

## The New European Bible Commentary: 2 Corinthians

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### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*And Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia-* The addition of "all the saints" in Achaia could be because the Gospel had spread there since the time of the first letter. But I suggest that 2 Corinthians is largely concerned with the issues surrounding the Jerusalem poor fund, and Paul wished that all the Gentiles in all Achaia would contribute to this fund.

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* Grace, *charis*, or gift, refers often to the gift of internal spiritual strengthening which the Father and Son wish to share with their people. And knowing the unspirituality of many at Corinth, Paul truly wishes the operation of the Spirit in their hearts.

1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort-* The reference to comfort being sent from the Father is surely a reference to the promise of the Comforter, a personification of the Holy Spirit given by the Lord Jesus, for the internal strengthening of believers. The comforter was to operate within the hearts of the Lord's people (Jn. 14:17). The theme of 'comfort' which Paul now develops may also be a reflection of his gratitude to gracious Barnabas for all he had done for Paul- he was "the son of comfort", a human form of God's comfort (Acts 4:36).

1:3-7 is in poetic form. It seems that hymns developed in the early church, fragments of which are found in the poems of 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Eph. 1:13,14; 5:14; Phil. 2:6-12; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:4 and elsewhere.

1:4 *Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those that are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God-* Our experiences elicit "comfort" spiritually from God, which we are then to mediate on to others who suffer our same afflictions. Paul could therefore speak of how "we were comforted in your comfort" (2 Cor. 7:13). But we must allow the intended flow of the Spirit to occur. Paul concludes the Corinthian correspondence by appealing for them to "be comforted" (2 Cor.

13:11), to allow the operation of the process of comfort, the flow of the Spirit, the work of the Comforter through the members of Christ's body.

This principle is why experiences repeat between the lives of God's children. Our experiences connect with those of Biblical characters- and thus the Biblical records become alive and intensely personal for each of us. And we see similarities in patterns and experiences between our lives and those of others contemporary with us. This is surely to enable the principle of 2 Cor. 1:4- that if we suffer anything, it is so that we can mediate comfort to those who suffer as we do. To go into our shells and not do this not only makes our own sufferings harder, but frustrates the very purpose of them. This is the whole purpose of fellowship, of getting to know each other, of meeting together. The repeating similarities between our lives and those of others also reveal to us that God at times arranges for us to suffer from our *alter ego*- persons who behave similarly to us, and who through those similarities cause us suffering. In this way we are taught the error of our ways, both past and present. It seems that Jacob the deceiver suffered in this way from Laban the deceiver- in order to teach him and cause his spiritual growth. For example, as Jacob deceived his blind father relating to an important family matter, so Laban deceived Jacob in the darkness of the wedding night. Esau once begged food of Jacob, and he deceived him cruelly. As an old man, Jacob twice had to beg food from the estranged brother, his own son Joseph. No wonder he so tried not to have to send his sons to Egypt to beg for food. He was being taught- even after all those years- how Esau his brother had felt.

Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others. Consider too how the palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to teach others that Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:2-6).

So if we suffer anything, it is so that ultimately *others* may be comforted in our comfort. True Christianity, authentic relationship with God, simply can't be lived out in isolation, with us asking God for things and Him giving them to us just for us. We need to discern how *others* will be affected by our experience of answered prayer, and bear this in mind when formulating our prayers. And all this is surely the answer to the cynic's complaint that prayer is essentially selfish. It can be, it too often is; but Biblical prayer is not at all. In words which need reading twice, Elizabeth O'Connor drives the point home in *Journey Outward*: "If engagement with ourselves does not push back horizons so that we see neighbours we did not see before, then we need to examine the appointments kept with self. If prayer does not drive us into some concrete involvement at a point of the world's need, then we must question prayer... the inner life is not nurtured in order to hug to oneself some secret gain". The Psalms have all this as a major theme.

1:5- see on Acts 9:16.

*For as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, even so our comfort is also in abundance through Christ-* Our trials are specially designed so that we *may* give comfort to others who suffer in essence the same experiences- and this is how "our comfort aboundeth through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:4,5 RV). He is the comforter insofar as His brethren minister that comfort which He potentially enables them to minister. As we partake in the Lord's sufferings, so we partake of the comfort which is in Him- but which is ministered through the loving care of those in Him (2 Cor. 1:7). This is why any attitude of insularity is totally impossible for the true brother or sister in Christ. Behind every human face, there is a tragedy behind the brave façade which is put up. Almost everybody has been bruised by life, and is

feeling the pressure of temptation or defeat, depression, loneliness or despair. It's true that some need to be disturbed from their complacency, but the vast majority need above all else to be given by us *the comfort of God's love*. People, all people (not just our brethren) are desperate for real comfort and compassion. And it is up to us to mediate it to them.

*1:6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which works in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer-* It could be argued that *all* our experiences are in order that we might be able to give out to others from our own experience of God's grace (2 Cor. 1:4-6). Paul will use the same words to say that he "begs" [s.w. "comfort"] the Corinthians to "comfort" the disciplined brother by receiving him back (2 Cor. 2:7,8). Paul uses the same word to say that God was begging or comforting the Corinthians through him (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1). "The same sufferings" doesn't necessarily mean that we shall have identical sufferings to each other. The sufferings in view are those of the Lord Jesus mentioned in :5. Both Paul and the Corinthians were enduring the same sufferings- in that all their sufferings were those of the Lord Jesus. But the comfort, the power of the Spirit, is only mediated if there is some desire for it by those receiving it. The Spirit "comfort" is made effective (Gk.; NEV "which works") only if we patiently endure and participate in the Lord's sufferings. 1 Corinthians opened by stating that Corinth had received the Spirit; but 1 Cor. 3:1 and the rest of the letter is clear that they were "not spiritual". The Spirit is given- but it must be made effectual, the potential must be released, by our willing acceptance of it.

*1:7 And our hope for you is steadfast-* The Greek idea of *elpis*, "hope", is not a hope for the best, a kind of optimism that perhaps all might turn out all right. The idea is rather of a confident expectation; and considering the apostasy of the Corinthians, that is quite something. Paul refuses to condemn anyone who has been baptized into Christ and is therefore a partaker in His death and the Spirit-comfort which He makes available. And because Paul will not pre-judge the final judgement, his hope / expectation for them was "steadfast"

*Knowing that, as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also are you of the comfort-* The idea may be that *if* or *insofar* as they shared in the Lord's sufferings (:5), willingly understanding their experiences as part of His- then they would share in "the comfort", the Comforter, the gift of the Spirit, His life now mediated into the hearts and lives of those open it. If we share in His death, we share in His life. That is the basic significance of baptism, but the principle is ongoing throughout our lives. The association with His life is not simply in that we have hope of a future bodily resurrection, but in that His living, His life, becomes manifest in our mortal flesh right now (2 Cor. 4:11); we live in *newness* of life after baptism (Rom. 6:4).

*1:8 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant in regards to the hardships which we encountered in Asia-* Paul reminds them of his sufferings in the context of wanting to comfort them. For he has just outlined God's principle of how suffering is experienced in order that we might comfort others. His affliction is for their comfort (:6) and so he doesn't wish them to be ignorant of how much hardship he encountered in Asia.

*We were weighed down exceedingly-* This is the term used by the Lord in predicting what would happen to the believers immediately prior to His return (Mt. 24:9,21,29). Some of the preconditions for the Lord's return in AD70 were indeed fulfilled, and so Paul eagerly anticipated it. But there were other preconditions which were not fulfilled, and therefore His coming was delayed until our last days.

*Beyond our power-* The phrase is only used again in the NT in 2 Cor. 8:3. The Macedonians were generous to the Jerusalem Poor Fund beyond their natural power or ability. Paul is urging the Corinthians to learn from his example, and theirs too- that in the power of the Spirit we can do what would be beyond our own *dunamis*. In Paul's thought, what is beyond *human* power is the Holy Spirit, the power of God. The Holy Spirit and the power [*dunamis*] of God are paralleled in Lk. 1:35; 4:14. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the source of *dunamis*, power (Eph. 3:16; Rom. 15:13; 2 Tim. 1:7). In these passages the Spirit gives psychological, internal power.

*So much so that we feared even for our lives-* "Feared" is better "despaired", and the Greek word is only again used when Paul writes that through the power of the Spirit he does not despair despite all sufferings (2 Cor. 4:8). He is describing here in this opening chapter his natural powerless situation, but with the implication that the power of the Spirit changes all that. And although the Corinthians had received potentially the Spirit (1 Cor. 1), they were not making use of that potential. And Paul urges them to follow his example in doing so.

1:9 *Yes, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in the God who raises the dead-* The standard interpretation of this seems to be that when Paul asked himself as to whether he would die, he found the answer ["sentence"] that he would. But this is a very odd way of putting it; and why use the language of the courtroom, let alone a phrase taken from Jewish commentary and midrash on Genesis 3. This sentence of death can be read as an allusion to the sentence which passed upon all men as a result of Adam's sin. Paul is saying that all our sufferings are common in that we each have the same sentence of death. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves ["in our hearts we felt the sentence of death", NIV], *that* we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9 AV). The fact we are going to die, relatively soon, and lie unconscious... drives the man who seriously believes it to faith in the God of resurrection. It seems that at a time of great physical distress, Paul was made to realize that in fact he had "the sentence of death" within him, he was under the curse of mortality, and this led him to a hopeful faith that God would preserve him from the ultimate "so great a death" as well as from the immediate problems. Death being like a sleep, it follows that judgment day is our next conscious experience after death. Because death is an ever more likely possibility for us, our judgment is effectively *almost upon us*. And we must live with and in that knowledge. The tragic brevity of life means that "childhood and youth are vanity", we should quit the time wasting follies of youth or overgrown childhood (and the modern world is full of this), and therefore too "remove anger from thy heart and put away evil from thy flesh" (Ecc. 11:10 AVmg.). Ecclesiastes uses the mortality of man not only as an appeal to work for our creator, but to simply have faith in His existence.

1:10 *Who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver. On whom we have set our hope, that He will also still deliver us-* The "great death" from which Paul was delivered refers to the death sentence received in Asia, apparently to fight to the death with wild animals in the arena, which sentence Paul was miraculously delivered from (see on 1 Cor. 15:32). He uses the same Greek word for "deliver" in reminiscing how there "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17). "And will deliver" would then refer to Paul's hope of resurrection. For as noted on :9, he is reasoning that no matter how dramatic are our brushes with death in this life, we all have the sentence of death within us. Paul hopes that the Lord will continue to 'deliver him from evil' in this life (s.w. Mt. 6:13). But his greater hope is for the deliverance which will come at the resurrection, when we shall be delivered "from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24).

1:11 *You also helping together on our behalf by your prayers, so that it works out that for the*

*gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf-* Paul has in view an upcoming evil that he needed deliverance from. He asks them to pray for him, on the basis that the gift of salvation would then lead to all who had prayed for it then thanking God for it, and thus God would be glorified. But to describe his hoped for deliverance as a "gift" may seem strange- until we realize that Paul is framing all this in language he would later use of his pet project, the Jerusalem poor fund. His idea was that if there were many contributions towards that "gift", then there would be many praises given for it. And he paves the way for that by asking them to pray for his deliverance, that he may be given a gift of deliverance, and they would all praise God for it afterwards.

The idea of "helped... by prayer for us" (2 Cor. 1:11 AV) sounds as if Paul's unaided prayers had less power than when the Corinthians were praying for him too. Stephen believed this to the point that he could pray for the forgiveness of his murderers, fully believing God could hear and grant such forgiveness. Job believed this, in that he prayed God would forgive his children in case they sinned. The friends mocked this in Job 5:4; 8:4; 17:5 and 20:10, saying that the children of the foolish die for their *own* sins, whereas, by implication, Job had figured that *his* prayers and sacrifices could gain *them* forgiveness. Yet in the end, Yahweh stated that Job had understood Him and His principles right, whereas the friends hadn't.

1:12 *For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and Godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world- and more abundantly toward you-* "Holiness" is a poor translation; most manuscripts read "simplicity". And this is the word Paul will later use about the 'simplicity' required to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund. The word means both simple and generous. I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. The Greek word translated "simplicity" occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor. Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "*the simplicity that is in Christ*" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated

‘simple’), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not ‘simple’ or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

Our fear of what others think of us, of their reactions and possible reactions to who we are, to our words and our actions; our faithless worry about where we will find our food and clothing, how we will be cared for when we are old, whether our health will fail... all these things detract us from a simple and direct faith in the basic tenets of the Gospel, which is what should lead us to humility. “The *simplicity* that is in Christ... in *simplicity* and godly sincerity... by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world... [doing our daily work] with *singleness* [s.w. ‘simplicity’] of heart, as unto Christ” (2 Cor. 1:12; 11:3; Eph. 6:5,6). Worries about the material things of life, or deep seated doubt developed during years of atheism or wrong belief... these all so easily distract us from the simplicity of a true and humbled faith.

