionary journey – Acts 20:7-12).

3. Paul picks up his rendezvous with Titus in 7:5ff, but before doing so, he writes several chapters on the nature of his apostolic ministry (2:14 - 7:4).

## **III. Paul's Apostolic Ministry (2:14 - 7:4)**

### **A. Gratitude for God-glorifying Indignities of Ministry (2:14-17)**

**<sup>14</sup>But thanks be to God, who always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ and through us manifests the odor of the knowledge of him in every place. <sup>15</sup>For we are to God [the] aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup>to the latter, an odor from death to death, to the former, an odor from life to life. And who [is] adequate for these things? <sup>17</sup>For we are not like the many who peddle the word of God, but like [those who act] from sincerity. On the contrary, like [those] from God, we speak before God in Christ.**

1. Though Paul in the discharge of his apostolic ministry had suffered numerous indignities in the eyes of Greco-Roman culture, he gives thanks to God who always leads them in such a humiliating path, who always leads them as vanquished captives in his victory parade, and who, in so doing, uses them to spread the knowledge of Christ in every place.

a. The verb θριαμβεύω is used only here and in Col. 2:15, and in both places it likely is a technical term that refers to the Roman triumphal procession. A triumphal procession "was a lavish parade conducted in Rome to celebrate great victories in

significant military campaigns."<sup>31</sup> They were major cultural and civic events and were widely known throughout the Roman Empire. Hafemann says, "The highest honor any Roman Caesar or general could receive would be to lead one of these parades."<sup>32</sup>

b. In these parades, captives from the conquered territory were led in chains before the chariot of the one being honored for the victory, and the victorious soldiers followed behind the chariot shouting "Hail, triumphant one!" When θριαμβεύω is followed by a noun or pronoun in the accusative case, as is done here, that noun or pronoun refers to a person or thing that has been conquered not to a person or thing that is triumphing or celebrating a victory. The NIV says God "always leads us *as captives*" to make that relationship clear.

c. As Rome's conquered captives traveled a path of humiliation, so Paul as God's conquered captive travels a path in which he suffers indignities. But he is grateful to be so used because his humiliation brings honor and glory to God through spreading the knowledge of Christ. His suffering, which is humiliation in the eyes of the world, is God's glorification because through that suffering the good news of Christ is spread everywhere. Hubbard comments:

The rendering of the NIV, to be led *as captives*, is consistent with (1) the only known meaning of the underlying Greek verb (*thriambeuō*), (2) the imagery of the Roman Triumph, and (3) the larger theological perspective of these chapters as strength displayed through weakness. . . . Although formerly an enemy of the cross (Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13), Paul thanks God that precisely through his humiliation and suffering on behalf of Christ the gospel advances.<sup>33</sup>

2. In God's eyes, Paul and his companions are, through and in association with their suffering, the sweet aroma of Christ's sacrifice being spread among the people, who include those who are being saved and those who are perishing. Those who reject the apostolic messengers and their message are in the process of perishing, are heading for damnation, whereas those who accept those messengers and their message are in the process of being saved, are heading for eternal life in the consummated kingdom. So Paul's ministry is not on trial; those to whom he ministers are!

3. Paul then asks (v. 16b) who is adequate for this awesome task of being the aroma of Christ, a task that has eternal consequences. The answer is that Paul and his companions are adequate, for unlike so many others who peddle the word of God for profit, who adulterate the message for personal gain, Paul preaches out of sincerity. He speaks as one sent by God with full awareness that he ministers in Christ in God's sight. As he will make clear in 3:5, his adequacy for the task is from God not himself.

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<sup>31</sup> Hafemann (2000), 107.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Hubbard (2017), 40.

## B. Letters of Recommendation (3:1-3)

**Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some, letters of recommendation to you or from you? <sup>2</sup>You [yourselves] are our letter, having been inscribed in our hearts, being known and read by all men, <sup>3</sup>showing that you are a letter of Christ having been ministered by us, having been inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not in stone tablets but in tablets [that are] fleshy hearts.**

1. Paul had apparently been criticized by some for "commending himself" instead of having letters of recommendation from others, so he is sensitive to the issue. Those stirring up trouble for Paul in Corinth had come with letters and tried to use that fact to portray themselves as more credible than Paul. They perhaps brought letters from the Pharisaic wing of the Jerusalem church (see, Acts 15:24) or perhaps from other Hellenistic congregations. It seems that they also received or intended to receive letters of recommendation from the Corinthians when they left. Letters were their credentials for operating.

2. Unlike these recently arrived intruders, Paul had founded the church in Corinth, so its very existence served to accredit his apostleship. This is the same point he made in 1 Cor. 9:1-2: "Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."

3. In other words, their existence as a group of Christians *is* Paul's letter of recommendation, a letter authored by Christ himself but brought into being through the agency of the apostle (just like one who writes what is dictated). Christ used Paul to write Paul's own letter of recommendation through the transforming work of the Spirit in the Corinthians' hearts that accompanied the presentation of the gospel in that city. They are a living letter of recommendation. To question the legitimacy of Paul's ministry is to question the legitimacy of their own origins as a body of Christians.

4. Note that in 3:2 many commentators read "written on *your* hearts" (e.g., Barrett, Bruce, Martin, Kruse). If "our" is the correct reading, which has much stronger manuscript support, Paul is saying that the memory of their transforming response to his preaching is etched in his heart, which transformation was evident to all.

5. Paul contrasts tablets that are fleshy hearts with stone tablets rather than with papyrus or parchment because stone tablets are associated with the giving of the Mosaic law and he is beginning to compare ministries under the old and new covenants. The fact Paul's ministry resulted in the transforming work of the Spirit on the human heart means he is a bona fide minister of the new covenant that was prophesied by Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26-27; Jer. 31:31-34; see also, Heb. 8:7-13, 10:15-18).

## Excursus on the Mosaic Law

The relationship between the OT law and the gospel of Christ is an extremely complex topic that is very difficult to synthesize and systematize. One scholar has labeled Paul's understanding of the law "the most intricate doctrinal issue in his theology."<sup>34</sup> But it is important to understand something about how these pieces fit together to make sense of significant portions of the NT, including remaining parts of 2 Corinthians. Rather than reproduce the text here, I encourage you to take a few minutes to read "[Covenants and Commands - What I Wish Someone Had Told Me.](#)"

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### **C. Apostolic Confidence (3:4-6)**

**<sup>4</sup>And we have such confidence through Christ before God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are adequate of ourselves so as to consider anything as [coming] from ourselves; rather, our adequacy [is] from God, <sup>6</sup>who indeed made us adequate [as] ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

1. Paul's confidence in his apostolic ministry comes through Christ, who commissioned him to preach, and is held in the presence of God who knows all things. It is not a false confidence based on human recommendation (see Gal. 1:11-12).

2. Paul hastens to stress that this confidence in his ministry is not self-confidence but a confidence based on the fact that the God who called him to be an apostle made him adequate for the task (see 1 Cor. 15:9-10). His adequacy might not measure up to the world's standards, but his adequacy is the one that counts, an adequacy determined and apportioned by God.

3. Paul mentions that he and his companions have been made adequate as ministers of a new covenant, which is the covenant prophesied by Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26-27; Jer. 31:31-34; see also, Heb. 8:7-13, 10:15-18). As the writer of Hebrews notes (Heb. 8:13), to speak of the "new" covenant is to imply the obsolescence of the old.

4. The new covenant of which they have been made adequate ministers is a covenant "not of letter but of Spirit." The temporary and superseded old covenant the intruders were promoting is one of "letter" in the sense that only its commands remain.<sup>35</sup> In other words, there is no longer a mercy element in it because the sacrifices in association with which forgiveness was granted are no longer recognized in light of Christ's true sacrifice, which underwrote those shadow sacrifices. Accordingly, when those written

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Paul in Rom. 2:28-29, Paul contrasts the one who is circumcised in heart by the Spirit to the one who is circumcised in flesh by the letter, meaning physically circumcised pursuant to the written command.

commands, the letter, kill, as they certainly will because the power of sin prevents anyone from obeying them perfectly, one has no hope. In Paul's words in Gal. 5:4, "You who seek to be pronounced righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

5. The Spirit, on the other hand, not only is involved in giving resurrection life (Rom. 8:11, 29), but through his distinctive work in saints in the new covenant provides a greater spiritual life through regenerating and renewing us (Tit. 3:5) and transforming us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). So to the extent the intruders were attempting to bring the Corinthians under the old covenant, they were misusing it by applying it outside its time in salvation history, with potentially deadly consequences, whereas the new covenant of which Paul was a minister brought the life of the Spirit. The fact the intruders were doing so puts the lie to any claim that they were superior to Paul.

6. Of course, some Jews used the law improperly even during the era of the old covenant by making it a set of rules to be observed in order to establish one's own righteousness (rather than as the revealed manner in which the righteous by faith express their trust in God). This legalism no doubt played a role in the attempt to bring the Mosaic law into the new age.

## **D. Glorious Character of the Apostolic Ministry (3:7-18)**

### **1. Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant (3:7-11)**

**<sup>7</sup>Now if the ministry of death, that was engraved in letters in stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel [were] not able to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, though [it was] being brought to an end, <sup>8</sup>how will the ministry of the Spirit not be with more glory? <sup>9</sup>For if the ministry of condemnation [had] glory, how much more [does] the ministry of righteousness abound in glory! <sup>10</sup>Indeed, the thing having been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, by reason of the surpassing glory. <sup>11</sup>For if the thing being brought to an end [came] through glory, how much more [will] the thing remaining [be] in glory!**

a. Referring to Ex. 34:28-32, where the laws of the old covenant were engraved by God on stone tablets given to Moses, Paul points out that the old covenant, which is now *only* a ministry of death because it is obsolete, was accompanied by glory. Indeed, it came with such glory that the Israelites could not even look at Moses' face because of its (albeit temporary) glow when he descended from the mountain with the tablets.

b. If that ministry – which was only temporary – came with such glory, Paul asks rhetorically how the ministry of the permanent new covenant, the covenant

in which God's Spirit works in a new way, will not be even more glorious. If the old covenant, the ministry of condemnation, had glory, how much does the new covenant, the ministry of righteousness, abound in glory! The subtext is that no one should be turning back toward the old.

c. In fact, the contrast between the two covenants is so great that what once was rightly considered glorious now fades in comparison. As M. Zerwick said, "If the sun is up, the brightness of the moon is no longer bright."<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Veiling and Unveiling (3:12-18)

**<sup>12</sup>Therefore, having such a hope, we act with much boldness, <sup>13</sup>not as Moses [acted]; he would put a veil over his face so the sons of Israel would not gaze at the end of the thing being brought to an end. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were hardened, for until the present day the same veil remains at the public reading of the old covenant, not being lifted, because [only] in Christ is it removed. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, until today, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts, <sup>16</sup>but whenever [anyone] turns to [the] Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of [the] Lord [is], [there is] freedom. <sup>18</sup>And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as from [the] Lord, [the] Spirit.**

a. Since Paul and his companions have a confident expectation that they are ministers of a permanent covenant (the emphasis of v. 11) that will never be surpassed in splendor, they are very bold or frank in conducting their ministry, as those who have nothing to conceal but every reason for fearless candor.

b. Referring to Ex. 34:33-35, Paul contrasts this boldness to Moses' conduct in veiling his face to prevent the Israelites from continuing to gaze at his face until it totally lost its reflected glory. It seems Moses, for whatever reason, was not bold enough to allow the lesson of the old covenant's temporary nature to be taught through such a stark manner as the Israelites watching his face's reflected glory be extinguished. Rather, he resorted to the more indirect means of veiling his face's fading glory. In doing so, he attempted to make the same point, i.e., that the old covenant was not the appropriate object of extreme fixation (intense gazing) because it was not the final stage of salvation history, but in a more subtle manner.

c. Note that this is Paul's inspired interpretation of the OT text. He deduces that the glory of Moses' face faded, probably from the fact it is not mentioned again after Exodus 34 and the fact that in Ex. 40:35 Moses is hindered from entering the tent of

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Harris (2005), 289.



meeting because of "the glory of the Lord that filled it." He then concludes that this was at least partly the reason for the veiling.

d. Unfortunately, the minds of the Israelites were too hardened to receive Moses' more indirect teaching. Instead, the veil became an obstacle to their seeing the truth of the temporality of the old covenant. Metaphorically speaking, the same veil was present in Paul's day when the Scriptures were read in Jewish synagogues. Many Jews continued to be blind to the true meaning of the old covenant, failing to see it as a temporary preparatory agency making them ready to receive Christ (see Gal. 3:24) and thus failed to see the nature of the new covenant.

e. But whenever anyone (with Jews especially in mind) turns to God (Yahweh) through conversion to Christ, the metaphorical veil is removed, just as the literal veil was removed when Moses would go in before God (Ex. 34:34). Those in Christ see the covenants from the correct perspective and thereby appreciate the transcendent glory of the new. Since Judaizers do not appreciate the surpassing glory of the new covenant, they are still veiled, which implies that they are not in Christ (note Paul's direct blast in Gal. 1:6-9).

f. God in Ex. 34:34 (translated "Lord" in LXX), the verse referred to in v. 16, "is the Spirit" in the sense he functions in that verse analogously to the Spirit in the new covenant through providing Moses a distinctive experience of his presence as Moses met him unveiled in the tent. In like manner, Christians distinctively experience the divine presence in the person of the Spirit and have the veil of obscurity regarding the old covenant removed when they commune with the Spirit, i.e., when they become Christians and thus receive the indwelling Spirit.

g. Where the Spirit of the Lord is present, as he is in the hearts of Christians (1:22), there is freedom from the veil that traps one in a misperception of the old covenant, that causes one to under-appreciate the new covenant so as to bind within it the commandments of the old.

h. In the new covenant, all members (like Moses in the old covenant) behold with an unveiled face the glory of God as in a mirror, meaning we see God's glory as it is reflected perfectly in his Son Jesus Christ, who Paul says is the "image of God" (4:3) and in whose face is "the glory of God" (4:6). It is that image of God's perfectly reflected glory in Christ into which we who focus on him are progressively being transformed. As Harris states, "Justified at regeneration, believers are progressively sanctified until their final glorification at the consummation (Rom. 8:29-30; 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10)."<sup>37</sup> Resurrection in a body of glory that is adapted to the eternal state (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:43-44), is "the acceleration and climax of the process of 'Christification.'"<sup>38</sup>

i. This process of transformation is like ("as") the glorification of Moses that came from Yahweh in Ex. 34:34, who in that text, as Paul has already indicated, functions analogously to the Spirit in the new covenant. As Moses experienced and was

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<sup>37</sup> Harris (2005), 316-317.