1:13 *For we write no other things to you, than what you read or even acknowledge, and I hope you will acknowledge to the end-* This sounds like a reference to the letters being circulated in Paul's name which were not really from him. Hence he concludes some of his letters by signing "with my own hand". Any who feel they have suffered from slander and abuse within the church should take encouragement from what Paul suffered from the Corinthians. But still he loved them because they were in Christ. Just consider what he was suffering from Corinth alone at this time:

#### **Paul: Victim Of Slander In The Church**

- Too physically weak to do the job (2 Cor. 10:10)
- Underhanded, cunning (2 Cor. 4:2 RSV)
- Tampering with God's word (2 Cor. 4:2 RSV)
- Not preaching according to the sanction of the Lord Jesus, but inventing things for himself (in the context of Gentile liberty, Gal. 1:1).
- Preaching himself as the saviour, not Christ (2 Cor. 4:5)
- Commending himself, showing himself to be so spiritually strong (2 Cor. 3:1)
- Trying to build up his own self-image with his listeners as he preached the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:5)
- Trying to domineer over his brethren (2 Cor. 1:24; 8:8 Gk.)
- Mentally unstable (2 Cor. 5:13)
- Causing others to stumble (2 Cor. 6:3)
- An imposter (2 Cor. 6:8- in the context, Paul is saying that the fact he is so maligned is a kind of proof that he really is a genuine worker for the Lord!).
- Wronging, corrupting, financially defrauding brethren (2 Cor. 7:2)
- Demanding so much money from others that they would become impoverished themselves (2 Cor. 8:13,14 J.B. Phillips)
- But not a real apostle, seeing that if he was then he would do as the Lord had bidden and receive “hire” for being a “labourer”; if he was worthy, he would have accepted

it. The fact he didn't showed he wasn't a hard labourer. This was so untrue. It's a real cruel example of slander in the church.

- He only threatened ecclesial discipline but never did anything in practice- he was all talk and no do (2 Cor. 10:1-6)
- What he wrote was in his letters was a contradiction of the person he was in practice (2 Cor. 1:13)
- He kept changing his mind over important issues (2 Cor. 1:17-19)
- They were offended that Paul didn't take money from them (2 Cor. 11:7 RSV), and yet also grudged giving money for the Jerusalem Poor Fund because the Corinthian church slandered Paul that he claimed he was only trying to get the money for himself.
- Crafty and a liar, not opening his heart to his brethren (2 Cor. 12:16 cp. 6:11)
- Preaching that we can be immoral because God's grace will cover us (Rom. 3:8)
- Preached in order to get money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12)
- Still secretly preached that circumcision was vital for salvation (Gal. 5:11).

If you can imagine where Paul might have used quotation marks, this helps to reveal certain phrases which he was probably quoting from their claims. Most of the above slander in the church was from just one ecclesia (Corinth): one can be certain that there were many other such slanders.

1:14 *As also you did once partially acknowledge us, that we are your boasting, even as you are also ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus-* Paul saw his reward as proportionate to the quality of his brethren (2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 2:16; 4:1). The nature or quality of his eternal life was bound up with whether or not they would be accepted at the day of judgment- and that surely was why Paul kept on keeping on with the Corinthians, and why we endure the whole dysfunctional story which is 'church'. With what measure we give to others in spiritual terms, we will be measured to at the judgment (Mk. 4:24 and context). 1 Cor. 3:9-15 likewise teaches that the spiritual "work" of "any man" with his brethren will be proportionate to his reward at the judgment.

1:15 *And in this confidence I had decided to come first of all to you, that you might have a second benefit-* The neat maps in our Bibles notwithstanding, it is clear that Paul had no such clear plan of where to found ecclesias. He preached in Galatia because illness required that he spend some time there, against his original intention (Gal. 4:13). He was forbidden to preach in Bithynia as he had planned, he fled to Athens for safety and ended up preaching there, then he fled from there to Corinth (Acts 16:6,7). And it seems that he was only in transit through Ephesus, but found the people responsive and therefore continued working there (Acts 18:19). Indeed, his movements were so uncertain that he was open to the charge of vacillating about his plans (2 Cor. 1:15,18). And yet it has been shown that the places where Paul founded ecclesias were strategic points, in that they were centres where different nationalities mixed, where trade routes crossed, where social and religious conditions were better than elsewhere for the spread of the Gospel. Yet this was not due to any conscious desire of Paul for this; the Lord overruled this, so that, e.g., from Thessalonica the message sounded out throughout Asia, due to the many mobile people who heard the Gospel there.

The second benefit or grace / gift may suggest that on each visit, Paul would give them a spiritual gift, just as he promised to do with the Romans in Rom. 1:11. Perhaps his physical presence was necessary because the particular Spirit gift in view would be passed on by the

laying on of hands. The two gifts would have been a result of his intended two visits to Corinth- on the way both to and from Macedonia.

1:16 *And by you to pass into Macedonia and again from Macedonia to come to you, and from you proceed on my journey to Judea-* This plan as it seems changed because he decided to go Macedonia via Troas, because a great opportunity in the Gospel had opened there (2 Cor. 2:12). The journey planned to Judea was in order to take the collection money there. Hence Paul's urging of the Macedonians to contribute. "Proceed on my journey" is literally as AV "to be brought on my way [by you] toward Judea". This alludes to the practice of walking with a departing visitor for the first part of their journey as a sign of support for the journey undertaken. And Paul says that his intention is that Corinth would in this way bless his Jerusalem mission. This was an almost obsessive interest.

1:17 *When I planned this, did I show fickleness? Or the things that I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, so that in the same breath I say, Yes, yes and then No, no?-* The change in travel plans, going to Macedonia via Troas rather than Corinth, was because of an opening for the Gospel in Troas (2:12). Yet Paul's critics interpreted this as fickleness. Any commitment to the Lord's work immediately opens us up for criticism and wilful misinterpretation of our motives. "Yes, yes" is the language of :20 about the preaching of the Lord Jesus. Not only must we preach because our Lord preached. We must witness *as He witnessed*. Paul understood us to have been anointed in a similar way to who Christ was anointed; and thereby we become witnesses of Him. In this context, he explains that he wasn't vague and uncertain in the matter of preaching; he didn't keep vacillating between yes and no because this was not how Jesus preached- in Him was "yes!" (2 Cor. 1:20,17).

1:18 *But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yes and no-* Paul's preaching was an exact transmission of the person of Jesus; He was not indecisive, He was positive; and likewise Paul's preaching of Him had the same marks. He quotes this as a counter to the criticism that he was "yes and no", a man with no sense of truth or decision. 'If I am a man in Christ, then I will axiomatically act like Him, and therefore this criticism of me *cannot* be true'. The only other references to the faithfulness of God in the NT are also in Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13). Because "God is true", therefore it ought to be axiomatic that our words are true, as those bearing His Name (so Paul argues in 2 Cor. 1:18; 11:10). It could be that although baptized, the Corinthians were still as it were testing out God, and were tempted to feel that He was not consistently reliable or trustworthy. This mentality can be found amongst many new converts today.

1:19 *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; but in him is yes-* The preaching of Paul meant that the person of the Lord Jesus was preached amongst the Corinthians. The message was not only Christ-centred, but the preachers were themselves the manifestation of the Christ they preached. We are "in Christ" to the extent that we *are* Christ to this world. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us. "The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was preached among you through us, even through me and Silvanus" (2 Cor. 1:19 RVmg.). Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians (Gal. 3:1 Gk.); to the Corinthians he was "the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RSV). Just as the Lord Jesus is always "yes" with regard to the salvation of others, so was Paul because he was in Him; and so should we be.

1:20 *For no matter how many and whatever be the promises of God, in him is the ultimate Yes!-* We know that the promises to the Jewish fathers were confirmed by the death of the Lord; and yet "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). "In



him" is put for 'on account of His death which confirmed them'. 'He' was His death and His cross. In the preceding verse, Paul has spoken of "Christ crucified". He was brought to the cross a man who had already died unto sin; and the very quick time in which He died reflected how physically worn out His body was, in reflection of how sin had virtually already been put to death in Him.

*Therefore also through him is the Amen, to the glory of God through us-* The connection between the atonement and faith in prayer is brought out in 2 Cor. 1:20 RSV: "For all the promises of God in him are yea. That is, we utter the Amen through him". The promises of God were confirmed through the Lord's death, and the fact that He died as the seed of Abraham, having taken upon Him Abraham's plural seed in representation (Rom. 15:8,9). Because of this, "we utter the Amen through [on account of being in] Him". We can heartily say 'Amen', so be it, to our prayers on account of our faith and understanding of His confirmation of God's promises. But why this laboured aside about the utter certainty of God's promises, because they have been confirmed in Christ? It is in the context of Paul urging that *his* promises are to be taken seriously and that he is not unstable or fickle. If he and we- have had such experiences of God's word of promise made even more sure, then one outflow of this will be in behaviour which is likewise solid and not fickle, changed at the last moment because of our own whims.

1:21 *Now he that establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God-* As noted on :20, the confirmation of God's promises through Christ's death are part of His stabilizing of us. Paul would not have lied to them about his travel plans because he has been established or confirmed, just as they had been ("with you"). This confirming or establishment is paralleled to having been anointed by the Spirit. The language of very special people in Jewish history- prophets and kings- is used of each believer. For no longer are just a few significant individuals anointed. Now, every believer is likewise significant and is similarly anointed; see on Acts 13:9. The Greek translated "establishes" has been used by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:6,8, where he reminds the Corinthians that they have been 'confirmed' by the gift of the Spirit after their initial believing into Christ. Yet they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1); they had not made use of that Spirit gift, just as many fail to today. The same word is used of the psychological confirmation of believers after their baptism and belief in Christ (Col. 2:7; Heb. 2:3). Heb. 13:9 is more specific, saying that the heart [or mind / psychology] is "established with grace", *charis*, the gift- of the Spirit. This is how I understand 2 Pet. 1:19- the word of prophecy, the word spoken forth by the early preachers, is confirmed / established [AV "made more sure"]. Now in 1 Cor. 1:22, Paul will go on to state specifically that the arena of the Spirit's establishing / confirming operation is within the hearts / minds of believers. The same word is found in Mk. 16:20, where the Lord promised to confirm or establish the believer in the Gospel by miracles. This function of the Spirit has passed away, but the essential confirmation of the Gospel by the Spirit gift in human hearts remains.

But the Greek for 'establish' can also mean to validate, and this was a relevant concern of Paul at this time. This same word keeps cropping up in Ignatius, who uses the Greek *bebaion* in the sense of 'valid'. Ignatius [and others] taught that for service of the Lord to be valid by a believer, it had to be validated through obedience to the church leadership. *They* gave his or her service its validity. "Whatsoever [the Bishop and presbytery] shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which ye do may be sure and valid [*bebaion*]" (*Smyrneans* 8.2). Significantly, Paul here addresses this very issue, using the very same Greek word, and in precisely this context- of justifying his service to God even though it was not approved / validated by others who thought they were elders: "He who validates us

[*bebaion*], along with you [the ordinary members of the flock]... is God, who also sealed us" (2 Cor. 1:21,22). God has validated and called each of us to His service. We don't need approval / validation / authorization from anybody on this earth. Of course we should seek to work co-operatively with our brethren, for such is obviously the spirit of Christ; neither Paul nor myself are inciting a spirit of maverick irresponsibility. But he *is* clearly saying that the idea of needing authorization / validation from any group of elders in order to minister, preach, break bread and baptize [which is a context of his writing to the Corinthians] is totally wrong.

1:22- see on 2 Cor. 3:3.

*Who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts-* "Also" doesn't have to mean that the statement following is an additional truth to preceding one. Literally "and...", this "and... and" structure can be used [as it is in several Eastern European languages] to express a series of parallel truths or descriptions of the same reality. As noted on :21, Paul has in view the gift of the Holy Spirit after baptism- a transforming power within the human heart. Any claim that the Spirit only worked through miraculous signs is made null and void by this specific statement that we have been given the Spirit in our hearts. After we believe, we are "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The promised Holy Spirit is surely a reference to the Comforter, a force which would be *within* the believer to make the Lord Jesus as real as if He were physically with us. The same gift of the Spirit is promised to all who would be baptized in Acts 2:39. The sealing is therefore "in our hearts". Perhaps this is why the 'sealing' of the faithful in Rev. 7:3 was "in their foreheads"- in their minds. This internal, psychological experience is the foretaste, the guarantee, of our future total transformation at the last day. 2 Cor. 5:4,5 present this "down payment" as the precursor to the literal transformation of the body at the Lord's return: "...that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing [the ending of our mortality by immortality] is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee". Eph. 1:13,14 speak of this same gift coming after belief: "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is a guarantee [s.w. "down payment"] of our inheritance, of the final redemption of God's own possession, for the praise of His glory".

1:23 *But I call God for a witness upon my soul-* David speaks of God enthroned in the court of Heaven judging him and yet also maintaining his right; and yet in the same context, David speaks of how God's throne is prepared for future judgment, He *will* minister judgment (Ps. 9:4 cp. 7,8,19). The court of Heaven that was now trying him would sit again in the last day. Paul shows the same understanding when, under 'judgment' by his brethren, he calls God as a witness right now (2 Cor. 1:23 RSV), several times saying that he spoke "before God", as if already at judgment day.

*That to spare you I came no more to Corinth-* In 2:12 Paul seems to excuse his change of travel plans by saying that a great door of opportunity for the Gospel had been opened at Troas. But it could be that this was an outcome of his knowledge that if he were to come to Corinth whilst they were still unrepentant of their gross immorality, the Spirit may have led Paul to severely judge them. Remember that in the first century, the Holy Spirit empowered the judgment of apostate believers with physical sickness or even death. Knowing this, Paul chose to give them more time to repent. We see here how the work of the Spirit through men was not [and is not] irresistible; Paul knew what the Spirit would urge or force him to do if he went there again and he chose not to allow that to happen. God is in dialogue with man, never forcing but always open to working with us.

1:24 *Not that we have lordship over your faith but are helpers of your joy. For in faith you must stand fast-* Nobody, not even faithful brethren, can have dominion over our faith; by our own faith we stand (2 Cor. 1:24, filling in the ellipsis). Solomon exhorts his son to get wisdom, for “if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it” (Prov. 9:12). The understanding of God we gain from His word, and the result of rejecting it, is so intensely personal. "Helpers" translates *sunergos*, a co-worker. As so often noted, the salvation of the Corinthians was related to Paul's own salvation. His joy at the last day would be their joy- if indeed they were accepted. And yet despite this close inter-relationship, it was by their own faith that they would stand acceptable before the Lord at the last day.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *But I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow-* As noted on 1:23, Paul changed his travel plans so as to avoid visiting Corinth until they were repentant. For he feared that if he did, the Spirit would compel him to bring judgment upon them for their gross immorality. Such judgment would however be a result of Paul's sorrow that they were as they were. Any form of church discipline must therefore be motivated and accompanied by genuine sorrow. In the whole saga with the immoral brother whom they had disfellowshipped, Paul had earlier written that his discipline should have been an outcome of their mourning for him (1 Cor. 5:2). Paul says he is determined that he will not come with sorrow- i.e. he is determined that they shall put things right. It was this willing of things through which perhaps explains the contradictory emotions he displays later in the letter- on one hand, rejoicing at the news of their apparent repentance, and yet threatening judgment for the major issues which were still unresolved. We cannot 'determine' others' changes, no matter how strongly we would wish for them.

2:2 *For if I make you sorry, who then is he that makes me glad, but he that is made sorry by me?*- "You made us sorry / upset us by your letter" is the typical stuff of church politics. And Paul tries to turn it round with a positive twist. But it seems no more than a playing with words: 'I made you sorry? Well if you are sorrowing *really*, unto repentance, then you will make me glad'. Paul writes later that they had sorrowed to repentance, and that his sorrow had been turned to joy by the news from Titus that they had changed (2 Cor. 7:9). But at this early stage of the letter, Paul writes as if they are still not made sorry to repentance. We can assume therefore that these early chapters were written before the news came of Corinth's repentance. My own take however is that Paul loved them with all the love of the lover who is over eager to interpret any news from the beloved in a positive way. For he has to conclude the letter with threats of major judgment upon them.

2:3 *And I wrote this very thing, lest when I came, I should receive sorrow from those in whom I ought to rejoice- having confidence in you all, that my joy is in you all-* What "thing" did he write that supposedly made them sorry? Presumably, from the later context, he refers to his command in 1 Cor. 5 for the immoral brother to be removed from their company. Corinth's response had been that they found Paul's demand most upsetting or 'sorrowful'. And he tries to make a play on the idea of 'sorrow' by saying that their sorrow could lead them to Godly repentance. In 2 Cor. 7 he rejoices at the news that their Godly sorrow had led to repentance; but I suggest this is an over eager desire to see the best in them, for he concludes 2 Corinthians lamenting their continued immorality and threatening major judgment to come. Yet he was 'confident' that his joy- the joy that would come from their repentance- is their joy. This all seems to reflect an over eagerness to see them as more than they really were. Perhaps that was the outcome of true love for them, imputing goodness to them; yet it was surely mixed with the same kind of over enthusiasm which Paul displays for the Jerusalem Poor Fund project.

2:4- see on Rom. 9:3.

*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears. Not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly for you-* As Paul expected them to remove the immoral person from a motive of sadness (1 Cor. 5:2), so he too had made the request for the excommunication from many tears. He suggests he wrote with tears dripping from his cheeks as he wrote. His motive was therefore one of abundant love, not to make trouble for the sake of it, nor to intentionally upset them. "Anguish" suggests 'restraint' in the original Greek; perhaps Paul could have taken a harder

line with them over the matter than he did, and his request for the offender to be removed was a restrained position, restrained by love. The "affliction" may refer to the great affliction he endured at the time of writing (s.w. 2 Cor. 1:8); as if whilst surrounded by great personal affliction, he still had emotional space to worry deeply about the situation in Corinth. It was at that very time of personal crisis that he had written to them about the matter, and that was a sign of his deep care for them.

*2:5 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not so much to me but in a sense (not to put it too severely) to you all-* Paul blames the sorrow on the behaviour of the immoral brother. The "any" is the "one" of :6. Paul is seeking to make their sorrow his sorrow, just as he envisages his joy as being their joy (2:3). This again seems a rather forced way of reasoning; for they were claiming that his letter had made them sorry and calling him to account over it.

*2:6 Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority-* There is no hint here that there was repentance by the immoral person. "Sufficient" can carry the sense of 'It has gone on for long enough now'. The disfellowship was intended to be temporary, Paul is saying. But that is not at all how he reasons in 1 Cor. 5 when commanding them to exclude the brother. It would seem that he is getting out of the situation by saying 'OK well he has been excluded long enough, have him back then'. He is so desperate to resolve the matter so that he and they are all at one on the matter.

*2:7 So that to the contrary you should rather forgive him and comfort him-* This command to "forgive him" suggests that he may not himself have been repentant. One would rather expect his penitence to be mentioned, both here and in 1 Cor. 5, if that were an issue. But there is no mention of it. Paul seems to want to move on, to put this issue behind them, so that they can focus on his pet project of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. "Forgive and comfort" are words full of association with the gift of the Spirit. *Charizomai* is not the usual word translated "forgive"; it means literally 'to gift', and *charis* is usually associated with the gift of the Spirit. Likewise "comfort" recalls the Spirit gift of the Comforter. Paul consistently appeals to the Corinthians to take the way of the Spirit in dealing with their issues. The receipt of the *charis* of the Spirit should lead us to likewise 'give'- both of our forgiveness, and also [as Paul will soon develop] in literal giving to the poor.

*Lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his excessive sorrow-* The psychological impact of disfellowship must be carefully considered. These words have been proven true time and again; those who are ejected from communion end up in spiritual shipwreck and with psychological issues as a result of being consumed, swallowed up, by the psychological trauma of rejection. And yet despite this, disfellowship of whole blocs of believers is practiced so freely by those who ought to know better. It is death and our mortality which is to be "swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 5:4). This 'swallowing up' in sorrow may be a reference therefore to the opposite outcome- condemnation at the last day. This is the end product of keeping a believer 'out of fellowship', no matter what they have done. And our history is littered with examples of shipwreck of faith brought about by disfellowship. The mention of "sorrow" uses the same word used throughout the chapter so far, in dealing with the Corinthian complaint that Paul had made them sorry by asking them to disfellowship this individual. He has responded that their sorrow should morph into a Godly sorrow that led them to repentance, and he likes to think that the immoral man has this same Godly sorrow of repentance.

*2:8 Therefore I beg you to confirm your love toward him-* This was far more than an on paper re-admittance of the brother to church fellowship. They were to assure him that they loved him, which would suggest that it is the sense of love withdrawn which leads the

excommunicated into the mire of "excessive sorrow" which swallows up faith (:7). It could be that "love" here is a reference to the *agape*, the love feast; they were to re-admit him to fellowship at the breaking of bread.

*2:9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know, by putting you to the test, if you are obedient in all things-* Again I would say that Paul is trying to defuse the situation by saying that his commandment to withdraw from the immoral man was a test of their obedience, and since they had done it, they could now resume fellowship with the brother. That, however, hardly seems a good reason to disfellowship someone, given the psychological shattering which it would have upon the person concerned. So I would again conclude that Paul is seeking by all means to defuse the tension, taking as much guilt on himself as he can.

*2:10 But to whom you forgive anything, I also. When I also forgive- if I need to forgive- then I do it for your sakes-* Paul wants to move on from their complaint about his insistence that they separate from the immoral brother. With no mention of the man's repentance, he says that if they forgive him, then so does he. And his own forgiveness of the man was "for your sakes". Paul forgave the brother and moved on for the sake of peace with the Corinthians. This raises the interesting question of whether forgiveness can be granted or not granted for the sake of issues other than the actual behaviour or repentance of the offending individual.

*In the presence of Christ, so-* Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians (Gal. 3:1 Gk., see note there); and likewise here to the Corinthians he was "the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RSV).

*2:11 That no advantage may be gained over us by the Satan. For we are not ignorant of his devices-* As noted repeatedly above, Paul appears to be backtracking from his position concerning the immoral man, for he sees that he is at loggerheads with the Corinthian church over it. He had commanded them to withdraw from the man, they had done so, but were now complaining that he had manipulated them to do this and they were "sorry" or upset with him about it. Paul could see that a rift between him and his converts in Corinth would be used by critics in order to damage the overall work of the Gospel, and particular his project of raising funds for the Jerusalem poor. The 'satan' was some organized opposition to Paul's work which troubled Paul's converts and made capital over any tensions between him and his convert. I'd guess the reference is to 'the Jewish satan', the Judaists who dogged Paul's steps around the mission fields of the first century. I have given more detail about this theory in *The Real Devil*. "Devices" translates a Greek word used almost exclusively in 2 Corinthians, translated "mind" with the sense of 'perception'. Paul knew that the adversary would perceive the tension between Paul and the Corinthians, and use it. Most of the references are to the "minds" [s.w. "devices"] of the Corinthians being brainwashed by Judaist false teachers (2 Cor. 3:14; 4:4; 11:3). This would rather confirm a Judaist reference for "the Satan".

2:12- see on 1 Cor. 16:9.

*Now when I came to Troas for the sake of the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened to me in the Lord-* As noted on 1:23, Paul changed his intention to visit Corinth on his way to Macedonia. He travelled via Troas- and that decision was blessed because a door was opened to him there in the Gospel's work. Frequently Paul uses the word "Gospel" as meaning 'the preaching of the Gospel'; the Gospel is in itself something which *must* be preached if we really have it (Rom. 1:1,9; 16:25; Phil. 1:5 (NIV),12; 2:22; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5; 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8). The fact we have been given the Gospel is in itself an imperative to preach it. "When I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:12 RV) has the ellipsis

supplied in the AV: “to preach Christ’s Gospel” [although there is no Greek word in the original matching ‘preach’] .

2:13 *I had no relief for my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother, but taking my leave of them, I went into Macedonia-* Not only on a personal level, but also collectively, we can limit the amount and extent of witness. Thus Paul had a door opened to him to preach in Troas, but the ecclesial problems in Corinth that were so sapping his energy meant he had to leave those opportunities inadequately used (2 Cor. 2:12,13 RSV). He had been expecting Titus to meet him there with good news from Corinth, but Titus didn't come. So he left the Gospel opportunities there in order to hurry on to Macedonia and then get to Corinth as soon as he could because he was worried by the lack of news from them.

2:14 *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ and makes manifest through us the savour of His knowledge in every place-* Despite all the setbacks with the Corinthians Paul felt that somehow we are "always", time and again, caused to triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14), participating day by day (and hour by hour at times) in His triumphant victory procession (so the allusion to the Roman 'triumph' implies). The spirit of ambition shouldn't just be an occasional flare in our lives; it should characterize our whole way of living and thinking. All things work together for good- and the changed plans necessitated by the weakness of the Corinthians led Paul to Troas and an opportunity for preaching there, and thus the knowledge of Christ was made manifest in another place, Troas. So despite all discouragement from the weakness of others and church politics, we are actually being led in triumphal procession behind Christ the victor. This passage invites us to see the Lord Jesus after His victory- which can only refer to His victorious death on the cross- leading a victory parade, in which we are the triumphant soldiers, carrying with us burning incense. This represents our preaching of the Gospel, as part of our participation in the joyful glory of the Lord’s victory on the cross. And yet that incense is used as a double symbol- both of us the preachers, who hold the aroma, and yet we are also the aroma itself. We are the witness. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). But the motivation for it all is our part in the victory procession of the Lord, going on as it does down through the ages, as He as it were comes home from the cross.

2:15 *For we are a sweet savour of Christ to God in those that are saved and in those that perish-* The preacher is his message; if the doctrines of the Gospel are truly in us, then we ourselves will naturally be a witness to it in our lives. The Gospel is the savour of Christ; and yet we personally are the savour (2 Cor. 2:14,15); *we* are the epistle and Gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). The "saved" were the Corinthians, in the first context; the perishing were those new ears at Troas who had heard the message. They each had the choice as to how to perceive the savour coming to them.

2:14-17 2 Cor. 2:14-17 seems to have a series of allusions back to Mary’s anointing of the Lord:

*2 Cor. 2*

*Mary’s anointing*

Maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (:14)

The house filled with the smell of Mary’s anointment

For we are the smell of Christ (:15) in our witness of Him to the world

Mary must have had the same smell of the same perfume on her, as was on Jesus whom

she had anointed with it

Making merchandise of the word of God (:17 As Judas coveting the anointing oil for R Vmg.) mercenary gain

The simple point of the allusions is that we like Mary are spreading the smell of Christ to the world; she is our pattern for witness.

2:16- see on Mt. 3:11.