<sup>38</sup> Harris (2005), 317.

transformed by the divine presence in meeting with Yahweh unveiled in the tent, Christians experience and are transformed by the divine presence in the person of the Spirit and have the veil of obscurity regarding the old covenant removed when we commune with him, i.e., when we become Christians and thus receive the Spirit. As Harris remarks, "The Spirit, his person and his work, is the hallmark of the new covenant."<sup>39</sup>

### **E. Conduct of Paul's Ministry (4:1-6)**

**Therefore, having this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>Rather, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the open proclamation of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup>And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup>in [the case of] whom, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that [they] do not see the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ [as] Lord, and ourselves [as] your slaves on account of Jesus. <sup>6</sup>For the God who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," [is he] who shined in our hearts for [the] illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in [the] face of Christ.**

1. Because God in his mercy had given Paul such a glorious ministry, had entrusted him to be a minister of the gospel by which people enter the Spirit-related new covenant, he does not lose heart in the face of his hardships and disappointments. He does not waver in the discharge of his divine commission. The glory of the mission or cause makes all his suffering fade in comparison.

2. Paul again declares (see 2:17) that, in light of the greatness of the gospel they were called to preach, he and his companions have renounced all unworthy (shameful) ways of presenting it, such as deception or adulterating the word of God. Paul is either defending himself from false claims that he was deceitful and/or twisted the word of God or is attacking those who did in fact act that way, or possibly both. I can imagine Judaizers claiming that Paul had watered down God's word about the old covenant to make the gospel more palatable to Gentiles.

3. Far from discharging their ministry through ignoble means, Paul and his companions openly proclaimed the truth and thus did the right thing in the eyes of both men (if they would be honest) and God.

4. And even if their gospel is veiled, not recognized for the transcendently glorious thing it is, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, those whose minds have been blinded by Satan. In other words, any obscuring of the gospel that exists is not because

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<sup>39</sup> Harris (2005), 318.

of some flaw in Paul's message or in Paul as a messenger but because of the Satan-influenced close-mindedness of those who reject the message (the use of "veil" perhaps suggests an allusion to his Judaizing antagonists – see 3:14-15).

a. In terms of the Judaizers, Satan obscured their appreciation of the gospel by playing on Jewish pride to exalt the Mosaic covenant beyond its intended role.

b. Those who reject Paul's gospel are perishing in that they are on the road to eternal condemnation.

5. The essence of Paul's gospel is not himself but Christ, whom he proclaims *as Lord*. In 1 Cor. 1:23 Paul says "we preach Christ *crucified*." These two elements need to be held together. As Colin Kruse says, "In the gospel, the lordship of Christ is proclaimed and people are called to give their allegiance to him, but the one to whom they are thus called to submit is also the crucified one, the one who died for them."<sup>40</sup>

6. Far from promoting themselves, Paul and his companions had become the Corinthians' servants for Jesus' sake. In other words, they serve humanity in obedience to Christ. 1 Timothy 2:4 says God wants all men to be saved, and Lk. 19:10 says that Jesus came to seek and save what was lost. Paul and his co-workers labor to that end. They do so because God had given them the knowledge of the truth in Christ, who is the glory of God.

## **F. Treasure in Earthen Vessels (4:7-15)**

**<sup>7</sup>Now we have this treasure in earthen vessels in order that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>In every way [we are] being afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, <sup>9</sup>persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup>always carrying around in [our] body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup>For we who are living are always being delivered over to death on account of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup>So then, death is at work in us, but life [is at work] in you. <sup>13</sup>But having the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, and therefore we speak, <sup>14</sup>knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will present [us] with you. <sup>15</sup>For everything [is] on your account, so that grace, having extended through more and more people, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.**

1. Earthen vessels, clay pots, were commonplace, weak, and had little intrinsic value. The priceless treasure that is the gospel was entrusted to such ordinary and

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<sup>40</sup> Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 104-105.

feeble human servants as Paul and his companions so that there be no confusion as to the source of its surpassing power.

a. In being kicked all over the Mediterranean (see 11:23-28) but still surviving and continuing to preach, they were a living lesson that God was the power behind the gospel. It is he and only he who kept their extreme hardships from breaking them.<sup>41</sup> They experienced his power in the midst of their own human weakness. As the strength of the gospel's ministers to endure hardship comes solely from God, so does the gospel's transforming power.

b. Had they, on the other hand, been people in whom the world gloried, people of power, influence, and status, people who knew only praise and success, some might think that the gospel's effect was due, at least in part, to their own abilities.

2. Rather than discrediting them as apostles, Paul says that their daily exposure to danger and death for Christ's sake is a sharing in his fate, in the process of his dying, and that this suffering provides the context for the resurrection life of Jesus to be manifested in their bodies. Note that Paul does not actively seek out sufferings in order to be like Christ, unlike Ignatius; rather, the sufferings of Christ are working themselves out in his life.

a. Thus, their lives reflect the very gospel they preach, a message of life in the midst of death. Because they are subject to deadly forces, they are able to be agents for the disclosure of God's power to save, not only in their deliverance from those afflictions (see 1:8-9) but also in their living through them as those no longer subject to death (as those who have already shared in the resurrection life that will be fully experienced when Christ returns – see Phil. 1:20-21).

b. Here Paul is referring specifically to apostles, but there is a solidarity between Christ and his people such that his sufferings overflow into our lives. In other words, all Christians to some extent share in the sufferings of Christ. As Jesus told the disciples in Jn. 15:19, "If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." And as Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:12), all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. This provides an opportunity for the reality of the resurrection life to shine through us.

3. In v. 12 Paul concludes by conceding that death is at work in him and his companions, in the sense of "dying a thousand deaths." He adds, however, that life is at work in the Corinthians, suggesting that part of their suffering is endured in their effort to

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<sup>41</sup> Paul says in 4:8 that they are "perplexed but not despairing" whereas he said in 1:8 regarding the Asian affliction that they "despaired even of living." It may be that "despairing *even of living*," being certain one was going to die, is not the kind of despairing he means in 4:8. Or perhaps God's rescue from the Asian affliction taught Paul "that there was no need ever again to despair with regard to any circumstance, for 'the God who raises the dead' [1:9] was well able to deliver his servant from extreme peril, if he so chose" (Harris [2005], 344).

bless the Corinthians spiritually. Richard Bauckham expresses the logic of Paul's thinking this way: "If God's definitive salvific act occurred through the weakness of the crucified Jesus, then it should be no surprise that the saving gospel of the crucified Jesus should reach the Gentiles through the weakness of his apostle."<sup>42</sup>

4. In vv. 13-14 Paul speaks of the faith that drives him to preach in spite of the suffering he faces. The reference in v. 13 is to Ps. 115:1 in the LXX (see 116:10 in MT).

a. He *knows* that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise them "with Jesus." As Paul indicated in 1 Cor. 15:20-23, Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits, a sign of the full harvest to follow. God, who gathered the firstfruits, will surely bring in the full harvest.

b. That resurrection is not only for apostles but for all, such as the Corinthians, who have put their faith in Christ. They, along with Paul and his companions, will be brought into the divine presence "on that day." As he says in 5:10, all will come before the judgment seat of Christ.

5. In v. 15 Paul says that all he does and all he endures is to bless people like the Corinthians and ultimately to bring glory to God as more and more people receive his grace and come to praise him as a result.

## **G. Boldness Reaffirmed and Further Supported (4:16 - 5:5)**

**<sup>16</sup>Therefore, we do not lose heart, but even if our outward man is being wasted away, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For the lightness of our affliction, which is momentary, is producing for us far beyond all measure an eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup>as we focus not on the things that are seen but on the things that are not seen, for the things that are seen [are] temporary, but the things that are not seen [are] eternal. <sup>5</sup> For we know that if our earthly house, [our] tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup>For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed over with our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup>presupposing, of course, that having been clothed\* we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup>For indeed while being in the tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed over in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by the life. <sup>5</sup>Now the one who prepared us for this very thing [is] God, who gave us the down payment of the Spirit.**

1. For the reasons he has identified ("Therefore"), they do not lose heart, are bold, in preaching the gospel despite affliction. He is referring to the greatness of the

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Garland (1999), 233.

ministry entrusted to them, the fact suffering provides the context for the presentation of the resurrection life, the prospect of sharing in Christ's resurrection, and the purpose of causing thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

2. In addition, they do not lose heart in preaching because, though their body is being worn out by persecutions, their heart is regularly being invigorated, no doubt by the Spirit (as in Tit. 3:5). As Bruce comments, his spiritual resilience resulted from the inner resources which supplied him with constant sustenance and refreshment.

3. This ongoing renewal of the inner man, this spiritual strengthening, is brought about (by the Spirit) at least in part through the adoption of an eternal perspective, a perspective that contrasts the temporality of suffering in this world with the immeasurable eternal glory that is the God-ordained outcome of faithful endurance. As they focus on the big picture, on the coming eternal reality rather than on their immediate, transient hardship, they are given strength for bearing that hardship (see Rom. 8:18-25).

4. In 5:1 Paul elaborates on the contrast between this present temporary reality, what is seen, and the coming eternal reality, what is not (presently) seen. He knows that if his temporary house (tent), meaning his mortal body (see 4:10-11), ceases to be capable of being animated by his spirit – in other words, if he dies – death will not be the last word. There is waiting for him, kept secure *in heaven*, a permanent house (building), an immortal body, which he will receive *from God* at the resurrection.

a. Remember that Paul had not long ago said to them in 1 Cor. 15:42-43, 50-54: <sup>42</sup> *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in a perishable state; it is raised in an imperishable state.* <sup>43</sup> *It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. . . .* <sup>50</sup> *Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* <sup>51</sup> *Pay attention; I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we all will be changed,* <sup>52</sup> *in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* <sup>53</sup> *For this perishable thing must put on imperishability, and this mortal thing must put on immortality.* <sup>54</sup> *And when this perishable thing puts on imperishability and this mortal thing puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be [fulfilled]: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

b. As N. T. Wright notes, the statement that the building from God, the house not made with hands, is *in the heavens* means it is in

*the place where the divinely intended future for the world is kept safely in store, against the day when, like props being brought out from the wings onto stage, it will come to birth in the renewed world, 'on earth as in heaven.'* If I assure my guests that there is champagne for them in the fridge I am not suggesting that we all need to get into the fridge if we are to have the party. The future body, the non-corruptible (and hence 'eternal') 'house', is at

present 'in the heavens' as opposed to 'on earth' (*epigeios*) (5:1); but it will not stay there.<sup>43</sup>

5. Paul says in 5:2 that, having this knowledge of our eternal destiny, we in our present state sigh or groan in desire and anticipation, longing in the face of the struggles of mortal existence to be clothed over with our dwelling from heaven, our resurrection body.

a. The "groaning" is not an expression of doubt or agony but an expression of hope and anticipation. It is the sighing of a pain charged with hope (see Rom. 8:23-25). This is supported by the fact the verb "we groan" is qualified by the participial phrase "longing to be clothed over with our dwelling from heaven." As Kruse comments:

What is being described is essentially a positive longing to put on a heavenly dwelling. While afflictions experienced by the apostle may have caused him to groan and sharpened his longing, this all resulted in a strong desire for what God had promised rather than with a preoccupation with the afflictions themselves -- something which would have been quite uncharacteristic of the apostle as we see him in his letters.<sup>44</sup>

b. The verb "be clothed over" (*ἐπενδύω*) means to put an item of clothing *over what is already on*, like an overcoat. (The verb is an aorist middle infinitive, but it is here often translated as a passive, e.g., KJV, ASV, NAU, NRSV, NKJV, NAB, NIV.) It is used again in v. 4, but the verb in v. 3 (*ἐνδύω*) is different.<sup>45</sup> Some believe these verbs are here used as synonyms, the variation being merely stylistic, but I am with those

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<sup>43</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 368.

<sup>44</sup> Kruse (1987), 114.

<sup>45</sup> With most English translations and in accordance with the text of the Tyndale House Greek New Testament, I take ἐνδύω as the original text in v. 3 rather than ἐκδύω. NET note states:

Some MSS read "taken off" (ἐκδυσάμενοι, *ekdusamenoî*) instead of "put on" (ἐνδυσάμενοι, *endusamenoî*). This alternative reading would change the emphasis of the verse from putting on "our heavenly house" to taking off "our earthly house" (see the following note regarding the specification of the referent). The difference between the two readings is one letter (v or κ), either of which may be mistaken for the other especially when written in uncial script. ἐνδυσάμενοι enjoys strong support from the Alexandrian text (P<sup>46</sup> κ B C 33 1739 1881), Byzantine witnesses, versions (lat sy co), and Clement of Alexandria. The Western text is the only text type to differ: D<sup>\*c</sup> reads ἐκδυσάμενοι, as does ar<sup>f</sup> Mcion Tert Spec; F and G read εκλ for εκδ which indirectly aligns them with D (and was surely due to confusion of letters in uncial script). Thus "put on" has the oldest and best external attestation by far. Internal evidence also favors this reading. At first glance, it may seem that "after we have put on our heavenly house we will not be found naked" is an obvious statement; the scribe of D may have thought so and changed the participle. But v. 3 seems parenthetical (so A. Plummer, *Second Corinthians* [ICC], 147), and the idea that "we do not want to be unclothed but clothed" is repeated in v. 4 with an explanatory "for." This concept also shows up in v. 2 with the phrase "we desire to put on." So the context can be construed to argue for "put on" as the original reading. B. M. Metzger argues against the reading of NA<sup>27</sup>, stating that ἐκδυσάμενοι is "an early alteration to avoid apparent tautology" (*TCGNT* 511; so also Plummer, 148). In addition, the reading ἐνδυσάμενοι fits the Pauline pattern of equivalence between apodosis and protasis that is found often enough in his conditional clauses. Thus, "put on" has the mark of authenticity and should be considered original.

who think "the double compound is significant and not merely a synonym for the uncompounded word."<sup>46</sup> The verb ἐπενδύω appears only in these two verses in the New Testament and does not appear at all in the LXX.

6. I think Paul is saying in v. 3 that the resurrection hope, the hope to be *clothed over* with an immortal body from heaven, presupposes that<sup>47</sup> those who have been *clothed* with Christ, who have put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27), will not be found naked by God at the judgment, meaning they will not stand before God on their own merit, in the nakedness of the first Adam, but will stand before God clothed in the righteousness of the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. The hope of being raised "with Jesus" (4:14) is predicated on that identification. In other words, the blessed resurrection hope is for those who have clothed themselves with Christ and not been alienated from him, as Paul warned would happen to the Galatians who accepted the Judaizers' false gospel (Gal. 5:4).

b. The reference in v. 2 to being "clothed over with our dwelling from heaven" is an extension of our initially having been clothed with Christ.

(1) Victor Furnish says, "to 'clothe oneself' with Christ at baptism is to receive the Spirit as a *down payment* on the fullness of salvation (v.5; 1:22; cf. Rom. 8:23), and to long to 'clothe oneself over' with a heavenly dwelling is to long for the fulfillment of what has already been inaugurated."<sup>48</sup>

(2) Hafemann likewise remarks, "[B]eing clothed with Christ is the theological foundation to being clothed with our eternal dwelling from God. The believer's union with the resurrected Christ inaugurated in baptism is consummated in the resurrection from the dead."<sup>49</sup>

7. Verse 4 reiterates the point of v. 2. We sigh longingly in the midst of afflictions because we do not want to be unclothed, meaning we do not want to abandon Christ and be left to stand before God in the nakedness of our own merit, but rather want to be *clothed over* with our immortal resurrection body as a result of our being clothed with Christ. Our hearts are set on faithfulness and its eternal reward, so we particularly long for that reward when the hardships of this temporal reality inflict us.