*To the one a savour from death to death; to the other a savour from life to life-* The smell of the incense, representing the truth of Christ manifested by Paul in his work with both the Corinthians and unbelievers, was variably received. For some it had the putrid smell of death; and those who received it that way would be led to eternal death. Perhaps the savour arose from the death of Christ, but led disbelievers to death. The savour arising from His resurrection would lead believers in it to eternal life. For them, the smell was pleasant and was perceived as the message of life, leading to eternal life. Paul is here alluding to Rabbinic views of the Law. *Debarim Rabba*, sec. 1, fol. 248: "As the bee brings home honey to the owner, but stings others, so it is with the words of the Law." "They (the words of the Law) are a savour of life to Israel, but a savour of death to the people of this world". Or in *Taarieth*, fol. 7, 1, "Whoever gives attention to the Law on account of the Law itself, to him it becomes an aromatic of life, but to him who does not attend to the Law on account of the Law itself, to him it becomes an aromatic of death". Paul is writing of the Gospel of Christ in the same terms as the Law of Moses. For these allusions to have been appreciated, we can only conclude that there was significant Judaist influence at Corinth, which was leading some to reject the "savour of Christ" in favour of the Law. Gentile, immoral and immature Christians were attracted to the Judaist argument because it freed them up to live immoral lives, with their conscience salved by tokenistic, legalistic obedience to a few laws.

*And who is sufficient for these things?-* As if to say, 'We simply don't appreciate the power and the implications of the logic we are putting before men'. There is no third way. Before all those who smell the savour of the Gospel is the choice of eternal death or life. And Paul, like any serious preacher of the Gospel, felt insufficient to be the one bringing this message of such ultimate importance. It is our sense of insufficiency which is our sufficiency as preachers; it is the most vital qualification.

2:17 *For we are not as most, corrupting the word of God; but as of sincerity and as of God-* "Corrupting" in Greek can mean 'pedalling'. The false teachers in Corinth demanded payment for their teaching- and received it. The message was a corruption of God's word, and not some totally pagan set of teaching. It was the word of God in a corrupted form. And that would fit exactly with the Judaizers, who were corrupting God's word in the Law of Moses- and selling their teachings.

*In the sight of God we speak in Christ-* Or, "presence of God". Paul is using language which the Jews applied to the Angels. I take this to suggest that Paul felt himself to be so at one with his guardian Angel that he can appropriate such Angelic language to himself. Paul twice assures his readers that he speaks the truth because he is speaking in the sight / presence of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 12:19). The fact God is everywhere present through His Spirit, that He exists, should lead us at the very least to be truthful. In the day of judgment, a condemned Israel will know that God heard their every word; but if we accept that fact now then we will



be influenced in our words now. And by our words we will be justified (Ez. 35:12). Reflection upon the omniscience of God leads us to marvel at His sensitivity to human behaviour. He noticed even the body language of the women in Is. 3:16- and condemned them for the way they walked. Paul says that he does not personally profit from his preaching, but in the sight of God does he preach (2 Cor. 2:17 RVmg.). Our motivation in preaching, whether it be to demonstrate intellectual prowess, or to sincerely save somebody, or merely to look good in the eyes of our brethren, is all weighed up; and so we must preach in the sight of God, knowing He watches.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?*- This is likely to be a quotation from the Corinthian criticism of Paul: 'Here he goes again, commending himself!'. The lack of quotation marks in ancient Greek makes interpretation difficult.

*Or need we, as do some, letters of commendation to you or from you?*- The subverters of Corinth ecclesia came with "letters of commendation" (2 Cor. 3:1 cp. 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12,18; 12:11), and one wonders whether these letters were not from Jerusalem; for in the synagogue system upon which the early ecclesia was based, the Jerusalem rabbis issued such letters. Recall how Saul had such letters to authorize him to persecute the Damascus Christians. Their tactics were political and aggressive- they made Peter so scared that he forgot all the lessons the Lord had taught him through the conversion of Cornelius, that from fear of them he refused to break bread with Gentiles when their representatives were present. It would seem that the Corinthians were demanding Paul have letters of commendation before they would listen to him; and they thought they had authority to issue a commendation of Paul, or not. And the lack of such documentation would affect Paul's credibility and authority. This is all the stuff of power brokering and politics. We note that in chapter 7, Paul will rejoice that the Corinthians are onside with him after the visit of Titus. But that outburst is at variance with the consistent impression that the Corinthians were against Paul and did not respect him. Perhaps it was Paul imputing righteousness to them; or maybe it was the overstatement which is typical of those in love, ever hoping for the best and extrapolating from everything into an unreal position.

3:2 *You are our letter of recommendation, written in our hearts, known and read by all*- The Corinthians themselves were hardly much commendation of Paul. It was not any letter written by them which would recommend Paul, but rather the fact that Paul so loved them in his heart was visible to all. His love and care for them was his recommendation to missionary service, rather than any letter from them. I suggest that this verse is that which Paul refers to in 2 Cor. 7:3: "For as I have said before [here in 3:2], you are in our hearts, to die together and live together".

Jesus 'came down' to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and 'all men' saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord. We too are to be a living epistle, words of the Gospel made flesh, "known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

3:3 *Being revealed before all that you are as it were a letter from Christ, delivered by us; written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God*- Just as Paul needed no recommendation letter from Corinth because they were written in his heart, so they needed no letter of commendation. Because the commendation was in the spirit and not in the letter; in their hearts and not on tables of stone. Their desire for letters of commendation betrayed a lack of the Spirit. If they really knew that the new covenant was engraved on their hearts by the Spirit, there would be no interest in any letter of human commendation. And this must be remembered by us too. The letter from Christ was "delivered by us" in that Paul had brought the Spirit to them through preaching the word to them which led to their conversion. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but were not possessed of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:1). They failed to feel and live according to the potential spiritual strength they had been given.

*Not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh*- The reference is to Jer. 31:33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be

their God, and they shall be My people". Yet the new covenant that was made with us by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Heb. 8 proves that we are under the new covenant by quoting from Jer. 31, which is a prophecy of how in the future, Israel will repent, and will enter into the new covenant. Twice the Spirit uses Jer. 31:31 to prove to us that we are under the new covenant now (see Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:16-19); yet Jer. 31 is a prophecy of how natural Israel in the future will enter into that covenant, after their humiliation at the hands of their future invaders. So we are being taught that our entering of the covenant now is similar to how natural Israel will enter that covenant in the future. The point is really clinched by the way the Spirit cites Jer. 31 as relevant to us today. The reasoning goes that because Jer. 31:34 speaks of sin forgiven for those who accept the new covenant, therefore we don't need sacrifices or human priesthood now, because Jer. 31:34 applies to us. So therefore God writing in our hearts is going on now, too. This is confirmed by Paul's allusion to Jer. 31 in 2 Cor. 3:3. God wrote with His Spirit on our hearts, He made a new covenant on the covenant-tables of our heart. Likewise 2 Cor. 1:22: "Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the spirit in our hearts". There are several prophecies which speak of Israel entering that new covenant, and what it will mean to them. All of them, in some sense, apply to us who are now in the new covenant. All of us should be earnestly seeking to appreciate the more finely exactly what our covenant with God means, exactly what covenant relationship with God really entails. 2 Cor. 3:16 reasons that when Israel's heart shall turn to the Lord Jesus, then the veil that is on their heart will be taken away. But now, through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, we each with unveiled face can behold the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). The clarity of vision concerning Christ which Israel will eventually come to should be ours now; our hearts should turn to Christ now, as theirs will do. For this reason, the Old Testament gives us much information as to how Israel's heart will turn to Christ.

3:4 *And such confidence have we toward God, through Christ-* "Confidence" means the certain expectation which comes from faith. Paul has used the word in 1:15 of how he was "confident" in the Corinthians; and he will use it again in this context in 2 Cor. 8:22. It is the confidence he himself expresses of how "in Christ", righteousness has been imputed, and he himself stands boldly before the judgment seat of Christ, both now and in the last day (Eph. 3:12). The ideas of being right *pros* God *dia* Christ are found in the classic explanation of imputed righteousness in Rom. 5:1: "Being justified [made righteous] by faith, we have peace with [*pros-* toward] God, through [*dia*] our Lord Jesus". This explains how on one hand he can be so critical of the Corinthians, fully aware of their gross immorality and lack of faith in the Gospel. Therefore his confidence was "toward God", in His presence both now and at judgment day; and *dia*, on account of, Christ- and not of themselves. And yet on the other hand he can speak and write so positively of them; as he cannot condemn them, he [like us] can only confidently assume that any baptized into Christ shall indeed be accepted at the last day. The idea of imputed righteousness continues in :5. This approach takes away all the angst associated with the perceived need to separate from any who depart from the one faith in doctrine or practice. The platform of course should not be open to such people, but in terms of continued association and fellowship- Paul's example with the Corinthians is crystal clear. He had "confidence" towards them whilst stating that some of them had no knowledge of [relationship with] God (1 Cor. 15:34).

However, as mentioned elsewhere in this commentary, Paul also seems prone to obsessive mindsets, he so wanted the Corinthians and his Jerusalem Poor Fund to work out successfully that he speaks and thinks of things and people in far more positive terms than is realistic.

3:5- see on Mt. 3:11.

*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God-* "Account" is the same word as "impute" [see on Rom. 2:26], and I explained on :4 that Paul believes that the Corinthians are counted righteous, they have righteousness imputed to them, and so he strives to see them likewise. The Greek for "sufficient" is also translated "worthy". Our worthiness is from God, for Paul has just said that none of us of ourselves are worthy or sufficient (2 Cor. 2:16). But he now clarifies that it is not that he is of himself counting them righteous; he does so because God has done so. He will proceed to explain that this is possible through the ministry of the Spirit; we are being made in reality what we are in status, which is "in Christ". Because *our* face / image is being changed into *His* image, "even as by the spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:3,5,18). We look in the mirror, and see Christ in us. This looking in the mirror is used by James as a figure for self-examination (James 1:18,22-25). By doing the word of truth, we find we will live lives of looking in the mirror, of self-perception. This is the essence of self-examination; to perceive the Christ-man within us, and that all other behaviour is our being unfaithful to our true self, living out a persona. We are to see ourselves as being Christ; we are to have a high view of ourselves in this sense, whilst despising and seeking to dismantle the personas we so often act out which are unfaithful to Him. See on 2 Cor. 11:5.

*3:6 Who also made us sufficient as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit-* The imputation of righteousness mentioned in :4 and :5 is a result of the new covenant. Under the new covenant, the Spirit is ministered. As explained in Romans 8, believers are transformed by the Spirit in practice into what they are by status. The idea of "servants [ministers] of a... covenant" makes us parallel with the Angels under the old covenant. The Law of Moses (and the whole Pentateuch? Consider Acts 7:38,53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2) was given by Angels. That the Angels ministered the Word in the past is picked up by Paul in 2 Cor. 3 when he says that because we have taken over the role of the Angels in this respect, we should teach the word boldly: "...Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech" (:12). The context refers to our preaching, that it should not be with the "enticing words of man's wisdom". See on Rev. 22:9. However, the reference to being ministers of the covenant may be an allusion to the Lord Jesus, in whom we are, and to Joshua / Jesus (Rom. 15:8; Heb. 8:2; based on Joshua / Jesus who was the minister of the Tabernacle, Ex. 24:13; Josh. 1:1). Our sufficiency, our sense of adequacy and competence, is of God (:5). Without this positive confidence we are unable to do any task well, and this is especially true of spiritually ministering to others. But that confidence is not of ourselves; it is a confidence in God's confidence in us.

*For the letter kills but the spirit gives life-* Faced with baldly stated commandments, we will fail. The letter thereby kills. It is the ministration of the Spirit which leads to eternal life. This highlights the importance of the Spirit in our lives. It is a matter of life or death. Paul writes from personal experience; for he had been 'killed' by the attempt to obey the law (Rom. 7:11 s.w.). "Gives life" is the language of future resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:22,36,45); but clearly in view is the new life given within the believing heart right now. It is the presence of the Spirit within our minds now which is the basis upon which our mortal bodies shall be made eternally alive (Rom. 8:11).

*3:7 But if that which ministered death, written, engraved on stones, came with glory (so that the children of Israel could not look continually upon the presence of Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this glory was)-* The allusion here and in :10 is to the LXX of Ex. 34:29,35: "Moses knew not that the appearance of the skin of his face was glorified... The children of Israel saw the face of Moses that it was glorified". The LXX in Exodus makes it clear that Moses veiled his face so that the Israelites would not perceive that the glory he received faded. This contrasts with the open, plain declaration of Christ's glory, which was

reflected in Paul's plain and open speaking (:12). The glory which came from the old covenant was blinding, whereas Paul will develop the contrast with the glory of the new covenant, which is transforming, not blinding.

*3:8 How shall the ministry of the spirit be without glory?*- The repeated use of the word 'ministry' is preparing for Paul's later appeal for the Corinthians to support the ministry to God's people in practical ways (3:9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1,12,13; 11:8). God's ministry to us, involving the glory of His grace in Christ articulated to us by the work of the Spirit, must become reflected in our ministry to our poorer brethren. Paul's idea was that the ministry of the Spirit would be exemplified by their participation in the Jerusalem Poor Fund project. Paul saw this as likewise bringing forth glory to God, as he states specifically in 2 Cor. 8:19: "in this act of grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord".

*3:9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness exceed in glory*- The contrast is not between condemnation and salvation, but between condemnation and righteousness. The context in :4 and :5 is of imputed righteousness being the basis of salvation. The blinding glory associated with the theophanies on Sinai and the tabernacle was nothing compared to the glory which was manifested in the Lord Jesus.

*3:10 For truly, that which has been made glorious*- Referring to the face of Moses, Ex. 34:29,35 LXX speak of how "the appearance of his face was glorified". God's glory is more permanently and supremely seen "in the face of Jesus", 4:6. We are to look at the invisible things of God's glory in Christ (4:18); all else is temporal compared with the moral glory, the characteristics of God, as they are perfectly revealed in the face of Jesus. The things of God's Name, His glory, His characteristics, are the only things which are truly eternal; all else will fade.

*Has not been made ultimately glorious in that the other glory is simply so surpassing*- There is no diminishing or deprecation of the Mosaic system in itself; it is rather that the glory in Christ "is simply so surpassing" that the Mosaic glory literally fades into insignificance.

*3:11 For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains permanently is yet more glorious*- Note that the Mosaic system is described as being then in the process of fading away. The Greek tense definitely demands such a translation. The reference is not only to the fact that the Mosaic glory began fading as soon as it was on Moses' face- it's just that the veil hid that fact from the Israelites. It's also a hint that the Mosaic system did not end at one moment, but there was a process of passing away. God and Paul could have taken a hard line: the Law is finished. This is why Jesus bled and lived as He did. But they are so sensitive to the difficulty of others in accepting what we know to be concrete truth. And we must take our lesson. In our witness to the world, we mustn't give up at the first sign of wrong doctrine or inability to accept our message. See what is positive and work on it.

The Greek translated "fades away" is used about the ending of the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:2,6), and also about the ending of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:8,10,11). It could be that the miraculous gifts and the Mosaic system all ended at the same time. In this we see God's patience and grace in not demanding that believers immediately accepted the end of that system at Christ's death; they were given a period in which to accept it, confirmed by the miraculous Spirit gifts, all presumably ending in the destruction of the temple in AD70. We

too must accept that other believers will not always immediately grasp the truths which are obvious to us- Christ's patience with ideas of 'demon possession' is a parade example. We should note too how the obvious command to take the Gospel to the Gentiles was only so slowly grasped by Peter and the early brethren; yet God patiently worked with them through their slowness to understand the obvious. He does the same with us, and we should be likewise tolerant to our brethren, rather than rigidly defining some finer points of Biblical interpretation and refusing to fellowship them until they reach that level of understanding.

3:12 *Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech-* See on :7. Paul exhorts us to speak 'freely' or boldly in our preaching just as he himself 'spoke freely' in his witness to Agrippa (Acts 26:26 s.w.). Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves. "Having, then, such hope, we use much freedom of speech" in preaching (2 Cor. 3:12 YLT). It is also exemplified by how Peter preached "freely" (Acts 2:29 s.w.). If we are certain of our hope, we should not only be bold in preaching it, but also plain and direct in our interactions with others, including our brethren. For Paul is writing with a view to the criticisms made of him that he was somehow unstable and deceitful in his words and actions. He is saying that the greatness of the hope, the wonder of the glory we behold with unveiled face, makes him not at all like that.

3:13 *And are not like Moses, who put a veil upon his face so the children of Israel could not gaze to see the outcome of that which was fading away-* The LXX in Ex. 34:30-35 clarifies that *when* Moses ceased speaking, he put a veil over his face. Israel therefore didn't perceive that his glory was fading. What was the "outcome" or the *telos*, the end, of the fading glory of the Mosaic law? Rom. 10:4 uses the same words: "Christ is the end of the law... to every one that believes". The Mosaic law lead those who have believed in Christ *to* Christ once they re-read it with Christ in view. But the law itself was given in order to stop Israel at the time from perceiving Him. The Law only made sense from the perspective of one who had believed in Christ. Rather as Bible prophecies, in the sense of predictions of future events, do not of themselves give rise to faith in God and the Bible. Once the step of faith is taken, then they (and many other things such as archaeology, types and shadows) all make perfect sense in confirming the faith that has been expressed. Romans and Gal. 3:19 likewise argue that the Law was given in order to enslave people under sin- rather than to be decoded as a hidden picture of a future redeemer figure.

3:14 *But their minds were hardened-* There is a strong Biblical theme that the judgments upon the Gentile world came upon an apostate Israel. The hardening of the hearts of the Egyptians was experienced by Israel. And the Mosaic law, "holy just and good" as it was, became the mechanism God used to effect this.

*For until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains, it not being revealed to them that it is made redundant through Christ-* The Mosaic law is not therefore an obvious path that leads to Christ. Those who trust in it and practice it actually find it veils their hearts to Christ. See on :13. "Made redundant" would be better translated "is fading away". The obvious connection is with the temple veil being torn down at the Lord's death. But it was re-erected. The Law itself, as it was read, veiled their hearts from seeing the glory of Christ. There was therefore something in it which was designed to hide Christ rather than reveal Him. God uses similar devices with humanity generally- the problem of suffering, the lack of scientific, Euclidean evidence for God's existence or the truth of the Bible. It is not until Christ's encounter is accepted, and the heart opens to the work of the Spirit, that all starts to make sense. As discussed on 1 Cor. 1, no amount of intellectual, logical, scientific, archaeological study will bring a heart to Christ. Neither will a similar analysis of the Mosaic

law. God is not as it were covering His face with hard cards which we have to guess or decipher before we get to see His face; the Bible is not a riddle which a few astute, lucky or fortunately positioned people happen to figure or crack, and then get rewarded with the vision of His glory. Indeed it is this rational, academic approach which according to 1 Cor. 1 *hides* Christ from men, and likewise with a similar approach to the Mosaic Law. The Jews searched these scriptures daily, but did not come to Christ that they might have life.

3:15 *But to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart*-The reading of Moses was designed to veil their hearts- see on :14. Throughout 2 Cor. 3:15-4:6, Paul comments on how Moses' face shone with God's glory, and yet he spoke to Israel through a veil, with the result that Israel did not appreciate God's glory. He speaks of him and all preachers of the true Christian Gospel as "able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6)- clear allusion to Moses as the minister of the old, inferior covenant. Paul uses this to explain why Israel did not respond to his preaching; "if *our* preaching be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul therefore saw himself and his fellow preachers as like Moses, radiating forth the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to an Israel which had the veil upon their heart. This allusion must have so angered the Jews- to suggest that Christian preachers were like Moses!

3:16 *But whenever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away*- When a [Jewish] man turns to the Lord Jesus, the veil of obedience to the Law is taken away (2 Cor. 3:16 RVmg.). Yet the Law also led men to Christ; and yet it also veils Him from them- depending whether they read it as God intended. But the "it" which turns to the Lord could refer to the hearts of Jewish people. The veil is the Law; the veil is not taken away by intellectual purity of understanding. It is taken away when the heart turns to the Lord Jesus, and this is the realm of the spirit or heart. *Epistrepho*, "turn to", is a form of *strepho* which is the usual word for conversion. But it is often used of what is done to a person by the Lord- we are converted by Him. 'To be converted' suggests the conversion is done to us. The Lord's wish is to heal and convert human hearts (Mt. 13:15); that they might be healed and converted. John the Baptist's mission was to convert hearts to Jesus as Christ, to turn or convert Israel to the Lord (Lk. 1:16,17). When a heart is turned to the Lord by the Lord, then the veil is taken away. But the person must allow the process to happen, and not harden their hearts against it. If they do, then they shall be confirmed in that by being hardened the more- as :14 has just stated. It is an openness to the leading of the Lord in the spirit which is so important. It is response to that leading which brings about conversion, rather than decades of poring over ancient Hebrew and Greek words. Verse 17 will go on to speak explicitly about the work of the Lord Jesus as the work of the Spirit.

Whenever the Jews read Moses, they have a veil over their minds, but when a Jew turns to the Lord, that veil is removed. Paul is perhaps alluding to the Jewish practice of covering their head and even face with a prayer shawl or *tallit* when reading or hearing God's word (Mk. 12:38). And this perhaps is behind his demand that brethren should not cover their heads in ecclesial meetings in 1 Cor. 11:4. They are like Moses, hiding his face behind a veil. But when the veil is removed by conversion, then the glory of Christ will shine forth from them. The implication surely is that a true Jewish convert to Christ will in turn radiate forth the Lord's glory to others. *We each*, with unveiled face, have like Moses seen the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). When Moses saw the glory, he was immediately given a ministry to preach to Israel, to share that glory with them (Ex. 34:34). And Paul drives home the similarity; *we each* have had the experience of Moses, and so "therefore seeing *we* (too, like Moses) have this ministry", "we each" are to exercise it to Israel.

3:17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty-* Where, in the context, is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus? The preceding verses speak of the human heart. Hence F.F. Bruce offers the paraphrase: "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free". This freedom or liberty in the heart is what Paul so often exults in, comparing it to the bondage of legalism (Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 10:29; Gal. 2:4; 5:1,13).

The Jews believed that the *shekinah*, the physical light of glory associated with the tabernacle, was somehow a personal being associated with a Messiah figure. Paul deconstructs this idea in 2 Cor. 3:17,18, where he says that the *shekinah* seen on the face of Moses was a *fading* glory of the Old Covenant, having been made insignificant by the glory of Christ. Thus Paul is attacking the common Jewish idea by saying that the Lord Jesus was *not* the *shekinah* but is *superior* to it. Indeed, he so often makes the same point by stressing that the glorification of the Lord Jesus was at His resurrection and ascension. He *became* "the Lord of glory" by what He suffered, and received this glorification at the resurrection and ascension. If the Lord's glory was somehow pre-existent before that, the wonder and personal significance of the resurrection for Jesus is somehow lost sight of; the idea of suffering and *then* being glorified, as a pattern for us, is quite lost sight of. And yet this was the repeated theme of Paul's inspired writings. Note in passing how when describing the *shekinah* cloud in which the Angel dwelt, Paul comments that the cloud was mere water, for at the Red Sea it played a part in symbolizing Israel's baptism "into Moses in the cloud [water above them] and in the sea [water on both sides of them]" (1 Cor. 10:2). Moses and not the *shekinah* cloud was the type of Christ. Yet Justin Martyr and many other careless Bible readers, coming to Scripture in order to seek justification for their preconceived Trinitarian ideas, have interpreted the cloud as being the Angel which was supposedly Jesus. Hebrews 1 clarifies that God spoke in Old Testament times through Angels and prophets- but *not* through His Son. This He began to do in the ministry of the human Jesus. That path of thought alone should remove all possibility that any Old Testament Angel was in fact the Lord Jesus.

3:18- see on :5 *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves;* Jn. 11:40; Ex. 33:11.

*But we, with an unveiled face and reflecting the glory of the Lord-* "Beholding as in a mirror" (RV). In the same way as Moses spoke to the Angel without a veil on his face, and thereby came to reflect the glory which shone from the Angel's face (Ex. 34:33-35), so we are bidden look at the glory of God in the face of Jesus, to consider his character, and be changed into that same glory by reflecting his character in our lives. By simply beholding the glory of Christ's righteousness, truly appreciating it, we will be changed (2 Cor. 3:15-18 RV). Christ-centeredness, regularly thinking of Him, grabbing a few verses from the Gospel records in the course of the day- this is the essence of the Christian life, of beholding Him with unveiled face. Paul seems to be arguing that whenever a Jew turns to the Lord Jesus and fellowships with Him, then he is living out the pattern of Moses. And further, 2 Cor. 4:3 speaks of our Gospel being 'veiled' to those who are lost- as if *we* are as Moses, the Gospel we preach being as the glory of God which shone from Moses' face. Let's keep remembering how huge and radical was the challenge of this to a first century Jewish readership for whom Moses was an almost untouchable hero.

2 Cor. 3 speaks of our beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus in a mirror; and this process slowly transforms us into that same image of Him which we see. The "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the



very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness. I have given reason elsewhere for believing that the Gospel records are in fact transcripts of the Gospel message preached by the four evangelists. The 'Gospel according to Matthew' is therefore the Gospel message which he usually preached. And it's significant that at least three of them start and end where many of us would- starting with the promises to the Jewish fathers, and concluding with an appeal for baptism. Actually John's Gospel does this too, if you decode the language he uses. This is surely the explanation of the Lord's otherwise strange remark that wherever the Gospel is preached, the anointing of His feet by Mary would be part of that message. And this is one of the few incidents that all four Gospel writers each mention. What this shows is that the Gospel message is in its quintessence, the account of the man Christ Jesus- with all that involves. It has truly been commented that "the central message of the gospels is not the teaching of Jesus but Jesus himself". This is true insofar as Jesus is the word made flesh.

A mirror by its very nature, because of what it is, reflects the light which falls upon it to others. If we have *really* seen the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will *inevitably* reflect it to others. Jesus didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father. Paul puts the same principle another way when he says that we're all mirrors (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). We naturally reflect to others what has been reflected into us by the Lord Jesus. A mirror by its very nature, because of what it is, reflects the light which falls upon it to others. If we have *really* seen the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will *inevitably* reflect it to others. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

*Are all transformed into his likeness from glory to glory-* The "all" is in contrast with Moses, who alone saw the glory of the Lord God. But we are all in his position. No longer was Moses to be perceived as some unreachable hero of faith, as a saint in a stained glass window, to whom we poor sinners can never attain. We in Christ have attained *far beyond* him. This was a rebuke to the Judaizing element in Corinth, as well as a huge challenge for Jews of all ages. "From glory to glory" suggests an ongoing upward spiral. The glory is not fixed, as it was with the Angel whose face Moses beheld. It increases the more we behold. We are progressively changed into greater reflected glory; in contrast to the fading glory on the face of Moses.