8. Verse 5 declares that God is the one who prepared us for resurrection life, the one who gave us the Spirit as a down payment on that life. The aorist participles (prepared, gave) correspond to the aorist participle in v. 3 (having been clothed) and point to a decisive moment in the past, no doubt the time of baptism.

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<sup>46</sup> Barnett (1997), 261 (fn. 30).

<sup>47</sup> On taking εἴ γε καὶ as "presupposing, of course," see, Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 267 and Harris (2005), 384.

<sup>48</sup> Furnish (1984), 297-298.

<sup>49</sup> Hafemann (2000), 213.



## H. Confidence and Commitment (5:6-10)

**<sup>6</sup>Therefore, having confidence always, and knowing that while being at home in the body we are away from the Lord -- <sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith not by sight -- <sup>8</sup>we have confidence, [I say], and would prefer rather to be away from the body and be at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Accordingly, whether being at home or away, we aim to be pleasing to him. <sup>10</sup>For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive back in accordance with what he did in the body, whether good or bad.**

1. Because they always have confidence in the glorious resurrection existence that is in store for them, and knowing by faith that life in this present mortal body is in some sense life away from the Lord, who they know by faith is dwelling in heaven, they would, if it were up to them, prefer to be dead and thus be with the Lord awaiting the resurrection.

a. This is the same sentiment Paul expressed in Phil. 1:21-24: <sup>21</sup> *For to me, to live [is] Christ and to die [is] gain.* <sup>22</sup> *But if [I am] to live in [the] flesh, this [will mean] fruitful labor for me, yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.* <sup>23</sup> *Indeed, I am hard pressed between the two: I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for [this is] far better,* <sup>24</sup> *but to remain in the flesh [is] more necessary for your sake.*

b. The Spirit empowers them to endure suffering, hardships, and persecution, but he does so in conjunction with their confidence, born of faith, regarding both life after death (being with the Lord awaiting resurrection) and life *after* life after death (being resurrected in an immortal body for life in the new heavens and new earth).

2. Given the blessed future the Lord has provided for his followers, Paul and his companions are all about pleasing him, whether here on earth or with him in heaven. They are completely given over to doing what he wants done and will not be moved to displease him for the sake of pleasing people.

3. And they make it their goal to please him knowing that all Christians, as part of humanity, will appear before Christ's judgment seat and give an account for how they lived. On the day of the final judgment, one's life will bear witness to the Spirit-powered transformation that accompanies being clothed with Christ through faith or will bear witness to the lack of such faith. As Daniel B. Wallace says (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 219): "Both James and Paul would agree, I believe, with the statement: 'Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.'"<sup>50</sup> It is because of their faith that Paul and his companions make a point of living as God would have them live.

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 219

## I. Motivation for Service (5:11-15)

**<sup>11</sup>Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we have been made plain to God, and I hope also to have been made plain in your consciences. <sup>12</sup>We are not again commending ourselves to you but giving you a basis for a boast on our behalf, so that you may have [a response] to those who boast in appearance and not in heart. <sup>13</sup>For if we are out of our minds, [it is] for God; if we are in our right minds, [it is] for you. <sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ compels us, having concluded this, that one died on behalf of all, therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died on behalf of all that the living might no longer live for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised up.**

1. Because they know that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (therefore), they know the fear of the Lord; and because they know the fear of the Lord, they persuade men. In other words, they know the glory and power and authority of the Lord Jesus, the one who has called them to apostolic service, and thus fear him in the sense they fear what it would mean to treat him disrespectfully, to refuse to take with appropriate seriousness his call on their lives.

a. As faithful Christians, they are not living in fear of judgment; rather they are living in the knowledge that Christ *deserves* to be feared by all who would refuse to accept him as Lord. Because of their faith that Jesus is Lord, they strive to do what he has called them to do, which includes persuading men. So Paul's ministry is not about pleasing people, not about fitting into their concept of a blessed man. It is about pleasing the Lord.

b. It is in faithfulness to the Lord that they strive to "persuade men." They do not, of course, persuade in the negative sense of winning favor through deception or compromise (see Gal. 1:10), but in a way consistent with Jesus' lordship. They persuade with full knowledge that their motives and methods are fully exposed before God and in the hope that those motives and methods are also clear to the Corinthians' hearts.

2. Paul must have been criticized for commending himself because he denies that he is doing that when defending the straightforward character of his brand of persuasion. Rather, he is giving them a basis to answer his critics. He is giving those in Corinth who have reaffirmed their loyalty to him after Titus's visit ammunition to defend their confidence in his ministry.

3. He describes his critics as those who boast in appearance and not in heart. They have a shallow, external concept of spirituality. They prided themselves in such outward matters as their letters of recommendation (3:1), their forceful personality (10:10), their oratorical skills (11:6), their receiving money for preaching (11:7), their Jewish pedigree (11:22), and their visionary experiences (12:1-7). So not only did Paul's opponents claim that he lacked certain social indicators of authentic apostleship; they also claimed that he exhibited the Spirit too little for an authentic apostle.

4. The opponents' emphasis on their visionary experiences is probably foremost in Paul's mind because:

a. In v. 13 he says that *his* ecstatic visionary experiences (being "not in his right mind" because of a vision or trance – Acts 10:10, 11:5, 22:17) are for God. In other words, they were moments of intimacy between himself and God, not something to be paraded to impress people.

b. On the other hand, his *rational* interaction with the Corinthians (being in his right mind) is for their spiritual benefit, something Paul is probably suggesting is a more relevant test in the evaluation of apostolic ministry.

c. This somewhat parallels Paul's comments about tongues in 1 Cor. 14, where the emphasis is on edification. In 14:28 Paul says that if no one is available to interpret the foreign language in which the worshipper miraculously speaks, the tongue-speaker must remain silent in the assembly. In that case, he must speak to God for his own benefit, meaning he must exercise his gift in private.

d. Many in the Charismatic movement have fallen prey to this kind of external evaluation of spirituality, this emphasis on the showy.

5. In v. 14 Paul explains that his commitment to bless the Corinthians spiritually (through rational interaction) is compelled by the fact of Christ's love, demonstrated in his death for all mankind.

a. And "therefore all died" in the sense that Christ's death was sufficient to serve as the death penalty for all. The penalty for all human sin has been paid, but it still must be individually appropriated through faith.

b. Verse 15 adds that Christ's atoning death for all mankind was intended to produce people who no longer live for themselves but for Christ (the one who died for them *and was raised*), which is precisely what Paul is doing. The question for all of us is whose interest are we pursuing in our lives. Are we living for ourselves or for the one who died for us?

## **J. Message of Reconciliation (5:16 - 6:2)**

**<sup>16</sup>So from now [on], we regard no one according to [the] flesh; even though we have regarded Christ according to [the] flesh, now we no longer regard [him that way]. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone [is] in Christ, [there is] a new creation; the old things passed away -- Look! New things have come to be. <sup>18</sup>And all things [are] from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not charging**

**their trespasses to them, and has put on us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we serve as ambassadors of Christ, with God appealing through us. We implore [people] on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>The one who did not know sin [God] made [to be] sin on our behalf, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 6 So working together with [God], we appeal also to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup>For he says, "In [the] acceptable time I heard you, and in [the] day of salvation I helped you." Look, now [is the] acceptable time; look, now [is the] day of salvation!**

1. In light of the fact Christ died for mankind and was raised from the dead, a fact that changes everything, Paul and his coworkers (and rightly all believers) no longer judge people from a worldly, external perspective. They now see everything through the lens of the Christ event. Indeed, we know how misleading a fleshly, worldly assessment was in the case of Christ. The world's assessment is represented in the fact he was crucified like the lowest of criminals; the reality, however, was that he was the divine sacrifice for our sins, God's chosen Savior of the world. David Garland writes:

The primary reason for raising this issue is the Corinthians' misjudgment of his ministry, which they have assessed according to the worldly paradigms with which they are more familiar. Paul confesses that he (using an authorial "we") viewed reality and persons from a fleshly perspective which used only human yardsticks to measure others. False, superficial criteria led him to esteem those who appeared to be wise, influential, of noble birth, and strong, and to disdain those who were none of those things. Before he was captured by Christ, such worldly norms warped his judgments as they do all who live under the thralldom of sin and whose veiled, benighted minds screen out God's truth.<sup>51</sup>

2. So if anyone is a Christian, he or she is part of a completely new creation, part of the eternal heavenly age that has already broken into the present evil age and which will be fully and ultimately expressed when Christ returns. As citizens of that new age, the lenses of the old age can no longer be made to fit us. Our perception of reality and of God's ways has been radically altered by the Christ event. Things which once were regarded as important are now seen as being worthless (e.g., Phil 3:4-8).

3. This is all from God. In all the action of the gospel, the initiative is his. The new order, like the old, is his creative work. God is the one who reconciled Paul and his fellow apostles (and their assistants) to himself through Christ and entrusted to *them* the message of reconciliation. God, of course, reconciled all believers to himself, of which Paul and his fellow apostles are representative, but the focus here is on the specialness of Paul's ministry as a genuine apostle in response to the attempts of some in Corinth to diminish him. Guthrie remarks, "The 'us' (ἡμεῖς, *hēmas*) to whom Paul refers in the first half of the verse [v.

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<sup>51</sup> Garland (1999), 283.

18] seems to be the apostle himself and his coworkers, for in the latter half of the verse God is said to have given 'to us' (ἡμῖν, *hēmin*) the ministry of reconciliation."<sup>52</sup>

a. This message of reconciliation that was entrusted to the apostles by God refers to their foundational role in conveying to the world the message of God's saving work in Christ, "that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not charging their trespasses to them." Jesus is God's way of peace, peace through the forgiveness of our sins.

b. The foundational message that was given to the apostles by God was passed on to others. As Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:2, "and what you heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these things entrust to faithful men who will be qualified to teach others also." This is the church's message to the world. But the recipients of that message who continue to spread it are different from those through whom the Spirit initially gave it.

4. It is because the apostles were distinctively entrusted by God with the message of reconciliation (Therefore) that they qualify as "ambassadors" on behalf of Christ. The only other time this word is used in the NT or LXX is Eph. 6:20, where Paul refers to himself as an ambassador in chains. As Harris notes: "To be an ambassador in the ancient world (Greek, Roman, or Jewish), as in modern times, involved three things: (1) a commissioning for a special assignment; (2) representing the sender; and (3) exercising the authority of the sender."<sup>53</sup> Garland writes:

Paul identifies himself as an ambassador of Christ. Our modern perception of an ambassador as an official of the highest rank chosen and certified by a government to represent it before another helps us appreciate the magnitude of Paul's claim. He is Christ's spokesman. He does not act on his own authority but under the commission of a greater power and authority who sent him. Paul therefore understands himself to be divinely authorized to announce to the world God's terms for peace.<sup>54</sup>

5. As an ambassador of Christ, God is making his appeal through Paul (and others similarly commissioned).<sup>55</sup> He is God's appointed agent in spreading the aroma of life. Barnett notes, "Paul adds to this credential [of being an ambassador] the closely related claim that 'God makes his appeal through us,' that is, God speaks through the apostles (which in this context means Paul himself)."<sup>56</sup>

6. In fulfillment of that commission, Paul (and the other apostles and those who act under their immediate direction) implore *people* on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to

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<sup>52</sup> Guthrie (20015), 308-309; see also, Barnett (1997), 304-305; Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 256 (fn. 527).

<sup>53</sup> Harris (2005), 445.

<sup>54</sup> Garland (1999), 295.

<sup>55</sup> On translating ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν as "with God appealing through us," see Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 135; Barnett (1997), 310 (fn. 45); Seifrid (2014), 259 (fn. 536); Guthrie (2015), 311.

<sup>56</sup> Barnett (1997), 310.

God. The text simply says, "We implore on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God," leaving unstated the object of that imploring. Many translations add "you," meaning the Corinthians readers, but I think it makes better sense to generalize the object of their imploring. As apostles, they implore *people* to be reconciled to God, which the Corinthians are presumed to have been.<sup>57</sup> Seifrid comments: "The main English versions (ESV, NIV, NRSV), by the use of direct address in the second person ('We appeal *to you*'), suggest that Paul here speaks to the Corinthians. But he turns to them explicitly only in 6:1. It is far more likely that he here presents his message to all the world."<sup>58</sup>

7. The reconciliation which Paul urges on behalf of Christ is made available through Christ's atoning work, a topic he elaborates on in v. 21. God made Christ, who did not know sin, to be "sin" on our behalf, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

a. The sinless Son of God bore the consequences of our sin on the cross in order that God might deem us righteous by refusing, because of Christ's death in our place, to take account of our sins.

b. In taking upon himself the burden of humanity's sins (cf. Isa. 53:4-6, 12), Christ bore the holy wrath of God; he drank dry the cup of that wrath. His crucifixion was like none other. They all shared the horrible physical suffering inherent in that form of torture, but only Jesus took on himself the penalty for human sin. There is no love like it.

8. So working together with God, Paul and his coworkers also appeal to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. In other words, they want them to remain faithful to the gospel they initially received, which involves remaining loyal to Paul as God's apostle and not swallowing the false teaching of the Judaizing intruders.

9. He emphasizes the seriousness of this appeal by quoting from Isa. 49:8, which speaks of God's gracious deliverance from the bondage of captivity at the chosen time. Christ is the deliverance *par excellence*, and the time of that deliverance has come; it is here. It is absolutely unthinkable that such grace should be received in vain!

## **K. A Blameless Ministry (6:3-10)**

**<sup>3</sup>We in no way give anyone a cause for offense, so that the ministry not be faulted. <sup>4</sup>Rather, in every way, as ministers of God, we commend ourselves: with much endurance -- in afflictions, in distresses, in difficulties, <sup>5</sup>in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in labors, in sleepless nights, in times without food -- <sup>6</sup>with purity, with knowledge, with patience, with kindness, with [the] Holy Spirit, with genuine love, <sup>7</sup>with [the] word of truth, with [the] power of God; through the weapons of righteousness for the right [hand] and the left, <sup>8</sup>through glory and**

<sup>57</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971 [reprint 1992]), 210.

<sup>58</sup> Seifrid (2014), 259; see also, Harris (2005), 447-449; Hubbard (2017), 245 (first fn. 4).

**dishonor, through bad reputation and good reputation; [regarded] as deceivers, yet true men; <sup>9</sup>as unknowns, yet well-known; as dying, yet, look, we live; as being punished, yet not put to death; <sup>10</sup>as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.**

1. In 6:3 Paul says that he conducts his apostolic ministry in a way that is above reproach. He does not want to be an obstacle to people receiving the grace of God in their lives. If people have legitimate questions about the integrity of the messenger, they may use that as an excuse to reject the message. This is something every Christian needs to remember.

2. Rather, Paul and his companions, as servants of God, conduct themselves in a way that commends or accredits their ministry.

a. They exhibited great endurance which testifies to their commitment to the task. They are not in it just to get something. Their endurance through hardships shows them to be "true believers" in what they proclaim, not some kind of religious hustlers who only sing the song when it benefits them to do so.