The new man / person created in us at baptism by the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) is essentially a character; or at least, the potential for a character, after the pattern of the Lord Jesus. For Christ is said to be "formed in us". As we gaze into His glory, we are changed bit by bit into His image. His glorious character is a mirror, Paul says; as we look into it, our image comes to reflect His glory (2 Cor. 3:18). He doesn't subsume us beneath Himself. Self-expression, or even self-manifestation, is one of God's features, and so He intends it to be in us who are made after His image. God manifestation doesn't in that sense mean the destruction or ignoring of the individual human person; rather, the very opposite, in that the real character, the new life, will be eternally developed and preserved. This is where Hinduism is so wrong, as wrong as any monolithic, apostate Papal or Protestant Christianity- the person disappears into the great Whole. Joash understood where 'God manifestation' can be taken too far; he told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him

(Jud. 6:31). This needs thinking through. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to 'play God' for Baal; they had to mindlessly, unthinkingly manifest the god they thought existed. Joash says that if Baal really exists, he himself will act for himself, openly. And this of course is where the One True God excels; He does act for Himself, and doesn't rely *solely* upon manifesting Himself through men in order to achieve anything.

The fact that God is a person means that who *we* are as persons, our being as persons, is of the ultimate importance. It has been observed, in more sophisticated language: "To predicate personality to God is nothing else than to declare personality as the absolute essence". Thus who we are as persons, who we develop to become, is indeed the ultimate issue. And further. Having a personal relationship with a personal God means that we in that process develop as persons after His image; for there is something magnetically changing about being in relationship with Him. We are changed from glory to glory, by simply beholding His face and inevitably reflecting the glory there, which glory abides upon us in the same way as it stuck to the face of Moses even after his encounters with the Angel of Yahweh (2 Cor. 3:18-21). And yet we live in a world which increasingly denies us ultimate privacy or isolation; the loudness of the world is all permeating, all intrusive, to the point that Paul Tillich claims: "We cannot separate ourselves at any time from the world to which we belong". And at times, we would all tend to agree with him. We just can't seem to 'get away from it all' and be with God, no matter where we go on holiday, with whom we go, even if we slip off for an hour to be quite alone in the local park. But ultimately, I believe Tillich was wrong. We *can* separate from the world's endless call and insistent pull, even if we're stuck with an unbelieving or unhelpful partner, sniffy kids, long hours at work, the TV always on, the phone always ringing. Because we as unique and individual persons can *personally* relate to the *personal* God and His Son, thus finding the ultimate privacy and isolation which being human in this world appears to preclude. But further, it's actually in the very razzmatazz of our mundane, frustrated experience in this world that we can come to know God, and in which God reveals Himself to us.

*By the Lord the Spirit-* The Lord Jesus is "the Lord the spirit"; and "the Spirit" is one of Jesus' titles in Revelation, so closely is He identified with the work of the Spirit. It is He, through His Spirit, who effects this transformation of character, this progressive reflection of Him in human personality. Romans 8 has argued likewise; we who are counted as "in Christ" by status are transformed in practice into Him by the work of the Spirit. The Lord's activity is intense. The Lord calls men and women to Him, having first prepared their way to Him, guiding the preachers of His word. He brings people to baptism, enters into a husband-wife relationship with them (Eph. 5:24), has children by them (i.e. spirituality develops in our characters, Rom. 7:4), strengthens them afterwards, keeps them in Him, "in everything... co-operates for good with those that love God" (Rom. 8:28 NEB), saves them in an ongoing sense, develops them spiritually, and then finally presents them perfect at His return. He is actively subduing "all things", even in the natural creation, unto Himself (1 Cor. 15:27,28 Gk.). However, the NT focuses on His work amongst us, the ecclesia. Where two or three are gathered, He manifests Himself in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). He is like a priest constantly on duty, bringing His people to the Father (Mt. 26:29 cp. Lev. 11:9).

Jesus Himself is described here as "the Lord the Spirit". "The Spirit" is a title of Jesus (Rom. 8:16,26,27; Rev. 2:7,11 etc.). To walk each day in the Spirit is to live in Him, to act as He would act. It is this "Spirit" which will be the basis of our new life. Living life in that Spirit is living the life we will eternally lead. If we don't like the righteous, clean life in Christ, if we find it limiting and boring, then we are signing ourselves out of the eternal life. There will be no point in our receiving it. The eternal life is there to be lived. It's there for the taking in the

sense that it is there to be lived. If we live it, we have it. And our bodies will be changed at the Lord's coming so that we can eternally live it.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we do not give up-* The emphasis is on *this* [kind of] ministry. The not giving up is in proportion to the ministry of the Spirit [just spoken of] ever increasing in glory, whereas the Mosaic ministry fades away. What keeps any ministry going, what stops us all from giving up, is the Spirit- which is the dynamic of our service. All talk of burnout, lack of staying power or disillusion is an indicator that the Spirit was never really there in the ministry. The constant obtaining of mercy [in response to our ongoing sins] is what energizes us to not give up. Paul seems to ascribe his own unflagging zeal for preaching to his experience of God's gracious forgiveness of him. And further, he speaks in the third person, suggesting that his fellow preachers had a like motivation: "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry (of preaching), *as we have received mercy, we faint not*" (2 Cor. 4:1). The Greek suggests that as we have received mercy, so we have received the ministry- to share that mercy to others. Our witness to the Gospel and our ministry of caring for others are motivated by our own awareness of having received grace personally. Any other motivation simply isn't enough to inspire us to keep on keeping on. See on :14. "We do not give up" is repeated in :16, where it is cited as an outworking of living under grace and is part of our inward man being progressively renewed daily. Giving up, fading away, is a common experience of many religious people including Christians. The parable of the sower speaks of it. It is only the involvement with the Spirit which will stop this happening in real terms- for even if someone maintains their religious commitment to attending meetings, the question is whether we are spiritually alive within. And that is the realm of the Spirit.

4:2 *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully-* What had Paul personally renounced? Surely, the things of Judaism. He speaks about them with very hard language, leading up to his description of them as the great satan in :4. "The hidden things" connect with Moses' face being hidden behind a veil; and Paul now twists the idea of a covered face towards the concept of shame. He presents the revered Moses as it were covered in shame. He considered that the Jewish rabbis handled God's word deceitfully (an allusion to Jer. 8:8?). "Craftiness" is the same word used about the Jewish opposition to the Lord's ministry (Lk. 20:23); it was the characteristic of the Jewish false teachers in 2 Cor. 11:3.

*But by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God-* By showing that we are real men and women, who are desperate sinners thankful for the real and true grace we have so wonderfully come across, we will persuade men. The more real, the more credible. Paul described the genius of his preaching thus: "By the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience" (2 Cor. 4:2). It is our very transparency which strikes a chord in the heart of those who hear us. Paul didn't need letters to commend himself; he says that in their spirit, in the heart, they know that he is sincere. And he uses the same approach here. There is an intuitive sense that a person is manifesting God's truth. This again is the realm of the Spirit. "In the sight of God" or as the phrase is often translated "before God" is a common phrase of Paul's. He was ever aware that life is lived, even in our deepest hearts, in His eyes and presence.

4:3 *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those that perish-* The limitation of salvation to those who accept Christ couldn't be more clearly stated. Belief in *God* is not enough. The Jews strongly believed in "one God" but they would still perish without Christ. Liberal Christians seem to think that belief in God is somehow a saving grace; but salvation is in His Son. It was the face of Moses which was veiled, and Paul hereby identifies himself

and all Christian preachers with Moses. This was radical stuff for Judaists, who considered Moses the acme of spiritual attainment and effectively unreachable and devoid of equal amongst subsequent generations. The implication is also that "our Gospel" was the message of the glory of Christ, it was and is totally Christ centred. The veil was belief in the Law of Moses for salvation; this in fact led to their 'perishing' in that it prevented them seeing the glory of the Lord Jesus.

4:4- see on Eph. 1:20.

*In whom-* The problem was internal; the minds of the unbelieving were blinded. 3:14 has said that their minds were hardened or blinded because the veil of Judaism lay upon their minds. "The god of this world" is therefore sure to be related to Jewish, legal influences.

*The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving-* The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "To those in this world whose minds have been blinded by God, because they did not believe". It is darkness which blinds men's eyes (1 Jn. 2:11), i.e. not walking according to the light of God's word. There is only *one* God – not two. And it's also noteworthy that Is. 6:10 speaks of *God* as having the power to blind Israel. The New Testament repeats this. Rom. 11:8 says that *God* (and not Satan) blinded Israel to the Gospel; 2 Cor. 3:14 says that their minds were blinded or "hardened" (RV) as Pharaoh's was. Whoever "the god of this world" is or was, God worked through it and is therefore greater than it. Henry Kelly comments: "Given this track record, can we see the God of this Aeon as *our* God, as Yahweh? He is, after all, in charge of everything". It is God and not any independent Satan figure who sends people an *energeia* of error to believe falsehood (2 Thess. 2:12) – the ultimate 'energy' in the process is from God.

For something to be called "the god of this world" does not necessarily mean that it is in reality "the god of this world"; it could mean 'the thing or power that this world counts to be God'. Thus Acts 19:27 speaks of the goddess Diana, a lifeless idol, "whom all the world worships". This doesn't mean that the piece of wood or stone called Diana was in reality the goddess of this world. I mentioned in section 1-1-2 that Paul is quoting "the god of this world" from contemporary Jewish writings rather than actually believing such a 'god' existed. It's also possible that "the god of this world" who blinds people is an allusion to material in the documents comprising what are now known as the Gnostic Gospels. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* claims to record God's rebuke of Satan: "'You are mistaken, Samael", which means, "god of the blind"'. Paul in this case would be alluding to popular belief about Satan, and reapplying this language to the Jewish opposition to the Gospel, and to the human "blindness" which stops them accepting Christ. In Eph. 4:18 Paul specifically defined what he meant by "darkness": "Having the understanding darkened... through the ignorance that is *within* them... The blindness of their heart". That opposition, rather than any mythical 'Samael', was the real adversary / Satan.

Even if it is insisted that Satan exists as a personal being, the question has to be faced: Who created Satan? Is his power under God's control, or not? Time and again the 'Satan' and 'demon' passages of the Bible indicate that however we are to understand these terms, God is more powerful, God is in control. The book of Job shows how the Satan there had all power given to him *by God*. The power of the Lord Jesus over 'demons' makes the same point. And in that context, note how Ex. 4:11 assures us that God is the one who makes people deaf, but Lk. 11:14 speaks of how such muteness is apparently caused by demons. Clearly, God is in control. This world, with all the evil and negative experience in it, has not been left under the control of some out-of-control evil being. With this in mind, it should be apparent that the 'god of this world' can't mean that the world is under the *ultimate* control of Satan rather

than God. Rather, “the god of this world” [*aion*] “can also be read as merely a personification of all the forces of this *aion* that would thwart the success of the Christian message”.

The way that the idea of ‘Satan’ is used to describe both individual sin and societies governed by the principle of sin is very much in line with the way that first century society was very much a communalistic rather than an individualistic society. The society was the person. Further, social scientists and psychologists have time and again confirmed the Biblical teaching that the fundamental motivation of human beings is the ego, self-interest – what the Bible calls ‘Satan’. This is what drives people at the individual level, and thus drives societies. It’s appropriate, therefore, for ‘Satan’, the personification of human sin and self-interest, to also be a term applied to human governments and societies as a whole. Truly in this sense (the Biblical) Satan could be understood as “the god of this world”.

### **A Jewish Interpretation**

If Scripture interprets Scripture, “the god of this world (*aion*)” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 must be similar to “the prince of this world (*kosmos*)” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Both the Jewish age [*aion*] and *kosmos* ended in A.D. 70. In the context, Paul has been talking in 2 Cor. 3 about how the glory shining from Moses’ face blinded the Israelites so that they could not see the real spirit of the law which pointed forward to Christ. Similarly, he argues in chapter 4, the Jews in the first century could not see “the light of the glorious (cp. the glory on Moses’ face) gospel of Christ” because they were still blinded by “the god of this world” – the ruler of the Jewish age. The “prince” or “God” of the “world” (age) was the Jewish system, manifested this time in Moses and his law. Notice how the Jews are described as having made their boast of the law...made their boast of God (Rom. 2:17,23). To them, the Law of Moses had become the god of their world. Although the link is not made explicit, there seems no reason to doubt that “the prince of this world” and “Satan” are connected. It is evident from Acts (9:23–25,29–30; 13:50,51; 14:5,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 20:3) that the Jews were the major ‘Satan’ or adversary to the early Christians, especially to Paul. Of course it has to be remembered that there is a difference between Moses’ personal character and the Law he administered; this contrast is constantly made in Hebrews. Similarly, the Law was “Holy, just and good”, but resulted in sin due to man’s weakness – it was “weak through the flesh”, explaining why the idea of Satan/sin is connected with the Law. Because of this it was in practice a “ministry of condemnation”, and therefore a significant ‘adversary’ (Satan) to man; for in reality, “the motions of sins...were by the Law” (Rom. 7:5).

*That the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn-* "Dawn" is better "shine out". The glory of Christ and therefore of God cannot shine through the veil of legalism. That Christ "is the image of God" is mentioned to make the point that being blinded to Him means being blinded to God. It is not possible to have a relationship with the Father without the Son. The Gospel is the glory of Christ. The blessings now mediated by the exalted Lord mean that *whatever* the barriers, those who appreciate those blessings and the *height*, the pure, wondrous *height* of His exaltation and what this thereby enables for us, will *naturally* preach it. The Gospel is “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4 RSV). The glory of the “similitude of the Lord” that Moses saw and reflected (Num. 12:4) is likened to “the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Like Moses, Jewish people have the vision of that glory, but they have it veiled; they potentially have it, but it is hidden, because their minds are veiled. This could possibly suggest that Paul saw more potential in the Jewish mind for Christ than other races; thus he speaks in Rom. 11 of how the natural branch which has been cut off [Israel] will be more effectively grafted back into the olive tree than the wild Gentile branches. This of course has similarities with the Lord’s teaching about Himself as the vine, whose unfruitful branches had been cut off (Jn. 15:2). Israel “much more” than the Gentiles can be grafted back in, whereas Gentile converts

do this “against nature” (Rom. 11:24). In the context of Israel’s final repentance, God speaks of how every one of the Jewish people has been potentially created for His glory, because they carry His Name (Is. 43:7). Although Israel have been “quenched as a wick” for their sins (Is. 43:17 RVmg.), we are to realize that the wick is still smouldering, and are to follow the Lord’s example of never totally quenching it but instead seek to fan the wick of Israel back into life (Is. 42:3).