(1) Paul then specifies the kinds of things they have endured in their commitment to the gospel. The nine circumstances he lists comprise three sets of three.

(2) *Afflictions, distresses, and difficulties* are general terms for hardships. *Beatings, imprisonments, and riots* are particular examples of hardships inflicted on them by others. *Labors, sleepless nights, and times without food* speak of hardships voluntarily undertaken.

b. They exhibited "purity" (both moral uprightness and sincerity of purpose), "knowledge" (both the plan of redemption and pastoral insight), "patience" (endurance of injury without anger or retaliation), "kindness" (generous and sympathetic disposition), "the Holy Spirit" (His power in their lives), "genuine love" (not feigned), "the word of truth" (the divinely revealed gospel), and "the power of God" (disclosed through their weakness, suffering, and dedication to serving others).

c. They waged their battle with weapons of righteousness fashioned for the right hand and the left. Whether attacking (sword) or defending (shield), they never resorted to the unholy tactics of many. This is a message that many need to hear in this age of social media.

d. They showed themselves to be servants of God in that they would not be intimidated when foes dishonored or held them in low regard, nor would they be distracted from faithfulness when friends honored or held them in high regard.

e. From a worldly point of view, they were seen one way, but these worldly judgments missed the deeper reality of their ministry. From a spiritual perspective, which is the right perspective, they were quite something else. Through this lens the quality and genuineness of their ministry was evident. The contrast of worldly judgments and the spiritual realities are: (1) deceivers vs. men of integrity; (2) nobodies vs. well known to God's people; (3) dying vs. living by resurrection power; (4) punished vs. escaping death to bless others; (5) grieving vs. always rejoicing in blessings; (6) poor vs. enriching many with salvation; (7) having nothing vs. possessing everything worth having.

## **L. An Appeal for Reconciliation of Heart (6:11 - 7:4)**

### **1. The appeal (6:11-13)**

**<sup>11</sup>Our mouth has been opened to you, Corinthians, and our heart has been widened. <sup>12</sup>You are not minimized by us; rather, you are minimized in your feelings. <sup>13</sup>As recompense in kind -- I say as to children -- you also be widened.**

a. Paul and his companions have bared their souls to the Corinthians and had made room for them in their hearts. The problem in their relationship was not that Paul and his companions had restricted their affection for the Corinthians but that the Corinthians had restricted theirs for Paul and his companions.

b. Paul tenderly urges them to reciprocate the affection that he and his companions have for them. A minister is able to be most effective when the congregation loves him. Antagonism or reservation breeds resistance to the minister's message; the people cease to be teachable.

### **2. Removing an impediment to reciprocating their affection (6:14 - 7:1)**

**<sup>14</sup>Do not be misyoked with unbelievers. For what commonality [has] righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship [has] light with darkness? <sup>15</sup>And what concord [has] Christ with Beliar, or what share [has] a believer with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>And what agreement [has the] temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said, "I will dwell among them, and I will walk with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says [the] Lord, and do not touch an unclean thing, and I will receive you. <sup>18</sup>And I will be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says [the] Lord Almighty." <sup>7</sup> Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**



a. The way this section fits in the letter has long been debated. The transition from v. 13 to v. 14 is quite abrupt. Since Paul in 6:11-13 and 7:2-3 is appealing to the Corinthians to reciprocate the affection that he and his companions have for them, it seems best to interpret 6:14-7:1 as somehow relating to that appeal.

b. Paul apparently knows that one impediment to the Corinthians' reciprocating his affection is their being joined to unbelievers in their pagan religious activities, participating with them in their ritual meals in pagan temples. Recall that Paul spent nearly three chapters of 1 Corinthians (8:1-10:22) objecting to their consuming sacrificial meat in the pagan temple precinct as part of a pagan ritual. It seems this was still an issue, perhaps related to Paul's emergency visit, and the tension between Paul's expectation and their conduct was constraining their affection toward Paul.

c. To remove that impediment to their reciprocating his affection, Paul commands the Corinthians not to be misyoked with unbelievers.

(1) A "yoke" was put on animals for pulling loads. Those yoked together are engaged in the same enterprise; they are collaborating in pulling the same load. To be "yoked" with unbelievers is not in this context simply to be associated with them; it is to be participants with them in their pagan ways.

(2) Paul is telling them that they need to deal once and for all with the social pull toward idolatry, to cease being divided on the matter. They need to sever all ties with the pagan cults. A consequence of doing so is that they will be free to embrace Paul and his companions fully rather than keeping them somewhat at bay, but Paul does not ground the command on that consequence. Rather, he grounds the command not to be yoked with unbelievers on the fact doing so, joining in pagan worship, is utterly incongruous with their status as the people of God.

(3) Deuteronomy 22:10 forbids plowing with an ox and a donkey yoked together, so Paul's imagery suggests that Christians are a different "breed" than non-Christians and are not to share in their work. There is no excuse for a Christian joining in pagan practices such as idol worship because Christians and unbelievers are worlds apart. We are righteous, in the light, of Christ, believers in the truth, and the temple of God. They are lawless, in the dark, of Satan (Beliar being an alternate form of Belial, which was used as a name for Satan in the intertestamental period), rejectors of the truth, and devotees of idols.

(4) As God's new covenant people, we are to be spiritually pure, holy, and devoted to God – though in the world, we are not to be of the world. That is the thrust of the various texts Paul puts together. He refers to Lev. 26:11-12 with Ezek. 37:27, Isa. 52:11, and Ezek. 20:41 with 2 Sam. 7:14. Guthrie comments, "Each OT passage has been carefully chosen from a context emphasizing appropriate worship of the one true God over against pagan worship, with the passages strongly exhorting the people of God to

separate from idolatry (so Garland 1999: 336-37) so God will restore them to a proper relationship with himself."<sup>59</sup>

(5) That Paul's focus is on ethical and religious separation from unbelievers, on not joining them in idolatry, rather than on social separation is suggested by the fact the paragraph concludes (7:1) with a call to perfect holiness.

(a) As Paul indicated in 1 Cor. 5:9-10, social contact with pagans is unavoidable as long as one lives in this world. Furthermore, Paul elsewhere forbid Christians from divorcing their non-Christian spouses (1 Cor. 7:12-15) and called Christian slaves to submit to their masters (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25), which included non-Christians (1 Tim. 6:1-2). That shows that cooperative relationships with non-Christians are not *inherently* defiling. Otherwise, Paul would have insisted on separation in those cases. Indeed, Paul in 1 Cor. 14:23 mentions unbelievers entering the Christian assembly without any indication their presence would be defiling or should be forbidden.

(b) This is not to deny that certain social bonds, such as marriage, can be so influential that entering into them too easily leads to joining in pagan practices; it is to say that Paul is here focusing on joining in the practices rather than on entering into relationships that influence one toward the practices. If one is joining with unbelievers in idolatry, pulling the "sin cart" with them, one will resist getting close to Paul.

### **3. Appeal for reconciliation concluded (7:2-4)**

**<sup>2</sup>Make room for us. We wronged no one; we ruined no one; we exploited no one. <sup>3</sup>I do not say [this] for condemnation, for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and live together. <sup>4</sup>I have much confidence regarding you; I have much boasting on behalf of you. I have been filled with comfort; I overflow with joy in all our affliction.**

(a) Paul concludes his appeal to the Corinthians to receive him and his companions into their hearts. He asserts their integrity at three levels.

(1) They "wronged" no one – They had not mistreated any of those in Corinth. On the contrary, the wrong had been done to them.

(2) They "ruined" no one – Their doctrine and example was not responsible for anyone's moral ruin, and their organizing of the collection was not responsible for anyone's financial ruin.

(3) They "exploited" no one – They did not take advantage of anyone at Corinth.

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<sup>59</sup> Guthrie (2015), 353.

(b) In v. 3 Paul explains that in saying this he is seeking to deny the insinuations of the intruders, not to blame the Corinthians. The intruders are the ones stirring up the trouble. He assures the Corinthians that they occupy a permanent place in his love and concern, a place that will remain in future death and in future resurrection life.

(c) Despite all his frustration, Paul (especially now) has great confidence in the Corinthians' basic allegiance to him, and he is proud of how they responded to his "severe letter." In the midst of affliction, he was filled with comfort and overflowing with joy. The reason is given in the following verses: Titus had arrived with the encouraging news of how they had responded to that letter.

#### ***IV. The Joyful Reunion with Titus (7:5-16)***

##### **A. Comfort in Macedonia (7:5-7)**

**<sup>5</sup>Indeed, upon our coming into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief. Rather, in every way [we were] being afflicted, disputes without, fears within. <sup>6</sup>But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us with the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup>yet not only with his coming but also with the comfort with which he was comforted among you, in [his] reporting to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal on my behalf, so that I rejoiced even more.**

1. Paul returns to the account of his travels that was broken off at 2:13 to include the lengthy discussion about his ministry. When Titus did not show up in Troas, Paul went to Macedonia expecting to meet him there, but Titus was not there when Paul arrived.

2. When Paul arrived in Macedonia he faced great distress. He was embroiled in disputes or fightings without, which may point to quarrelling that focused on Paul or to opposition or persecution that beset him in Macedonia (perhaps related to the "severe test of affliction" facing the Macedonian churches - see 8:1-2). He also faced "fears within," which probably refers to his concern over Titus and his mission to the Corinthians.

3. God comforted the distressed apostle in the coming of Titus itself and even more in the news of Titus's reception at Corinth (the comfort the Corinthians had given to Titus).

a. Note how God is the actor in Titus's coming to Paul. Paul saw in that seemingly mundane event that God working to comfort him. I think we often miss and therefore are ungrateful regarding the many subtle blessings God pours into our lives. Every good gift is from above (Jas. 1:17).

b. The reception with which the Corinthians had comforted Titus, the report of which comforted Paul, involved their "longing" to see Paul and to be reconciled to him, their "mourning" over their disloyal behavior, and their "zeal" to defend Paul's cause and to follow his directions in disciplining the guilty party.

## **B. The Severe Letter and Its Effect (7:8-13a)**

**<sup>8</sup>For even though I grieved you by the letter, I do not regret [it]. Though I did regret [it] (for I see that that letter grieved you, even though for an hour), <sup>9</sup>now I rejoice, not because you were grieved but because you were grieved to repentance. For you were grieved according to God, that in no way did you suffer loss through us. <sup>10</sup>For the grief [that is] according to God, brings about repentance that leads to salvation without regrets, but the grief of the world produces death. <sup>11</sup>For notice this very thing, [not only] what earnestness being grieved according to God produced in you, but what a defense, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment. In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. <sup>12</sup>So even though I wrote to you, [it was] neither on account of the one who did wrong nor on account of the one who was wronged but in order that your earnestness on our behalf might be manifested to you before God. <sup>13</sup>On account of this, we have been comforted.**

1. Recall that soon after (or during) Paul's emergency visit to Corinth at least one of his opponents had attacked him in deeply insulting ways. Paul wrote from Ephesus what is called the "severe" or "tearful" letter. In this letter he apparently laid down the standards he expected in the churches and sought to determine if they would meet those standards. He demanded the punishment of the ringleader who had maligned and opposed him so maliciously. This letter was not preserved.

2. At one point Paul regretted having sent this letter, apparently because he was uncertain about the effect it would have. But in light of the fact, which he learned from Titus, that the initial grief caused by the letter had produced repentance, rather than rejection and hostility, he now had no regrets. In fact, he now rejoiced, not because they endured grief but because they were led to repentance.

3. Because they experienced this godly sorrow, which produced repentance, they suffered no harm as a result of the painful letter. If, on the other hand, they had reacted with anger or bitterness, the letter would have had a negative effect (i.e., caused them some kind of "loss," which is what Paul had been concerned about).

4. The difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is that godly sorrow produces repentance, a commitment to change, whereas worldly sorrow stops at remorse.

a. Repentance is redemptive. It leads to salvation in that there is no salvation without it. Those who willfully refuse to submit to God have rejected him; they do not have a biblical, saving faith. They love their sin more than they love God. Salvation, of course, is unaccompanied by regrets.

b. Worldly sorrow produces spiritual death precisely because it stops short of repentance. There is conviction but no repentance.

5. Paul reminds his readers of the outworking of this godly sorrow in their case, the repentance which it produced:

a. earnestness – serious about rectifying the matter

b. a defense (eagerness to clear themselves - NIV) – to do what was necessary to set the matter right

c. indignation – directed toward the perpetrator(s) who had attacked Paul and/or them

d. fear – of God or of Paul as God's apostle

e. longing – to be reunited with Paul physically and emotionally

f. zeal (concern - NIV) – for Paul and his gospel and things of God

g. punishment – of the offender for attacking God's apostle

6. In every way they showed themselves innocent in that they did all that Paul asked of them. They gave Paul his due as God's apostle.

7. Given their positive reaction to the "severe letter," Paul now realizes that the purpose God intended the letter to serve was not so much to have the offender corrected nor to rectify the wrong done to Paul but to let the Corinthians as a group see just how much they really did care for Paul. And because of that, Paul and his companions have been comforted.

### **C. The Relief of Titus (7:13b-16)**

**Now in addition to our comfort, we rejoiced even much more over Titus's joy, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. <sup>14</sup>For if I have boasted some to him about you, I was not put to shame, but as we spoke all things in truth to you, so also our boasting before Titus became the truth. <sup>15</sup>And his feelings toward you are in more abundance as he remembers the obedience of all of you, as with fear and trembling you received him. <sup>16</sup>I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.**

1. In addition to the comfort they received from the Corinthians' response to the "severe letter," they were thrilled by Titus's joy regarding the Corinthians. They had refreshed his spirit; they were a great emotional lift for this soldier of Christ.

2. And part of why they were so thrilled was that Paul had bragged to Titus about the Corinthians as a whole (despite their failure to defend him when he had been maligned). He would have been embarrassed had they not lived up to what he told Titus about them.

3. Titus's affection for the Corinthians was enhanced as he remembered their obedience to the demands of the "severe letter" and the fear and trembling with which they received him (i.e., they were extremely concerned that they would fail to meet their obligations toward Paul's envoy).

4. This gave Paul good reason for complete confidence in them and a secure base from which to propose completion of the collection, which he does in chapters 8 and 9. (Note: This confidence seems shaken in chaps. 10-13 [esp. 11:3-4, 19-20], which suggests that something has happened between these sections.)

## ***V. The Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem (8:1 - 9:15)***

### **Background on Collection**

The Jewish Christians of Judea had been hit hard by outbreaks of famine during the reign of emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), and the largely Gentile church in Antioch had responded quickly by sending relief through Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:27-30). In Gal. 2:10, which probably was written around A.D. 48-49, Paul tells how the leaders of the Jerusalem church urged him to continue to remember the poor, something he was eager to do. By the time he wrote 1 Corinthians (around A.D. 54), he had already begun soliciting aid from the churches in Galatia, and the Corinthians had agreed to participate in it (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

By the time 2 Corinthians was written (around A.D. 55), Paul had contacted the Macedonian churches, and they had begged him for the privilege of taking part in the effort. This collection was both a compassionate response to the pressing needs of the Judean Christians and an important expression of the unity of the Jewish and Gentile sections of the church (2 Cor. 8:14-15; Rom. 15:25-27).

### **A. Example of the Macedonians (8:1-6)**

**Now we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia,<sup>2</sup> that in a severe test of affliction,**

**their abundance of joy and their deep-down poverty abounded into the riches of their generosity. <sup>3</sup>For according to [their] ability -- I testify, even beyond [their] ability -- of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>with much appealing, [they were] imploring us [for] the favor of sharing in the ministry to the saints. <sup>5</sup>And [they did this] not just as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, also to us, by the will of God. <sup>6</sup>In consideration of this, we urged Titus that, as he had previously begun, so too he should complete for you also this grace.**

1. Paul tells the Corinthians about the generosity of the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) to stimulate the Corinthians to carry out what they had earlier shown themselves ready to do. God had so worked in the hearts of the Macedonians that despite the fact they were undergoing a severe trial and were dirt poor they had abundant joy which overflowed, in the midst of their poverty, in a wealth of generosity. In actuality, they probably gave a small amount, but when measured against their poverty it was a very liberal gift.

2. The Macedonians not only gave in keeping with their ability, which is all anyone could expect, but they went above and beyond what could be expected in their situation. In other words, their generosity was extraordinary.

3. Moreover, the Macedonians did not have to be coaxed into contributing; they gave voluntarily. In fact, they urgently pleaded with Paul for the privilege of participating in the collection!

4. Not only did the Macedonians give to the collection as Paul had hoped, but they did so as a result of first having dedicated themselves to the Lord, and also to his apostles, as God would have it. In other words, their giving was not simply out of compassion but was motivated by their devotion to Christ and their commitment to his servants (i.e., Paul and his companions). They saw that the collection being taken by Paul was in fact the work of Christ.

5. Given this tremendous example on the part of the Macedonians, Paul urged Titus to go ahead and complete the collection at Corinth, something he apparently had begun when they responded so positively to Paul's "severe letter."

## **B. A Plea for Liberal Giving (8:7-12)**

**<sup>7</sup>Now as you abound in everything – in faith, in word, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in the love from us [that is] in you\* – [see] that you also abound in this grace. <sup>8</sup>I say this not as a command but to prove, by the earnestness of others, the reality of your love also. <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, on account of you he became poor, though being rich, so that you, by means of that poverty, might become rich. <sup>10</sup>And so I am giving an opinion in this [matter]; for this is**

**beneficial for you, who previously began last year not only the doing but also the willing. <sup>11</sup>But now also complete the doing so that just as [there is] eagerness in the willing so also in the completing from what you have. <sup>12</sup>For if the eagerness is already there [that] is acceptable according to what one has not according to [what] one has not.**

1. As they excel in so many things – in faith, word (speech), and knowledge (probably referring to spiritual gifts – see 1 Cor. 1:5, 12:8-9), in earnestness (probably referring to their earnestness regarding Paul following Titus's visit – 7:11), and in their love for Christ and fellow believers that was instilled in them by Paul and his companions<sup>60</sup> (note the textual issue) – Paul exhorts them to excel also in this act of benevolence.

2. He makes clear, however, that he is not commanding them to do so but encouraging them to take the opportunity to show, by the standard of the Macedonian response, the genuineness of their own love for the Lord and fellow Christians. Love is not simply talk; it finds expression in action.

3. Paul cites the Lord Jesus as the finest example of one who showed eagerness and generosity in giving as a demonstration of his love. Christ gave up the glory of heavenly existence to come to this sinful world and ultimately to be crucified in order to bless others (see Phil. 2:5-8).

4. Paul urges them to go ahead and complete from what they have (i.e., according to their means) the collection they previously began. He points out that the acceptability of the gift in God's eyes is judged according to what one has. In other words, generosity is always relative. It takes into consideration needs and ability of the giver. They need not balk over the actual size of the gift because that is not the test of acceptability. If they are eager to give, they will naturally give what they can, and that will be acceptable whatever the amount.

### **C. The Equality of Reciprocal Need Meeting (8:13-15)**

**<sup>13</sup>For [it is] not that [there should be] relief to others [and] affliction to you; rather, [it is] a matter of equality. <sup>14</sup>Your abundance at the present time [is] for the need of those [saints] that the abundance of those**

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<sup>60</sup> Regarding the textual issue, NET states:

The reading "the love from us that is in you" is very difficult in this context, for Paul is here enumerating the *Corinthians'* attributes: How is it possible for them to excel "in the love from us that is in you"? Most likely, because of this difficulty, several early scribes, as well as most later ones (⋈ C D F G Ψ [33] ℣? lat), altered the text to read "your love for us" (so NIV [footnote]; *Grk* ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγάπη [*ex humōn en hēmin agapē*]). The reading ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη e\*x hēmōn en humin agapē is found, however, in excellent and early witnesses (ℱ<sup>46</sup> B 0243 6 104 630 1175 1739 1881 co). As the harder reading it explains the rise of the other reading. What, then, is the force of "in the love from us that is in you"? Most likely, Paul is commending the Corinthians for excelling in deriving some inspiration from the apostles' love for them.



**[saints] may also be for your need so that there may be equality. <sup>15</sup>As it has been written, "He [who gathered] much did not have too much, and he [who gathered] little did not have too little."**

1. They should not balk over the notion that Christian giving is a one-way street that flows only to some privileged group (e.g., Jewish Christians). Rather, it is a matter of equality in that all are of equal importance. Their present (relative) abundance is to supply the current needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem, and if the shoe is on the other foot, the saints in Jerusalem will supply the needs of the Corinthians.

2. This is not a call to equalize wealth among Christians but a reassurance of the equality of obligation. It is a defense of the collection against the idea that it is somehow due to the privileged status of Jewish Christians. The collection is just one example of the general Christian obligation to meet one another's material needs. This interpretation is supported by the fact Paul elsewhere instructs the wealthy to be generous (1 Tim. 6:17-19), not to equalize their wealth, and the fact disparity of wealth *per se* went unopposed throughout the history of the church.

3. Paul cites Ex. 16:18, referring to God's provision of manna, for the point that provision is according to need. As instruments of God's provision, Christians are to meet the needs of one another.

#### **D. The Delegates and Their Credentials (8:16-24)**

**<sup>16</sup>But thanks be to God, who put the same earnestness for you into the heart of Titus. <sup>17</sup>For he welcomed [our] urging, and being extremely earnest, he went out to you of his own accord. <sup>18</sup>And we sent with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the churches. <sup>19</sup>And not only [that], he has also been elected by the churches [to be] our traveling companion in this grace which is being administered by us to the glory of the Lord [himself] and [to show] our eagerness [to help]. <sup>20</sup>[We] are arranging this, lest someone should fault us in reference to this large sum being administered by us. <sup>21</sup>For we consider the right thing not only before the Lord but also before men.**

**<sup>22</sup>And we sent with them our brother, whom we proved in many ways [at] many times to be earnest and [who is] now much more earnest because of [his] great confidence in you. <sup>23</sup>If [there is any question] about Titus, [he is] my partner and co-worker for you; if [there is a question regarding] our brothers, [they are] apostles of [the] churches, [the] glory of Christ. <sup>24</sup>Therefore, show them a demonstration of your love and our boasting on your behalf in [the] presence of the churches.**

1. Paul commends the three brothers who are to come to Corinth to receive the collection, the first of whom is Titus. Paul thanks God that Titus shares Paul's concern for the Corinthians, a concern born of God's work in Titus's life. This concern for them is

highlighted by the fact he needed no persuasion to make the considerable journey back to them; he volunteered for the assignment.

2. He then commends the brother whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the (Macedonian?) churches. This brother was a real friend of the cause of the gospel, whether as a preacher or in a more general supportive role. In addition, he had been chosen by "the churches" (does not say which ones) to accompany Paul's group in the administration of the collection.

3. Verse 19b provides a glimpse of the purpose of the collection. It was "for the glory of the Lord" in that it was a tangible expression of the unity of Jew and Gentile brought about by the cross. Also, it was a way for the Gentile churches to express their goodwill toward their Jewish brothers by showing their eagerness to help.

4. Paul points out that they appointed men of such impeccable credentials to receive the gift and carry it to Jerusalem to head off any charges of impropriety in their handling of this large sum. They want to avoid even the appearance of impropriety so that the beauty of this collection might in no way be sullied.

5. Paul commends the third brother by saying that he had in many ways proven to be earnest (enthusiastic or focused) and was even more so now because of his confidence in the Corinthians to "come through."

6. Verse 23 sums up the credentials of the three delegates. If there is any question about Titus, he is Paul's partner and co-worker for the Corinthians. If there is any question about the brothers, they are messengers of the (Macedonian?) churches and, because of their lives and ministry, a credit to Christ.

7. Therefore, Paul urges the Corinthians in v. 24 to show these men their love and to vindicate Paul's boasting about them "in the presence of the churches." This clause means either so all the churches can see it or as though in the presence of the churches from which the delegates came.

## **E. The Need to Be Ready (9:1-5)**

**So concerning the ministry to the saints, it is not necessary for me to write to you, <sup>2</sup>for I know your eagerness, which I boast [about] on your behalf to [the] Macedonians, [saying] that Achaia has been prepared since last year. And your zeal stirred up the majority. <sup>3</sup>But I sent the brothers so that our boast on your behalf should not be empty in this respect, so that you are prepared as I said, <sup>4</sup>lest if Macedonians should come with me and find you unprepared, we (lest I mention you) be disgraced in this eventuality. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, I considered [it] necessary to urge the brothers that they go on ahead to you and arrange in advance**

**the blessing you promised. This will thus be ready as a blessing and not as an extortion.**

1. Paul expresses his confidence in them, saying there was no need to write to them about the collection because he knows that they have long been ready to give. In fact, he has boasted to the Macedonians that those in Achaia were ready to give since last year (see 1 Cor. 16:1-4). This commitment on their part helped to stir the Macedonians to give.

2. But the Macedonians have now completed their contribution, while the Corinthians have not yet followed through on their commitment. So while it is not necessary for Paul to write the Corinthians about participating in the collection, it is necessary to write about the present mission of Titus and the two brothers. They are coming to ensure that the Corinthians' good intentions are followed by action.

3. Paul is sending the brothers to organize the gift in advance of his coming so that it will be ready when he arrives. Otherwise, if some of the Macedonians come with him (which they did – Acts 20:2-6), he and the Corinthians will be disgraced by their being unprepared -- Paul because of his misplaced confidence in his brothers and sisters in Corinth and the Corinthians because of their failure to follow through on their noble promise. In that case, the entire sense of a partnership in Christ that Paul hopes to convey in the collection will be damaged.

4. If they go ahead and get the contribution ready before Paul arrives, it will then be ready as something freely given, a gift of love. On the other hand, if they won't give until Paul comes, that suggests reluctance, and their contribution will then take on the cast of something extorted.

## **F. Encouragement Regarding the Collection (9:6-15)**

### **1. Generosity and God's provision (9:6-10)**

**<sup>6</sup>And [note] this, the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows in blessing ways will also reap in blessing ways. <sup>7</sup>[Let] each one [give] as he determined in [his] heart, not with grief or out of compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to cause all grace to abound to you, so that in all things always having all sufficiency, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written, "He scattered widely; he gave to the poor. His righteousness remains forever." <sup>10</sup>Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and will increase the fruits of your righteousness.**

a. Paul reminds them that their level of generosity will in some sense be reflected back to them. The more they love God, as reflected in their generosity toward his needy children (sowing in blessing ways),<sup>61</sup> the more God will bless them.

b. And part of generosity is that the giving be voluntary. Compulsion negates generosity. The one who gives to avoid censure is not being generous; he's being forced! God loves a cheerful giver because that kind of giving is a reflection of a heart that is devoted to him.

c. They need to remember that the God they serve is able to supply them with everything they need to abound in all good works.

(1) He can provide whatever blessings they need to do good works, be they spiritual or material. And as the reference to Ps. 112:9 (111:9 in LXX, which is the source of the quotation) indicates, giving generously to the poor is a righteous deed in the eyes of God. The point is that they ought not conclude they are unable to participate in the collection (see 8:12). God can provide the way. Just look what he did with the Macedonians. He gave them the grace to give generously in the midst of their extreme poverty.

(2) The one who feeds the sower and provides what he needs to sow, will likewise care for them and provide them with plenty of what they need (multiplied seed) to participate in the collection. He will also increase the yield or positive results of their giving (their "righteousness"), as elaborated in vv. 11-15.

## 2. The fruits of their giving (9:11-15)

**<sup>11</sup>You are enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces through us thanksgiving to God; <sup>12</sup>for the administration of this service is not only making up the lackings of the saints but [is] also abounding through many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup>Because of the proof [provided by] this ministry, they glorify God for the submission [accompanying] your confession to the gospel of Christ and [for the] generosity of [your] sharing toward them and toward everyone. <sup>14</sup>And in their prayers on your behalf, they long for you on account of the surpassing grace of God [bestowed] upon you. <sup>15</sup>Thanks to God for his indescribable gift.**

a. Paul switches to the present tense, indicating his confidence that they *will* receive generosity-producing grace (which is why many translate it as future). This generosity on their part will, through the collection, not only meet the needs of God's children in Judea but also will produce much thanksgiving to God.

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<sup>61</sup> The preposition ἐπί in the phrase ἐπ' εὐλογίας has an adverbial sense (see, BDAG, 364). I have expressed it in keeping with the plural εὐλογίας (blessings) as "in blessing ways." To sow "in blessing ways" is to sow "bountifully," but "bountifully" obscures that actual word used.

b. God will be glorified for the Corinthians' faithfulness to the gospel, as evidenced by their generosity toward the needy saints.

c. Paul envisions that the grace of God that produced their generous giving will deepen the unity and bond of fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. They will long for them in their prayers on their behalf.

d. Paul ends with praise to God "for his indescribable gift," probably referring to his grace generally and to his Son specifically. Everything of value is due to God's giving. Note that Rom. 15:25-26, written from Corinth around A.D. 57, shows that the Corinthians did indeed contribute to the collection.

## ***VI. Response to a New Crisis - 10:1 - 13:10***

After receiving the good news of the Corinthians response to the "severe letter," Paul began writing 2 Corinthians. We don't know how long it took to compose the letter, but it seems that he received some more bad news about the church between chapters 9 and 10. Paul's opponents apparently launched a counteroffensive against him after Titus's successful visit and news reached Paul that the church was coming under their authority. This is the most critical situation in Paul's relationship with this church.