*4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake-* The Gospel preached was of the glory of the Lord Jesus. His Lordship is predicated upon His glory. If we grasp that this is to be the content of our message, then we shall be consumed with preaching Him and not in any form self-advertising, nor using God's truth as a channel towards self-glorification. Paul answers the accusation that he was 'lording it' over the Corinthians by saying that he preached Christ Jesus as Lord- and therefore he was a servant of Jesus, if Jesus really is Lord. But the service of Jesus was manifested through serving His people, the Corinthians.

4:6- see on Jn. 13:32.

*Seeing it is God that said-* It is emphasized that God created through His word of command; He said, and it was done (Ps. 33:6,9; 148:5; Is. 40:26; Jn. 1:3; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5). God is outside the constraints of time, and outside the possibility of His word not being fulfilled. Therefore if He says something, it is as it is done, even if in human time His command is not immediately fulfilled. Thus He calls things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17). It is in this sense that the Lord Jesus and those in Him are spoken of as if we existed at the beginning; although we didn't physically. And so God spoke the words He did on six literal, consecutive days, and the orders ('fiats' is the word Alan Hayward used) were therefore, in this sense as good as done. But the actual time taken to carry them out by the Angels may have been very long. The Genesis record can then be understood as stating these commands, and then recording their fulfilment- although the fulfilment wasn't necessarily on that same day. It would seem from later Scripture that the orders and intentions outlined by God on the six literal days are still being fulfilled. Take the command for there to be light (Gen. 1:3,4). This is interpreted in 2 Cor. 4:6 as meaning that God shines in men's hearts in order to give them the knowledge of the light of Christ. The command was initially fulfilled by the Angels enabling the sun to shine through the thick darkness that shrouded the earth; but the deeper intention was to shine the spiritual light into the heart of earth-dwellers. And this is still being fulfilled. Likewise the resting of God on the seventh day was in fact a prophecy concerning how He and all His people will enter into the "rest" of the Kingdom. The Lord realized this when He said that even on Sabbath, God was still working (Jn. 5:17). The creation work had not really been completed in practice, although in prospect it had been. In this very context the apostle comments that although we must still enter into that rest, "the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3). See on Col. 1:15.

*Light shall shine out of darkness-* The new creation is effected with the same power, Spirit and word as the natural creation.

*He shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge-* The initiative in granting this 'light of knowledge' is with the Lord. It is not that the Bible is a riddle to be solved, which some manage to crack, and thereby through the light of knowledge come to know the Father and Son. By contrast, we are being told here that the Lord took the initiative by direct action within human hearts. But as happened at Corinth, some choose to restrict God's intended pathway, they grieve the Holy Spirit, and "limit the Holy One of Israel" as did Israel of old.

Paul's description of how the light of the glory of God in Christ shines in the heart of the new convert was not without reference back to his own Damascus road conversion (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). Because the light was shone to us, we reflect it to others. "In the beginning", perhaps a huge period of time ago, God created the heavens and earth. But the present creation can be seen as being constituted some time later, after the previous creations. When during the six days of creation He said "Let there be light" this may not have necessitated the actual manufacture of the sun; this was presumably done "in the beginning". But the sun was commanded to shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:6), and therefore from the viewpoint of someone standing on the earth, it was as if the sun had been created.

*Of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ-* We read in Is. 52:14 that the Lord's face was more marred, more brutally transmogrified, than that of any man. And yet reflecting upon 2 Cor. 4:4,6, we find that His face was the face of God; His glory was and is the Father's glory: "The glory of Christ, who is the image of God... the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Who is the one who redeems His people? Isaiah calls him "the arm of the Lord": "To whom has *the arm of the Lord* been revealed?" (Is. 53:1; compare Is. 52:10). Then he continues: "*He* grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground" (v. 2). So, the *arm of the LORD* is a person- a divine person! He is God's "right arm," His "right-hand Man"! He is also human: He grows up out of the earth like a root out of dry ground.

4:7 *But we have this treasure in earthly vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves-* The reference is clearly to Gideon and his men breaking their earthly vessels, and God giving them a great victory (Jud. 7:19). Paul and Timothy were vessels used by God (Acts 9:15; 2 Tim. 2:21); but so are we all (2 Cor. 4:7). All true human achievement for God must be in allowing His Spirit to work, and not by human power "from ourselves". This is the spirit of Gideon (Jud. 7:2).

4:8 *We are afflicted in every way, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not in despair-* Another allusion to the situation at Gideon's time (see on :7). "Afflicted" is from a Greek word meaning to make narrow; "crushed" is from a different Greek word which has a similar meaning. We are made narrow, hemmed in- but in another sense we are not. We are gloriously free. Likewise in a sense Paul was in despair (s.w. 2 Cor. 1:8); but not in another. He uses the same word for "perplexed" in writing of his despair at the Galatians' loss of faith and moral declension (Gal. 4:20). We see here the two poles in his attitude to the Corinthians- despairing at them, and yet from a spiritual perspective, very positive about them.

4:9 *Pursued, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed-* As at the time of writing 1 Corinthians, Paul looked beyond his immediate traumas to the welfare of the weak Corinthians, and his concern for the impoverished Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The feature of all suffering is that we become self centred. Yet the Lord carrying His cross and looking outwards to the future suffering of the onlooking women is our great example. Paul was indeed forsaken by men (2 Tim. 4:10,16). But he was not forsaken by the Lord's presence through His Spirit. "Destroyed" translates the Greek term Paul repeatedly uses in Corinthians for the destruction of the condemned at the last day; he has just used it in this connection in :3 (1 Cor. 1:18,19; 8:11; 10:9,10; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3). It surely has to be that the 'destruction' in view is final condemnation. No matter how he was thrown or "struck" down by men, his comfort was that he was not and would not be condemned by the Lord. *His* acceptance means everything, and makes any human persecution or rejection of no account. And yet the rejection of men is a major issue with men; being 'cast down' from status or a position of acceptance becomes an unbearable experience for many. Paul went through all



this, but the fact he was in relationship with the Lord and would not be condemned *by Him* was the ultimate comfort. And it should be for us too. Paul states this clearly in 1 Cor. 4:4- that the Lord's judgment and not human judgment [including that of our brethren] is all important.

4:10 *Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body-* All Paul's sufferings listed in :8 and :9 he understood as a fellowshipping of the Lord's. Whilst we cannot attach meaning to event at the time, all our sufferings are part of His. This explains the breadth and depth of His sufferings; through them, He in essence can connect with all our sufferings. And those sufferings are given to us, as some form of manifestation of His sufferings. And just as surely, the resurrection life of Jesus will be manifested in our body, both in this life (:11) and in the resurrection body at the last day.

Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others: "So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:12). The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

Paul speaks here as if he full well understood the ongoing nature of the Lord's crucifixion, and saw it as the pattern of his daily living.

The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analysing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

| v. 10   | v. 11                                       |
|---|---|
| Always  | For we which live are alway                 |
| bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus | delivered unto death for Jesus' sake        |
| that the life also of Jesus                           | that the life also of Jesus                 |
| might be manifest in our body                         | might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. |

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross. See on Mt. 27:26.

4:11 *For we who live are always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh-* See on :10. If the life of Jesus is living in us ["we who live"], then we will constantly be experiencing both the crucifixion suffering and resurrection life of the Lord Jesus. The experience of new life within us now is the basis upon which our entire bodies will likewise be transformed (Rom. 8:11).

4:12 *So then death works in us-* The tragedy of death and suffering for the unbeliever is that it achieves nothing on a personal level, it is the end. Whereas for the believer, the Lord's sufferings and death are manifested in us, but they "work", they achieve or literally 'energize', life. Not only for us personally but for others. This is the ultimate death- a death which brings life for others as well as for ourselves. And only by connection with the Lord Jesus can such

a meaning be attached to human death. This to my mind is one of the most powerful blessings of Christianity, of connection to Christ in baptism and a life lived in the power and Spirit of His death and resurrection.

*But life in you-* We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7). Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others. The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

4:13 *But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe and on this basis we also speak-* The GNB gets the point: "The scripture says, "I spoke because I believed." In the same spirit of faith we also speak because we believe". Paul is saying that because he takes these things seriously, he really believes this is all gloriously true, he therefore speaks it out. "I believed, and *therefore* have I spoken" (Ps. 116:10) is quoted in 2 Cor. 4:13 concerning the attitude of the preacher; *because we have believed, therefore we preach*, after Paul's pattern. We carry in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, and live His resurrection life even now in our mortal flesh- and "We having the same spirit of faith [as He had], according to that which is written, I believed and therefore did I speak. We *also* believe, and therefore *also* we speak" (2 Cor. 4:11-13). Here Paul quotes the Messianic Ps. 116:10 about *our* witness, which is a living out of the spirit which Jesus had in His death and present life and being in Heaven. And we should adopt a similar positive approach.

We are all terminally ill, if only we would know it. Paul quotes from the experience of Hezekiah at this time and says that this should be the keynote of our witness (Ps. 116:10). He was "delivered from death" and therefore promised to walk before the Lord "in the lands of the living", believing in salvation and therefore speaking to those lands of it (RV). We all face the day when we shall be as water spilt on the ground, that cannot be gathered up; when the delicate, beautiful chandelier of human life will come crashing to the ground, when the rope holding the bucket snaps, and it falls into the well. In all these Biblical images of death, we face the tragic irreversibility of it all. Our bodies are already riddled with the cancer of inevitable decay. *Today*, while it is still today, we must focus ourselves upon the vital and essential realities of our faith, and away from all the peripheral issues upon which our flesh would far rather dwell.

4:14 *Knowing that He that raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you-* This is in the context of having observed that the process of sharing the Lord's death "works ['energizes'] life in you" (:12). Again Paul sees the final salvation of the Corinthians as partly related to his own continued connection with them. This is the exact opposite of those who cut themselves loose from any believers who fall beneath their own self-chosen standards of doctrine or practice. It was to be God, the One who raised Jesus, who would "present us with you". He will make us acceptable to Himself and His Son at the last day. Note how in 2 Cor. 11:2 Paul writes of how he himself was seeking to "present" (s.w.) the Corinthians "as a chaste virgin to Christ". But here he writes that this process of preparation and 'presenting' is God's. Clearly enough, he is teaching that God will work powerfully through our efforts to present others acceptable at the last day. If we set our hearts and lives upon such work, God shall work in and through us, somehow enabling our work.

4:15 *For all things are for your sakes, that the grace may be multiplied through many-* God's saving grace meant that "many" preachers like Paul were sharing this grace to others; and the result would be thanksgiving which glorified God. The terms used in this verse are going to

be later used by Paul about the gift or grace of giving to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. He believed that this giving would result in much thanks, to God's glory (2 Cor. 8:7; 9:8,12). The grace given each of us in salvation ought to be reflected in practical giving to the poor, so that our praise for God's giving to us translates into the praise of the recipients towards God. As Paul felt he could orchestrate even the salvation of the Corinthians (see on :12), so he felt he could arrange the glory of God through his elaborate Jerusalem Poor Fund project. But there is no evidence he gathered very much support for it, nor that it was accepted by the Jerusalem poor, nor that it ever elicited much thanks to God. Likewise it cannot be that Paul alone could be the saviour of those who "had not the knowledge of God" and who had turned away from God's glory in Christ.

*Causing thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God-* AV "to redound", Gk. 'to surge back'. God's grace shown to us surges back like the tide in good works to others; see on 4:1. The same word is used about the grace / giving to the Jerusalem poor abounding to God's glory through all the thanksgiving which Paul imagined the project would elicit (2 Cor. 9:12 s.w.).

4:16 *Therefore we do not give up-* As noted on :1 where the same word is used, the power to keep on keeping on comes from the Spirit, and from the firm knowledge that by His grace we shall surely live eternally. The presence of the Spirit in our hearts and lives now is the guarantee that we shall live eternally, and our mortal flesh shall in due course be transformed to Spirit nature. This is why we do not give up, it is why the true Christian faith is no mere passing religion, passion or enthusiasm which comes and goes as we go onwards in life.

*But though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day-* The same word for "inward man" is found in Eph. 3:16: "Be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man". Rom. 6:4 teaches that after baptism, we live in an ongoing "newness of life". This is because of the gift of the Spirit, which strengthens and renews the inner man constantly. Just as we are "always" experiencing the Lord's sufferings (:11), so "day by day" we are renewed. A related word is used when Paul teaches that the new creation which begins at baptism makes all things new (2 Cor. 5:17). There is a process on renewal and strengthening ongoing in the hearts or "inward man" of the believer- if we will believe it and permit it. Paul has spoken of this at the end of chapter 3; we are being progressively changed "from glory to glory", closer and ever more exactly into the mental image of the Lord Jesus. The ongoing nature of the transformation is important to Paul, because it contrasts with the fading glory of the Mosaic system.