### **A. An Appeal for Obedience (10:1-6)**

**Now I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the gentleness and graciousness of Christ, [I] who in person am humble among you but when absent am bold toward you! <sup>2</sup>I ask that when present [I] not [need] to be bold with the confidence which I have in mind to dare [exhibit] toward certain persons, those who consider us as walking according to the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For though walking in [the] flesh, we do not wage war according to [the] flesh -- <sup>4</sup>for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but [are] powerful by God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish reasonings <sup>5</sup>and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, take every thought captive for obedience to Christ, <sup>6</sup>and are ready to avenge every disobedience when your obedience is complete.**

1. Paul's opponents apparently charged that when he was in Corinth he was timid and ineffectual but when he was at a safe distance he plucked up his courage and wrote very forceful letters. Garland states:

He was, as it were, only a "paper" apostle. By contrast, the intruders appeared to embody the very apostolic ideals that Paul's detractors claimed he lacked. They displayed a more commanding spiritual presence, spoke with greater eloquence, and flashed more conspicuous evidence of divine authority (11:20). To use an image from a popular film, some in Corinth had

been inclined to regard Paul as if he were like the Wizard of Oz when he was finally exposed as a fraud. The wizard frightened people when he hid behind his curtain pulling levers and projecting a menacing image on a large screen with noisy sound effects. But he turned out to be bumbling and timorous when met face-to-face without his elaborate props to shield him. To their mind, Paul cuts a sorry figure when he is present with them and only dares to browbeat them in letters when he is safely out of reach (10:1, 10).<sup>62</sup>

2. In appealing to them by the gentleness and graciousness of Christ, Paul demonstrates that his letters are not invariably bold, but more importantly, he reminds the Corinthians that what they consider to be unbecoming weakness and servility were in reality virtues exemplified by Christ. Like Christ, Paul exhibited patient restraint and forbearance in dealing with them. By embracing a worldly, triumphalist perspective on proper character and behavior they were rejecting (or at least ignoring) the character of the Lord Jesus.

3. Paul's appeal is that the Corinthians exercise the necessary discipline against the Judaizing intruders ("certain persons") so that when he comes, he will not have to take the strong action he is anticipating taking against them (see 10:6).

4. These people, his opponents, consider that Paul "walks according to the flesh," perhaps meaning that the alleged conflict between what he was in person and what he was in his letters reflected an unspiritual person, someone who was duplicitous, scheming, and cowardly.

5. Though Paul walks in the flesh in the sense he lives in the world as a frail clay vessel that is subject to bodily weakness and death, he and his companions do not wage war according to the flesh, meaning they do not resort to cunning and deception, to shameful and underhanded tactics to gain the desired victory. On the contrary, rather than being fleshly, the weapons with which they fight are given power by God. They fight according to God's rules of engagement and with an arsenal of divine weapons.

a. Paul does not specify the weapons he has in mind, but he previously referred to the power of God working through him with weapons of righteousness in both hands (6:7). Garland states:

From references elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence, we can assume that he has in view the truth of the gospel, epitomized in the word of the cross (1 Cor 1:18, 23-24; 2 Cor 6:7; see Rom 1:16), and the knowledge of God (2:14; 4:6). Other spiritual weapons referred to in the New Testament such as prayer, divine wisdom, and holy conduct may also be assumed to be part of his arsenal. As Paul develops his argument in these chapters, however, he reveals that in God's hands even his weakness becomes a mighty weapon through which God works powerfully – perhaps because it is so disarming.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Garland (1999), 432.

<sup>63</sup> Garland (1999), 435.

b. Paul says that his weapons have power to demolish "strongholds," which he identifies as "reasonings (arguments, plans, or thoughts) and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God." In other words, his spiritual weapons have the power to tear down every mental defense that humans erect against the knowledge of God, including whatever rationalizations they may throw up to justify defiance of the moral and theological correction given by him as God's apostle.

c. Whatever Paul's rhetorical deficiencies and whatever handicap he may have in terms of worldly perceptions of success, his proclamation of the truth of God in the power and wisdom of the Spirit, embodied in and mediated through his life of suffering and righteousness, will leave no defenses standing. Those who reject his message and appeal will have nothing behind which to hide their defiance.

6. Paul is ready to punish every disobedience but only after the church itself has been obedient in disciplining the intruders and their followers (as they had previously done - 2 Cor. 2:6-7). If apostolic punishment is still needed, he will administer it.

## **B. Paul's Answer to the Charges (10:7-11)**

**<sup>7</sup>Look at the things before [your] face! If anyone is persuaded in himself to be of Christ, let him consider this again in himself, that as he [is] of Christ, so too [are] we. <sup>8</sup>For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave for edification and not for your demolition, I will not be put to shame -- <sup>9</sup>lest I should seem as if [I wanted] to terrify you through the letters. <sup>10</sup>For one says the letters are weighty and strong, but the presence of [his] body [is] weak and [his] speech contemptible. <sup>11</sup>Let such a person consider this, that such as we are in word through letters when absent, such also [we will be] in deed when present.**

1. To discipline the intruders as Paul has instructed, the Corinthians will have to decide whether Paul or the intruders are to be believed and followed. Paul says, "Look at the obvious facts," and then proceeds to offer obvious answers to some of the charges against him.

2. Specific charges alluded to:

a. The intruders apparently claimed to belong to Christ in some special sense (10:7b). They saw themselves as having a special calling or role (see, 11:13, 23), and Paul was presented to the Corinthians as someone who did not belong to Christ in that superior way.

b. The intruders charged Paul with inconsistency, especially in the contrast between his powerful letters and his unimpressive personal appearance (10:10). The

implicit charge is that his letters project a false image, a phony boldness. In person it becomes clear, judging by their triumphalist criteria, that he is not the Christian leader he seems to be in his letters.

### 3. Paul's answer to the charges:

a. Paul insists that he belongs to Christ no less than his opponents. After all, were Paul so inclined, he could boast about the authority the Lord had given him without being disgraced. In other words, his boast would be substantiated by the facts. For the authority Christ gave him was for the (central) purpose of building up believers, and everyone knows that he founded the church in Corinth, built them in their faith, and protected them from errors. The self-proclaimed apostles have merely introduced friction and pulled the church down.

b. Paul says he will not boast of this authority because his opponents will then say that his strong self-defense is typical of his weighty and forceful letters and completely atypical of his person.

c. Paul insists that he is consistent, despite how it may appear. He does so by saying in effect that if the intruders continue making their accusations, they will receive such wrath when Paul arrives that all will see that he is perfectly capable of taking them on in person and not just through letters. They fail to appreciate that his forceful letters have been dictated by the circumstances at the time. If requisite circumstances exist when he visits, they will discover that he can be no less forceful in person (10:11, 13:2, 10).

## C. Paul's Countercharge (10:12-18)

**<sup>12</sup>For we do not dare to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. Indeed, when measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, they do not understand. <sup>13</sup>But we will not boast in an unmeasured way but according to the measure of the jurisdiction which God apportioned to us as [our] measure, to reach as far as even you. <sup>14</sup>For we do not, as though not reaching to you, overstretch ourselves, for we came even as far as you with the gospel of Christ. <sup>15</sup>We are not boasting in an unmeasured way, in [the] labors of others; and we have hope, as your faith grows, to be magnified among you in abundance -- in accordance with our jurisdiction -- <sup>16</sup>[and] to preach the gospel in the [places] beyond you, not to boast in the things prepared in another's jurisdiction. <sup>17</sup>But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." <sup>18</sup>For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved but whom the Lord commends.**

1. Paul et al. dare not class themselves with the intruders (those who commend themselves), as though they were a desirable group, or compare themselves to



them, as though they were a spiritual standard. Indeed, the very fact they judge themselves by their own self-made criteria shows that they "don't get it." The only criteria that count are those of God.

a. They judged themselves by such things as visionary experiences, social and cultural pedigrees, rhetorical training, and the ability to command fees, and had little concern for the criteria preferred by Paul: allegiance to the gospel of Christ, growing conformity to the character of Christ, participation in the sufferings of Christ.

b. Many Christians today have become so enamored with styles of leadership in politics, business, or the entertainment industry that they are transferring these culturally conditioned, secular criteria to the church.

2. Paul says that they will measure their boast by the standard of the jurisdiction God apportioned to them in their ministry.

a. Their mission was to preach to the Gentiles, and it included reaching as far as the Corinthians, which they in fact accomplished. So they could rightly be proud of their work in planting and nurturing the church in Corinth because, unlike the intruders, they were not latecomers who enticed away the fruit of someone else's evangelism and sought to take credit for another's work.

b. They hope that they will again be "magnified" among the Corinthians (again secure the church) and that they can reach out even beyond them in carrying out the mission given to them by God.

3. Paul understands quite well that the only acceptable boasting is boasting in the Lord.

a. Paul would boast in what God had done for him in the cross and what God had done through him by the Spirit in his ministry, but he would not boast about his talent, wealth, power, wisdom, eloquence, and the like. He boasted in God's work in his life, not in his own greatness.

b. This is so crucial because what matters most in God's universe is whether he approves of us, and he does not approve of those who boast in themselves rather than in him.

#### **D. Groundwork for Foolish Boasting (11:1-6)**

**I would that you put up with me in a little bit of foolishness, but you are indeed putting up with me! <sup>2</sup>For I am jealous for you with a jealousy of God, for I betrothed you to one husband in order to present [you as] a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup>But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent quite deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts should be seduced from**

**the sincerity [and the purity] which is [due] to Christ. <sup>4</sup>For if the one who comes preaches some other Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive another spirit, which you did not receive, or another gospel which you did not accept, you put up with [it] well. <sup>5</sup>For I consider [myself] to have been in no way inferior to the super-apostles. <sup>6</sup>Even though [I am] untrained in [public] speaking, [I am] certainly not in knowledge. Rather, in every way we have shown this to you in all things.**

1. Paul has repeatedly insisted to the Corinthians that self-commendation is worthless (3:1, 5:12, 10:12), but the situation before him appears to demand that he stoop to what he condemns (at least on the surface) if he is going to preserve his converts. R. V. G. Tasker says:

Paul is very conscious that it is no business of an apostle, or indeed of any Christian, to praise himself. Such self-commendation is only justified, in the present instance, because his affection for his converts is so great, that he will go to almost any length to prevent them from becoming dupes of unscrupulous men, and to keep them loyal to Christ.<sup>64</sup>

2. Paul asks them to put up with "a little bit of foolishness" because he is embarrassed by the prospect of his imminent boasting (11:16 - 12:10). He then adds, with much irony, "but you are indeed putting up with me." What he means is that in one sense the Corinthians, misled by the intruders, were already treating him as if he were a fool rather than their father through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

3. In 11:2-6 Paul provides three reasons why he expects the Corinthians to put up with the foolish boasting in which he is about to engage:

a. Because Paul is divinely jealous ("a jealousy of God") for the Corinthians (11:2-3). He has for them something of the jealousy God has for his people (see, Ex. 20:4-5).

(1) God is passionate about the loyalty of his people not only because they owe it to him but also because their wandering to other "gods" results in their exploitation and ultimately their condemnation. The Corinthians wandering from loyalty to Paul means wandering to a false gospel and will yield the same results.

(2) Paul elaborates on his jealousy by telling the Corinthians that he betrothed them to Christ that he might present them as a pure virgin to him. In the NT, the church is the bride and Jesus is the heavenly bridegroom (Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 19:7, 21:2, 9, 22:17). Here Paul, who was their spiritual father through the gospel, presents himself as the father of the bride. In other words, Paul is saying that when he led the Corinthians to Christ, when he founded the church, he betrothed them to Christ as a father would betroth his daughter. As an honorable father, he desires to present his daughter as a

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in D. A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 83.

pure virgin to her prospective husband when he comes for her (at the Parousia). Instead, he hears reports that she is playing around with other lovers.

(3) Though they once manifested the sincerity and purity<sup>65</sup> that is due Christ, Paul fears that they will be suckered into abandoning it. Just as Eve was lured from proper allegiance to God by Satan's craftiness, so the Corinthians were being lured from the true gospel.

b. Because they accept all kinds of nonsense from the rival apostles easily enough (11:4).

(1) The "For" which begins 11:4 probably serves a double function. It relates 11:4 both to Paul's fear that they will be deceived and to his appeal to put up with his foolishness. It is related to his fear of deception in that they are too tolerant of those who teach heresy. Heretics are not to be welcomed (see, Rev. 2:14-16, 2:20).

(2) It is related to Paul's appeal to put up with his foolishness in that, given their willingness to put up with a false gospel, putting up with a little foolish boasting from him should be a breeze.

(3) These Judaizing intruders no doubt preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah – that he performed miracles, preached the kingdom of God, died, and rose from the grave. But they denied the gospel, thus serving Satan (11:13-15), in that they presumably urged Christians to relate to God on the basis of the obsolete Mosaic covenant, which would make Christ of no value to them (Gal. 5:2-4). There is only one gospel, and if one materially alters it, it is no longer the gospel and can no longer save from sins (Gal. 1:8-9). They gained credibility among the Corinthians as teachers by promoting the culture's worldly criteria of evaluation.

c. Because Paul is not inferior to the "super-apostles" who are demeaning him (11:5-6).

(1) Many sophisticated audiences in the Greek-speaking world favored a stylized rhetoric, and not to come up to rhetorical eloquence was considered a mark of inferior training or ability.

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<sup>65</sup> Regarding the bracketed phrase "and the purity" (καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος), NET note states: Although most MSS (α<sup>2</sup> H Ψ 0121 0243 1739 1881 ㉓) lack "and pure" (καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος, *kai tēs hagnotētos*; Grk "and purity") several important and early witnesses (P<sup>46</sup> α\* B D<sup>[2]</sup> F G 33 81 104 pc ar r co) retain these words. Their presence in such MSS across such a wide geographical distribution argues for their authenticity. The omission from the majority of MSS can be explained by haplography, since the -τητος ending of ἀγνότητος is identical to the ending of ἀπλότητος (*haplotētos*, "sincerity") three words back (ἀπλότητος καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος); further, since the meanings of "sincerity" and "purity" are similar they might seem redundant. A copyist would scarcely notice the omission because Paul's statement still makes sense without "and from purity."

(2) Paul concedes that he is untrained in public speaking, but he does have knowledge of the true gospel, and that's what counts. These people were exalting form over substance, making stylized rhetoric more important than the truth. If the right criteria were used, Paul was not the least bit inferior as a preacher.

### **E. Answer to Charge of Independence from Corinthians (11:7-15)**

**<sup>7</sup>Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself in order that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? <sup>8</sup>I plundered other churches by taking provisions [from them] with a view toward the serving of you, <sup>9</sup>so when I was present with you and was in need I did not burden anyone -- for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. Thus, in every way I kept and will keep myself from being a burden to you. <sup>10</sup>It is [the] truth of Christ in me, that this boasting from me will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. <sup>11</sup>Why? Because I do not love you? God knows [that I do]!**

**<sup>12</sup>But what I am doing I also will do, that I may cut off the opportunity of those who desire an opportunity [to make it] that they may be regarded, in that in which they boast, just as we are. <sup>13</sup>For such men [are] false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup>And no wonder, for Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>Therefore, [it is] no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**

1. Traveling teachers in the first century did not normally work with their hands. The ideal was to make a good living from teaching itself. That was seen as an indication of the value of what one taught. Paul refused to accept support from the Corinthians, and the false apostles used that in their effort to persuade the Corinthians that Paul could not be much of an apostle.

2. In Acts 18:1-4 we see that Paul worked as a tentmaker to provide for his needs during his initial stay in Corinth. This was considered degrading for a philosopher or itinerant teacher. Paul had the right to be supported by his converts (1 Cor. 9:7-12a), but he asks if it was a sin for him to humble himself through manual labor in order to exalt them above their idolatry and immorality. If self-humiliation for the sake of others is wrong, then Christ must have been wrong in leaving heaven to suffer on a cross for the salvation of mankind.

3. When Paul was in Corinth, he did not take any support from them. Rather, he received support from the Macedonian churches. This is how Paul worked. When he accepted support, it was for work done somewhere other than in the church giving the support. It seems that he chose to preach the gospel free of charge (1 Cor. 9:15-18) to help

proclaim the grace of God. The supporting churches would learn the responsibility to all men which grace had put them under.

4. In the Corinthians' case, however, Paul says that he will not accept any help from them whatsoever (though he was willing to do so at one point - 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16). This unique treatment of the Corinthians was probably due in part to their pagan view of remuneration. As long as they used "pay" to evaluate Paul and his message, he would refuse to accept anything from them so as not to reinforce their approach. The other reason is explicitly stated in 11:12.

5. Far from apologizing for or reversing his policy of not accepting money from the Corinthians, Paul "boasts" in it because it exemplifies the Christian principle of self-sacrifice. As with self-humiliation, if it is wrong to sacrifice for the benefit of others, then Christ must have been wrong.

6. Far from being an indication that he does not love the Corinthians, as his enemies suggested, his humility and self-sacrifice were prompted by his intense love for them.

7. In v. 12 Paul explicitly states a reason for his refusal to change his financial policy toward the Corinthians: it distinguishes him from the false apostles who are opposing him and thus should help to expose them.

a. His opponents apparently claimed to be all that Paul was and then some, but they were unwilling to do as he did in the matter of accepting money. So, with the help of their culture, they tried to turn Paul's noble conduct into a negative.

b. Paul, however, rejects that worldly analysis and provides the correct perspective on his conduct. It is really a point in his favor, and he will not surrender it because he knows that his opponents will not follow him in it (no doubt suggesting they loved money), and thus it will stand as testimony against them.

8. The reason the opponents will not follow him in self-humiliation and sacrifice for the Corinthians is that they are "false apostles, deceitful workmen, [those] disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." They disguised themselves as Christians, as sheep, but inwardly they were ravenous wolves. They were leaders who worked against the gospel in the name of the gospel. They cleverly took the focus off Christ and his work and put it on human triumph and achievement.

a. The Corinthians were vulnerable to this either because they lacked the spiritual maturity necessary to spot the twisting of the gospel or they lacked the courage to denounce it. Both of these are perennial dangers to the church.

b. Regarding the danger of spiritual immaturity, Carson writes:

The point is that the archenemy is an archdeceiver. Unless we understand this, we will be pathetically gullible, sucked into various sins and blown this way and that way in our doctrine. The only certain antidote is the kind of humble walk with God that is characterized by a growing and mature knowledge of the Scriptures.<sup>66</sup>

c. Regarding the courage to denounce error, Carson writes:

The appeal to limitless toleration -- not just toleration of the other chap's right to be wrong, but toleration pushed so far one can never say that anyone or anything is wrong -- presupposes the greatest evil is to hold a strong conviction that certain things are true and their contraries are false. Worse, this presupposition operates because of an antecedent presupposition: confident knowledge in religious matters is impossible. But if we hold that God has revealed himself to men, supremely in the person of his Son, but also in the words and propositions of Scripture, then however many interpretative difficulties may still afflict us, we have no right to treat as optional anything God has said. Indeed, never to say any opinion is wrong presupposes one opinion is right -- viz., the one saying no opinion is wrong. Either this is illogical, or the proponent of this view really means the one certainly correct opinion is that no *other* opinion should ever be dismissed as wrong. But how has he or she attained such certain knowledge? Few opinions are less liberal and tolerant than the form of liberalism fiercely intolerant of everything but itself.<sup>67</sup>

## **F. Final Preface to Foolish Boasting (11:16-21a)**

**<sup>16</sup>I say again, let no one think me to be a foolish person, but if [you should], at least receive me as a foolish person, so that I too may boast a little bit. <sup>17</sup>(What I am saying, I do not say according to the Lord, but -- in this matter of boasting -- as [one] in foolishness. <sup>18</sup>Since many are boasting according to the flesh, I too will boast.) <sup>19</sup>For you gladly put up with fools, being wise [yourselves]! <sup>20</sup>Indeed, you put up with [it] if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours [you], if anyone takes [you in], if anyone exalts himself, if anyone strikes you in [the] face. <sup>21</sup>By way of shame, I say (as [it were]) that we have been weak!**

1. Paul says that no one should take him as a fool because of the boasting in which he is about to engage. That is not the real Paul; he is simply answering a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:5). It is the Corinthians' own gullibility, their acceptance of the intruders' triumphalist criteria, that is forcing Paul to adopt this approach if he is to protect them. But if they do judge him a fool for boasting, then he asks that they receive him

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<sup>66</sup> Carson (1984), 103.

<sup>67</sup> Carson (1984), 101.

as they have received the other fools (i.e., the intruders) and put up with a little of his boasting.

2. Paul injects a parenthetical comment in vv. 17-18 to make clear that in bragging about his experiences and achievements he, at least on the surface (just considering the act of bragging itself), is acting like his worldly opponents and not like Christ. Christ was not a braggart, but Paul must temporarily act like one to gain a hearing so as to prevent the Corinthians' defection. On another level, of course, he *is* acting like Christ (inspired by his Spirit) because his "boasting" is done to bless others, not to impress them.

3. Paul then stings the Corinthians in v. 19, saying, "For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves!" They viewed themselves as "wise," but the result of their great wisdom was that they tolerated fools. In other words, they had a warped wisdom, a worldly wisdom that kept them from recognizing fools.

4. In fact, their brand of "wisdom" not only tolerated the false apostles but granted them positions of influence and leadership. The intruders had become tyrants, intimidating, abusing, and exploiting the Corinthian congregation. The Corinthians had accepted the intruders' triumphalist criteria of apostolic authenticity and leadership and were in turn being trampled by it.

5. Paul in no way wants to be compared to these power-hungry exploiters. He says, "By way of shame, I say (as [it were]) that we have been weak! " Or more colloquially, "To my shame, I admit that we were too weak for that!" Paul and his companions conducted themselves with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and the Corinthians dismissed them as "unimpressive" and "weak." On the other hand, they kowtowed to the harsh aggressiveness and abuse of authority exercised by servants of Satan masquerading as apostles.

## **G. Apostolic Boasting (11:21b-33)**

**But in whatever [respect] someone dares [to boast] (I am speaking in foolishness), I also dare. <sup>22</sup>Are they Hebrews? I also [am]. Are they Israelites? I also [am]. Are they Abraham's seed? I also [am]. <sup>23</sup>Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking as being out of my mind.) I [am] more [of one], with more labors, more imprisonments, beatings beyond measure, [and] frequent deaths. <sup>24</sup>Five times I received from the Jews forty [lashes] minus one; <sup>25</sup>three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked. <sup>26</sup>I have spent a night and a day in the deep. On many journeys, [I was] in dangers from rivers, in dangers from bandits, in dangers from [my] people, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in [the] city, in dangers in [the] country, in dangers at sea, in dangers among false brothers. <sup>27</sup>[I have lived] with labor and toil, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, many times without eating, cold and nakedness. <sup>28</sup>Apart from the additional things, [there is]**

**the daily pressure on me, [my] deep concern over all the churches.  
29Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn?**

**30If it is necessary to boast, I will boast about the things that concern my weakness. 31The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32In Damascus, the ethnarch of King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, 33and I was lowered in a basket through a window through the wall and escaped his hands.**

1. Paul begins his boasting with a declaration that he is in no way inferior to any conceivable rival. Whatever they can boast about, he can also. But this is so painful for him, he again adds, "I am speaking in foolishness."

2. Referring to the false apostles, Paul writes, "Are they Hebrews? I also [am]. Are they Israelites? I also [am]. Are they Abraham's descendants, I also [am]."

a. Paul wants it clear from the start that when it comes to Jewishness, he takes a back seat to no one. His opponents can gain no spiritual edge over him by appealing to their pedigree as the OT people of God.

b. Of course, Paul did not consider his Jewish pedigree to be a key thing in light of Christ (see, Phil. 3:4b-8), but he presents it here to remind the Corinthians he is not inferior on that score.

3. Paul asks, "Are they servants of Christ?" but then once again feels compelled to inject, "I am speaking as being out of my mind." He then answers the question, "I [am] more [of one]."

a. Paul is asking whether these false apostles are *considered* servants of Christ by the Corinthians (which, of course, they were). He is not altering his assessment of them as servants of Satan.

b. After saying he is more of a servant of Christ, Paul should go on to show in what ways he is a superior servant. As Carson notes, given that "brag-sheets" were common in the Greco-Roman world, we might expect Paul to list his exploits and victories. Carson states:

We might imagine Paul saying something like this: "I have established more churches; I have preached the gospel in more lands and to more ethnic groups; I have traveled more miles; I have won more converts; I have written more books; I have raised more money; I have dominated more councils; I have walked with God more fervently and seen more visions; I have commanded the greatest crowds and performed the most spectacular miracles."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Carson (1984), 116.



c. But instead, Paul details his sufferings, loss, shame, and defeats. It's as if the primary criterion of true apostleship is massive suffering in the service of Christ, something diametrically opposed to his opponents' system of values. In listing these kinds of things in his "brag-sheet," Paul is not so subtly ridiculing or parodying the bragging of the false apostles.

(1) with more labors – probably a reference to manual labor while preaching the gospel, something the false apostles considered degrading.

(2) more imprisonments – not the kind of thing the false apostles would put high on their resume.

(3) beatings beyond measure – not more beatings than his opponents, as though they had been beaten. This is fleshed out in vv. 24-25a: "Five times I received from the Jews forty [lashes] minus one; three times I was beaten with rods."

(4) frequent deaths – a general reference to many types of situations in which Paul faced mortal danger.

(5) once I was stoned – no doubt a reference to his horrifying experience in Lystra (Acts 14:19).

(6) three times I was shipwrecked – one of which was far enough out that he spent a night and day in the sea, perhaps clinging to wreckage until rescue arrived. Note this is before the shipwreck in Acts 27 in route to Rome.

(7) In his constant movement, he faced a multitude of dangers, not the least of which would be crossing rivers and being robbed.

(8) He was persecuted by Jews, attacked by Gentiles, and faced danger in all types of places (city, country, sea).

(9) in danger from false brothers – These are those who claim to be fellow-Christians but are not. This is a reference back to "false apostles" (11:13). Most such false brothers in Paul's day would be Judaizers who denied the *sufficiency* of Christ and hounded Paul.

(10) [I have lived] with labor and toil [and] many sleepless nights – Paul's ministry was one of exhausting labor, pressure, and too much to do in too little time. It was scarcely characterized by luxury, comfort, and reflective ease.

(11) [I have lived] with hunger and thirst, many times without eating (lit. "many fastings"), cold and nakedness – Paul experienced hunger and thirst associated with awkward travel arrangements and with an empty pocketbook. Cold

and nakedness (insufficient clothing) might have been forced on him by prison life or financial destitution. As Carson comments:

While the Corinthians were being taught that truly great teachers earned huge fees and commanded multiplying assets, the apostle Paul frequently lived so far below the poverty line he would have needed substantial sums to reach it. For this he suffered doubly: the privations themselves, and then the condescending scorn of immature triumphalists who married pagan greed with over-realized eschatology to argue that financial prosperity was the reward of the just and the right sons of God, conveniently forgetting the cross.<sup>69</sup>

(12) And apart from other things he could mention, he daily has the pressure of his concern for all the churches. This is not the self-centered worry that Jesus forbid in Matthew 6 but a healthy concern for the participation of others in the kingdom (as Jesus showed in weeping over Jerusalem). When saints are weak, Paul (unlike the triumphalists who despise all signs of weakness) empathizes with their weakness. When saints are led into sin, Paul burns with indignation against the behavior of those who facilitated it.

4. Paul's parody of the self-praise that people wrote in their own honor culminates in vv. 30-33 where he refers to his escape from Damascus that is reported in Acts 9:23-25. Paul's Christian life pretty much began not with him exercising rank and power in the society but with him being the target of those with rank and power, powers that were allied to kill him. It was in that weak and vulnerable position that God delivered him (through the disciples in Damascus), and he did so not by the glorious means of military heroics but by the inglorious means of slipping Paul out in a basket lowered through a window in the city wall. There was nothing about this in which Paul could glory; it was God's power that rescued him in the midst of human weakness.

## H. Boasting About Visions (12:1-10)

**It is necessary to boast. Though [it is] not beneficial, I will come to visions and revelations of [the] Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ, [that] fourteen years ago (whether in [the] body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know -- God knows) such a man was caught up to [the] third heaven. <sup>3</sup>Indeed I know such a man (whether in [the] body or apart from the body I do not know -- God knows), <sup>4</sup>that he was caught up into the Paradise and heard unutterable words, which it is not permitted a man to speak. <sup>5</sup>I will boast on behalf of such a man, but I will not boast on behalf of myself, except in [my] weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>For should I wish to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will speak [the] truth; but I refrain, lest anyone credits to me beyond what he sees in me or**

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hears from me,<sup>7</sup> particularly because of the excellency of the revelations. Therefore, lest I exalt myself,<sup>70</sup> there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he should batter me, lest I exalt myself.<sup>8</sup> Regarding this, I three times appealed to the Lord that it might depart from me,<sup>9</sup> yet he has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you; for [my] power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will instead boast most gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ might reside with me.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of Christ, I am pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions and difficulties; for when I am weak, then I am powerful.

1. The false apostles not only claimed superiority in such things as rhetoric, ability to command fees, and leadership style but also claimed spiritual superiority. They enhanced their standing by bragging about the visions and revelations they claimed to receive from God, whereas Paul was reluctant to talk about such experiences.

2. Paul again notes that boasting is not beneficial (meaning under normal circumstances), but because of the situation he goes on to speak about his visions and revelations. Yet, Paul finds this boasting so embarrassing that he can only bring himself to do it in the third person. (Paul may be saying that boasting about visions and revelations is not beneficial in the sense that such unverifiable claims are no basis for one's reputation -- see vv. 6-7.)

3. Paul says that 14 years before he was caught up or transported to the third heaven, which in 12:4 he refers to as Paradise.

a. The reference to the "third heaven" is in line with the threefold division of heaven in the OT (see, Neh. 9:6; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6, 6:18; Ps. 148:4). There is the atmospheric heaven, a stellar heaven (or firmament), and the limitless, or spiritual, heaven where God is located. The third heaven is the highest and best -- *that's* what Paul entered.

b. The vision was such that Paul is not sure whether he was transported bodily or simply in spirit.

c. During this extraordinary vision, Paul heard things that were too sacred to tell, things he was prohibited from revealing. As the ESV puts it, "he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." These things were not given to Paul to pass on to the church but were for his own special benefit.

4. When viewing his experience objectively, in the third person, Paul admits that it is an extraordinary blessing of God which would justify boasting. But from a subjective perspective, when writing in first person, he can only boast of his weaknesses. He

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<sup>70</sup> Garland (1999), 518 (fn. 408) states, "The verb ὑπεραίρομαι is used as a reflexive middle, 'to exalt myself' (see 2 Thess 2:4)."

adds, however, that if he did make such a claim himself, his claim would not be foolishness but would be true. So he lets the cat out of the bag -- he was indeed the one who received these surpassingly great revelations.

5. The reason he refrains from such (direct) boasting about his visionary experience, which he could do if he chose to, is that he fears others will give it undue importance.

a. Paul does not want his converts to assess him on the basis of some private and unverifiable experience but on the basis of his behavior (his conduct and speech).

b. He does not want to become the focus of attention but insists that people focus on the gospel and the Savior.

6. This revelation was so awesome that Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh" to prevent him from being conceited.

a. We don't know what this was, but it was probably some type of significant physical ailment, perhaps something that also was embarrassing.

b. Paul sees this thorn as simultaneously the work of Satan and the work of God. The thorn was sent by Satan to limit or defeat the apostle, but God permitted it in order to bless Paul through it (to keep him from becoming conceited). God is able to make even the evil actions of Satan serve his purpose.

(1) The eleven brothers sold Joseph into slavery, an evil action, but years later Joseph could say to his brothers "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

(2) Consider the cross of Christ. Darkness reigned when Christ was murdered through a wicked conspiracy, and all responsible for it are culpable. Yet at the same time, all these events came about as a result of what God's power and will had decided should happen.

c. As Andrew Fausset comments, "How dangerous must self-exaltation be, when even the apostle required so much restraint."

d. Three times Paul pleaded with the Lord (article suggests that "Lord" refers to Christ) to relieve this hardship, but the Lord's answer was "My grace is sufficient for you; for [my] power is perfected in weakness." In other words, the thorn would not be removed, but Paul would be supplied with the grace necessary to cope with it.

(1) The full scope and strength of Christ's power are found in human weakness. Divine grace is supplied to meet weakness; weakness and need are the

contexts in which it is poured out. The greater one's weakness or need -- when one is poor, sick, humiliated, despised, unloved, and scorned -- the more grace one receives from God to endure and thrive. The powerful and strong are less fit vessels for God's enabling grace, so to brag about one's strength and abilities, as the triumphalists did, is to brag about one's lack of divine grace.

(2) This is the point of Rom. 8:37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Christians are more than conquerors in the context of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, and sword, and in the sense that despite all these things God will empower us to remain faithful.

(3) There is no lower point, no greater situation of human weakness than the cross, but it is here that God's strength was supremely manifested in Christ.

e. This perspective on weakness is why Paul boasts in the suffering and hardships he endured in his ministry. Wherever he is weak, there is the greatest opportunity for God's power to manifest itself with full vigor.

f. In our suffering, we need to pray for relief, but as long as the Lord permits us to remain in that state, he is saying to us "My grace is sufficient for you." He will give us the strength to cope with our troubles. Until he removes our thorn, we should see it as an opportunity for the manifestation of his power and thus a means to his glorification. (Of course, if we received a final "No" regarding relief, as did Paul, then we would cease to pray for its removal.)

## **I. Epilogue to "Fool's Speech" (12:11-13)**

**<sup>11</sup>I have become foolish. You compelled me [to be], for I ought to be commended by you. For I was in no way inferior to the super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>The signs of the apostle were indeed done among you in all endurance, with signs and wonders and miracles. <sup>13</sup>For in what respect were you treated worse than the remaining churches, except that I myself was not a burden for you? Forgive me this wrong!**

1. Paul again says that he was compelled to boast because the Corinthians had failed to defend him as they should have. Since they did not speak up, he was forced to in order to protect them.

2. He was in no way inferior to the "super-apostles," but he is quick to add, "even though I am nothing." Paul sensed his debt to God's grace in everything.

3. Ralph Martin translates v. 12: "The marks of a [true] apostle were displayed [by God] among you in all persistence, [along with] signs, and wonders, and mighty works."

a. Paul says that the hallmarks of an apostle, which for Paul primarily involved his life-changing ministry and his Christlike life but which included miracles, were worked [by God] among the Corinthians in all endurance (i.e., in the face of rejection, ridicule, and slander). In other words, he showed himself to be a true apostle in every way, including miraculous works. They were in no way shortchanged or inferior by virtue of Paul's apostleship.

b. Paul does not make the performance of miracles the acid test of apostleship (as some translations might suggest). Rather, they are part of the package.

4. In v. 13 Paul asks "For in what respect were you treated worse than the other churches," the point of which is that they were in no way shortchanged by his apostleship. The only thing he did not "do for them" is be a financial burden on them by taking their support. He ironically comments, "Forgive me this wrong!"

## **J. The Planned Third Visit (12:14 - 13:10)**

### **1. His refusal to accept support (12:14-18)**

**<sup>14</sup>Look! I am ready to come to you this third time, and I will not be a burden, for I do not seek your things but you. For the children ought not lay up treasure for the parents, but the parents for the children.**

**<sup>15</sup>But I most gladly will spend and be spent on behalf of your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved less? <sup>16</sup>Now let it be [agreed], I did not burden you; yet, being crafty, I took you [in] with deceit. <sup>17</sup>Did anyone [of those] whom I have sent to you -- <sup>18</sup>did I defraud you through him? I urged Titus and sent the brother with [him]. Did Titus defraud you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? [Did we] not [walk] in the same steps?**

a. When he makes his third visit, he will not change his policy of refusing to accept support. The reason is that he does not want their money (implying that the false apostles do) but them, i.e., their continued allegiance to Christ and their reciprocated love.

b. After all, he is their father in the faith, and the obligation of provision generally flows from parents to children, not the other way around. Children do, of course, have an obligation to support parents who need it (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:8), and apostles have a right to be supported by their spiritual children (1 Cor. 9:3-14), but foregoing that right cannot automatically be deemed hostile in light of the general parent-child relationship.

c. Like a loving father, Paul will most gladly expend his own resources (property and energy) on their behalf, to bless them spiritually. In v. 15b he asks

whether his loving them more, by pouring his life out for them, will result in their loving him less. In other words, will they misinterpret his love and actually resent it.

d. In vv. 16-18 Paul responds to a slanderous accusation that was rooted in his fiscal policy toward them. Though it was acknowledged that Paul did not accept support from them, some apparently claimed he sent his agents to dupe them out of their money under the pretext of collecting for the poor saints in Judea. In rebuttal, Paul simply denies they can produce any evidence of fraud on the part of Titus, his agent, and then asserts his own integrity (which they should have known) in defense of Titus.

## 2. Fears about the unrepentant (12:19-21)

**<sup>19</sup>All along you are thinking that we are defending [ourselves] to you. Before God we are speaking in Christ, and all things [we do], beloved, are on behalf of your edification. <sup>20</sup>For I fear that when I come I may find you not such [men] as I desire, and I may be found by you such [a man] as you do not desire: that [there will be] discord, jealousy, angry outbursts, rivalries, [and cases of] evil speech, gossip, arrogance, [and] disorder, <sup>21</sup>that when I come my God may again humble me before you, and I will mourn [over] many of those who have previously sinned and did not repent over the impurity and sexual immorality and licentiousness which they practiced.**

a. Paul repudiates the idea that he had all along been trying to win the approval of human judges in Corinth. Paul was ultimately accountable to God (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:10), not to the Corinthians, so self-defense before mere men was never his primary concern. Rather, as one who is acutely aware that everything he does is laid bare before God, his aim in all his relations with the Corinthians -- especially his correspondence -- was not personal vindication but edification.

b. Paul was partly motivated to build up the Corinthians because he feared that he might be disappointed in them when he arrived, that he might be humiliated by their poor spiritual condition. Specifically:

(1) He feared he might find sins of the spirit: discord, jealousy, angry outbursts, rivalries, [and cases of] evil speech, gossip, arrogance, [and] disorder. Rather than finding the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Paul feared he would find disunity and warring factions.

(2) He feared he might find sins of the flesh: impurity and sexual immorality and licentiousness. Such immorality is more likely in a congregation characterized by the above-mentioned sins of the spirit not only because unrestraint in one part of life invites unrestraint in others but also because a fractured church cannot effectively exercise wise, firm, and loving discipline.

c. If this happened, the Corinthians would not find Paul the way they wanted him to be. Instead, he will be administering the discipline of the Lord.

### **3. Warning (13:1-4)**

**This [is the] third [time] I am coming to you. By the mouth of two witnesses or of three, every statement shall be established. <sup>2</sup>I have said in advance and say in advance (as when present the second [time], so now while absent) to those having previously sinned and to all the remaining [ones], that if I come again I will not spare [you], <sup>3</sup>since you seek proof of the Christ who speaks through me, who is not weak toward you but powerful among you. <sup>4</sup>For indeed, he was crucified from weakness, but he lives from [the] power of God. For indeed, we are weak in him, but we will live with him from God's power toward you.**

a. Paul is coming for a third time to Corinth, and his reference to Deut. 19:15 about matters being established by two or three witnesses is a clear indication that he intends to take disciplinary action against the impenitent. He plans to "hold court" so to speak. (He may also be pointing out that any accusations against him will also need to be credibly presented.)

b. Ample warning has been given, and on his next trip, if there is no improvement, decisive action will be taken. He "will not spare" those remaining in sin (either those warned during his second visit and in this letter or those warned only in this letter). This probably means that he, by the authority of Christ, will exclude them from the congregation (see, 1 Tim. 1:20 where Paul did this to Hymenaeus and Alexander), but it may suggest a more direct type of punishment from Christ (remember Ananias and Sapphira).

c. His promised refusal to spare them is due, at least in part, to their demand that he prove that Christ is speaking through him (i.e., that he is an authentic apostle). He's prepared to show it, but it is not going to be the kind of evidence they wanted. The living Christ, who stands behind Paul, will by no means permit the sins of this church to run forever unchecked.

d. After all, Christ was crucified in weakness, meaning he submitted himself to sinful men, but through the power of God he now lives as the resurrected Lord of all. This same pattern is evident in Paul's ministry (and should be in all apostolic ministries): a combination of weakness and divine power.

### **4. Exhortation (13:5-6)**

**<sup>5</sup>Test yourselves [to determine] whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not recognize [about] yourselves that Jesus Christ**



**[is] in you (unless, of course, you are disproven)? <sup>6</sup>And I hope that you will know that we are not disproven.**

a. The Corinthians have been bent on testing Paul, on having him prove himself as an apostle, but Paul exhorts them to test *themselves* to prove they are "in the faith." He calls them to examine their own lives to see whether they have abandoned their loyalty to Christ, to the true faith. Carson comments:

There are millions of professing believers in North America today (to say nothing of elsewhere) who at some point entered into a shallow commitment to Christianity, but who, if pushed, would be forced to admit they do not love holiness, do not pray, do not hate sin, do not walk humbly with God. They stand in the same danger as the Corinthians; and Paul's warning applies to them no less than to the Corinthian readers of this epistle.<sup>71</sup>

b. Assuming they will conclude they are in the faith, Paul asks whether they do not understand that Christ is in them, meaning whether they do not understand the ethical implications of that fact (see, 1 Cor. 6:15-17). One cannot love Christ and sin at the same time. He adds, "unless, of course, you are disproven," i.e., fail the test, because in that case Christ is *not* in them.

c. Again assuming they will conclude they are still "in the faith," Paul hopes they will recognize what that implies: that he and his companions have not failed the test of authentic apostleship. If the Corinthians are holding to the true faith, that is so because of what they received from the ministry of Paul and his co-workers.

## **5. Prayer (13:7-9)**

**<sup>7</sup>Now we pray to God you do nothing evil, not that we may appear proven, but that you may do the good thing, though we may be as if disproven. <sup>8</sup>For we cannot [do] anything against the truth but [only] on behalf of the truth. <sup>9</sup>For we rejoice whenever we are weak and you are powerful. This also we pray [for]: your restoration.**

a. Paul prays that they do no evil, that they will be restrained from sin. As Matthew Henry comments:

This is the most desirable thing we can ask God, both for ourselves and for our friends, that we and they may do no evil; and it is most needful, that we often pray to God for the grace to keep us, because without that we cannot keep ourselves. We are more concerned to pray that we not *do* evil, than that we may not *suffer* evil.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Carson (1984), 178.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Carson (1984), 179.

b. The motive for this prayer is not that their righteousness will vindicate Paul's ministry (transformed lives being a valid proof of his apostleship) but simply that they will do what is right, even if that means Paul's appearing (to the Corinthians) to have failed the test of apostleship (by obviating his display of apostolic severity and power).

c. Avoiding evil and doing what is right conforms to the truth of the gospel, it is how Christians are to live, and Paul and his companions are compelled to work solely on behalf of that truth. In other words, they cannot bring themselves to work against that truth for any reason, let alone something as petty as their personal standing.

d. Paul rejoices whenever the Corinthians are powerful in Christ and he is weak, meaning he is able to refrain from displaying his apostolic authority. He prefers to come in "weakness" (1 Cor. 4:21). In fact, he prays precisely for the Corinthians' spiritual strength and wholeness.

## **6. Purpose in writing (v. 10)**

**<sup>10</sup>On account of this I write these things while being absent, so that when present I may not deal harshly, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for edification and not for destruction.**

Paul writes as he does so that when he arrives he will not have to display the stern power of discipline. He wants to build the church up, not blow it away, but he has the divine authority to do whichever is necessary.

## **K. Final Greetings (13:11-13)**

**<sup>11</sup>Finally, brothers, rejoice; restore yourselves, encourage yourselves, think the same, be at peace -- and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. <sup>13</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [be] with all of you.**

1. He tells them to "rejoice," which in some translations is rendered "Goodbye." They can rejoice in God's love for them and in the fact they can remedy their current condition if they choose to do so.

2. "Restore yourselves" harks back to v. 9b. There Paul prays for their "restoration," sometimes translated "perfection." Here he exhorts them to "restore" themselves. They need to take action.

3. He exhorts them to "encourage one another." We are in this battle together and need to be helping each other stay on track.

4. He tells them to "think the same" and "be at peace." There is to be harmony in the church, people being on the same page and pulling in the same direction.

5. The God of love and peace will be with them in their struggle of faith.

6. This is one of the four places in which Paul tells the saints to greet one another with a *holy kiss* (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26), and Peter in 1 Pet. 5:14 tells them to greet one another with a *kiss of love*. Notice that neither Paul nor Peter says simply "Greet one another with a *kiss*." Rather, they both specify the attitude behind the kiss, and that is the focus of the command.

a. Given that kissing was the standard way of greeting family and friends in first-century Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures,<sup>73</sup> what is being commanded is not that they greet by kissing – that was assumed – but that *when* they greet by kissing it not be duplicitous, that the kiss not mask unholy or unloving attitudes toward the recipient as was done in the kiss that betrayed Christ.

b. If, for example, Miss Manners charged Americans to "toast brides and grooms with sincerity," it would be missing the point to think that she was insisting on wedding toasts. The practice of toasting newlyweds would be the unaddressed cultural backdrop not the subject of the command. The command should be understood along the lines, "Given the practice of toasting, do not use it as an occasion for duplicity."

7. He prays for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to be with them all.

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<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., Craig Keener, "Kissing" in Craig Evans and Stanley Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 628-629.