4:17 *For our slight momentary affliction accomplishes for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison-* The traumas of :8 and :9 are "slight"; the word is only elsewhere used in Mt. 11:30 "My burden is light". The lightness is not in absolute terms, for we are asked to carry the cross of Christ; but in relative terms it is- compared to the eternal weight of glory ahead. The *weight* of that glory is contrasted with the *lightness* of the present affliction. However painful, it is for a 'moment' *relative to* the "eternal" glory. The context presents the eternal glory as that of the Lord Jesus. But we are being changed into His glory, from glory to glory, as the Spirit works within our minds now to effect that change. The RV reflects the Greek in offering: "More and more exceedingly an eternal weight". The ongoing nature is brought out well. The 'accomplishment' therefore refers not only to the change to glory at the resurrection of the body; but to a process of glorification now ongoing, and which will continue eternally. The transformation and renewal is something we shall eternally experience; eternity in that sense will never be boring. Our afflictions are right now accomplishing the eternal weight of glory. Paul will soon use the same word in writing of how God, through the guarantee of the Spirit's work in us, is 'accomplishing' our salvation in us (2 Cor. 5:5). Our current afflictions are nothing to be compared with the accomplishment

of glory even now within us- let alone to the eternal glory of bodily immortality at the last day.

Every moment of our lives is being intensely used by God to prepare us for the eternity ahead. It is incredible that our probations here are so short- just forty years or so after our baptisms. It would seem more appropriate if we suffered for say one million years in order to prepare us for the infinite time we will one day enjoy, in which one million years will be as a moment. The point is, a tremendous amount of spiritual development and preparation is packed in to a very small space of time. And from this a crucial conclusion follows: we must allow God to use every moment of our present lives as intensively as possible, to the end we might be prepared for His eternal Kingdom.

*4:18 Whilst meantime we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal-* 'Things not seen' is a phrase elsewhere used for Jewish inability or blindness to the things of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:10; Jn. 9:39; Rom. 11:8,10). The idea of looking at things which are not visible is surely contradictory; until we read this in context of the preceding imagery of Israel not 'seeing' the glory of Christ because of the veil placed upon them. We look at those things, with unveiled face- things which are not seen *by many*, especially Jewish people.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens-* The context continues from the end of chapter 4, where we have been urged to focus on the things which are eternal rather than those which are immediately visible. Paul likens our body to a tent- and as a tentmaker it is understandable that he should use such a metaphor. If that tent or tabernacle is taken down, in death, we know that we have a solid, permanent building prepared for us by God, reserved in Heaven. It is this which we will be clothed with at the Lord's return. "Not made with hands" suggests that our future being has been prepared by God; "not made with hands" recalls the stone of Daniel 2 cut out without human hands, i.e. prepared by God. Verse 5 will explain that we have a future reward which is being worked out for us by the Spirit's action in our lives right now. Our focus should be upon who we will eternally be, not on who we are now. Who we shall eternally be is being prepared right now through the Spirit's action in our lives now.

*5:2 For indeed in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven-* The groaning is that of Rom. 8:23: "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as children and the redemption of our bodies". The groaning is therefore for "the redemption of our bodies" at the Lord's return; the building being prepared in Heaven (:1) refers to the same thing. It is shoddy Bible study to use this passage as proof that we shall receive our reward in Heaven at the point of death. The reference in Rom. 8:23 to "the firstfruits of the Spirit" is matched here in :5 where we are encouraged that we have received "the Spirit as a guarantee". The Roman 8 passage goes further in explaining that our groans for the final salvation merge with the groans of the Lord Jesus in His intercession for us right now. Being clothed with, or "upon" (AV), suggests that human personality will not be totally destroyed- but clothed upon with immortality. The Bible offers personal salvation- that you and I as persons shall be eternally saved, rather than fading into some nirvana of nothingness. And in this is the eternal significance of our character development now- for who we essentially are is who we shall eternally be.

*5:3 Inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked-* Nakedness is associated with rejection at the Lord's return (Rev. 16:15). Again the focus is upon His return as the time when this change shall be effected, and not at the point of our death.

*5:4 For indeed we that are in this tent do groan, being burdened. Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life-* "Burdened" is the same Greek word Paul has used in 1:8 to describe the burden / suffering he experienced for the sake of the Gospel. It made him "groan" the more for mortality to be swallowed by life- the resurrection and change of our mortal body to an immortal one at the second coming. The language is that which Paul has earlier used in 1 Cor. 15. "Not that we would be unclothed" connects with the reference to nakedness in :3. The sense is therefore 'Not that we want to be made naked before the judgment seat of Christ and left in that shameful state of condemnation, but to be made naked and then clothed upon with immortal bodies'. I don't think that being "unclothed" means that Paul didn't want to die- for in Phil. 1:23 Paul says he had a strong desire to die and only wanted to remain alive for the sake of what he could do in service to others. So his desire here in 2 Cor. 5:4 *not* to be "unclothed" I suggest refers to the nakedness of condemnation, the metaphor introduced in the preceding verse :3.

The struggle of prayer (see on Col. 2:1) is reflected in a word associated with it- 'groaning'. The Lord Himself prayed with strong groanings and tears, and He even now makes

intercession for our prayers with groanings which are inexpressible within the limitations of words. 2 Cor. 5:4 says that we groan, being burdened, for the day when “mortality might be swallowed up of life”. This is the language of a burdened Israel in Egypt, groaning for deliverance. Our ‘groaning’ in this mortal flesh (2 Cor. 5:2) is therefore not to be read as a justification for groaning and complaining about our humanity; but rather intense prayer for the second coming.

*5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee-* God is now preparing or 'working' out our future eternal nature of being, which we shall receive in the form of an immortalized existence when the Lord returns. But we have the Spirit now in our hearts as a guarantee and foretaste of that great salvation. Paul has just used the same word for 'prepared us' in 4:17- our light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory. But that 'working out' is God's working, by the Spirit. The only other usages of the word "guarantee" are also in the context of the Spirit being a guarantee *in our hearts* (1:22 "the guarantee of the Spirit in our hearts"), granted after we believe and are baptized (Eph. 1:13,14).

That God is working in our lives through His Spirit, and that He has granted us the gifts of forgiveness and prospective salvation by its working, should not engender any spirit of relaxation. If we truly believe this, it will motivate us to greater personal effort: "God... hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident... wherefore we labour that... we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat... knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:5-11 AV)- i.e. 'Despite having had God's gift of salvation in prospect, the utmost personal effort is still required in responding to it. Think of the day of judgment, the fear that you will have then because of God's holiness and your sinfulness. Although this is not our only motivation, indeed it is somewhat human ("we persuade men"), it is still powerfully true'.

But the 'preparation' or 'working' of God can also be understood in this context as the fact He has first made us mortal, and allowed us to groan for immortality. For we who understand not only Bible teaching about death, but also the insistent Biblical emphasis upon it, we don't live life in an eternal now. We live now for tomorrow, joyful in our awareness of the eternal consequence of our actions and personalities beyond the grave, knowing that all our beliefs, actions, faith, character developments- all come to their ultimate term before the judgment seat of Christ. In speaking of our mortality and our longing for immortality, Paul comments that "He that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. 5:5 AV). The reference to how God "wrought us" [NEV "prepared us"] would appear to comment upon the mortality of our bodies; human mortality [when correctly understood] makes us long for the coming of the Lord to clothe us with our new nature which is to be brought to us from Heaven (2 Cor. 5:2). God "wrought us" as He did in order to enable us to have this longing. According to the Bible, the spirit of man is God's. He gave us that life force (Is. 42:5), and at death "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). If we seriously believe this, then we will see death as an opportunity to give back to God what He gave us, namely our very life force. If in our lives we followed this principle, realizing nothing we 'have' is really ours but His, and therefore we were open handed with our possessions and knowledge of Him, freely giving it out as it were to Him, then giving back our life force to Him will be but a natural progression from this way of living. And thus we will see immortality not as something we personally crave for our own benefit, but rather a further opportunity to reflect back to Him, to His glory. Thus understanding Bible truth about death affects how we face death and eternity, and therefore radically influences our lives now.

*5:6 Being therefore always of good courage-* The "therefore" refers to the fact we have been given the Spirit in our hearts (1:22) as a guarantee that we shall indeed be finally saved.

Those like the Corinthians who deny the Spirit are left without this "good courage". It is that experience of the Spirit which convicts us that we are not "at home" in secular life, and long to be united with the Lord Jesus more fully (:8). The Greek word for "good courage" is used by Paul only here in 2 Corinthians (5:8; 7:16; 10:1,2). This personal confidence that we shall be saved inspires a generally hopeful and confident approach in dealing with others, not least politically fraught and tense situations as Paul faced with the Corinthians.

*And knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord-* "At home" translates the word which is found later in :8 and :9. The AV makes a mess here by not consistently translating the word. We are "at home in the body" but we would rather be "at home" with the Lord (:8). "At home" means just that- in your family. "Absent" carries the idea of having emigrated abroad, of having quit something. This definition is crucial to understand this passage from :7-9. I suggest that Paul is not merely describing the general situation of believers in mortality- as if to say that if we are still in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus is a major New Testament theme; we are not "absent" from Him. But we should not be in a position where we have emigrated from Him, gone out from Him, quit Him- and these are the ideas present in *ek-demeo*. Without question, the *ek* prefix means 'out of', and it carries that meaning around 900 times in the New Testament. I suggest rather that Paul is teaching that if we are at home in the body, if secular life is our natural and preferred habitat, where we feel most at home; then we have emigrated, gone away, from the Lord Jesus.

*5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight-* This connects back to 4:18: "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen". Our focus is not to be upon who we are now, what we see before our eyes; but upon who we shall eternally be, which we see by the eye of faith. In the language of :6 and :8, we are not to feel homely, "at home", in the present body nor the secular life with which it is associated. We are to have the Lord Jesus "at home" with us, and to be absent from the things of fleshly life.

5:8- see on Lk. 12:37.

*Yes, we are of good courage; and we would rather be absent from the body and at home with the Lord-* The reference of the "rather" is to being "at home in the body" (:6; verse 7 is an aside). Paul is confident of leaving the body and being at home with the Lord. As explained on :6, he has in view how we should right now in this life not feel at home in earthly life, and should not go away ["be absent"] from the Lord but rather be at home with Him in His family now. But this shall come to ultimate term when He returns, when like Lot we leave Sodom, we leave the things of this bodily life. He is confident, by grace, of that happening at the Lord's return. This interpretation is confirmed as we read on in :9,10 of our acceptance with Him then, and of the judgment seat of Christ at His return. This interpretation makes sense of the connection between confidence, and becoming fully "at home" with the Lord at His return and the judgment seat.

*5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to him-* Our aim or focus (see on :7) is to be pleasing to Him at the day of His coming- I prefer AV "we may be accepted of Him", because the next verse goes on to speak of the judgment seat of Christ. "Whether at home or absent" could mean 'Whether we are alive or dead at His return'. This would then connect with one possible view of :4 "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed"- which could mean 'We don't want to die before His return, our preference is that this mortal body be swallowed up into immortality at His return during our lifetimes'. This would mean that here in :9, being "at home" refers to being at home with the Lord now, and "absent" refers to being absent from the Lord in death. But in my note on :4 I

have suggested an alternative interpretation. And we are never absent or away from the Lord, in death nor life, for all live unto Him. As explained on :6, we are now to be "at home" with the Lord and "absent" or to have quit the bodily, fleshly life. So Paul may well mean that he labours for the Corinthians, that whether they are currently at home in the bodily fleshly life or absent from it, spiritually weak or strong, they will still be accepted at the last day. And that fits to my mind more comfortably with Paul's whole attitude to the weak Corinthians and his labour for their final acceptance.

"In this (body) we *groan*... we that are in this tabernacle do *groan*, being burdened... we are always *confident*... we are *confident*, I say... Wherefore we *labour* (are ambitious), that... we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:1-10 AV). Notice the designed repetition of the words "groan" and "confident". The humdrum groaning of this life is related to our ambitious confidence that we really will be accepted at the day of judgment. The very thought of acceptance on that day requires real ambition, an ambition that will lift us right up out of the 'groaning' of this life.

5:10 *For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ*- We shall then be revealed as to whether we are "at home" with the bodily, fleshly life- or with the Lord and His family. We shall be revealed as to whether we are "absent" or have gone out from the Lord, or whether we have instead quit the bodily, worldly life. The revelation of each believer at the judgment seat will be public- the same word is used by the Lord in teaching that no secret thing shall not be revealed "abroad", before all (Mk. 4:22). Paul had earlier used this word in teaching the Corinthians that the secret intentions of the heart shall be "revealed" at the Lord's coming (1 Cor. 4:5); every man's work shall be revealed ["made manifest"] (1 Cor. 3:13). Here in 2 Cor. 5:10, he says that the deeds of the body shall be revealed- but in the Lord's book, the thought and the actions are the same. There will be a mutuality at the day of judgment- the Lord Jesus shall be revealed to us, and we to Him. His life shall then be manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:10,11). The essence of judgment day is ongoing now- for our deeds are manifest now before God, in the light of the cross (Jn. 3:21 and context; see notes there). And so Paul now goes straight on to say that "we are made manifest [s.w. "revealed"] unto God" right now (:11). This is why Paul claims utter transparency before the Corinthians; he has now hidden agendas, because he is completely "made manifest [s.w. "revealed"] among you in all things" (2 Cor. 11:6). We shall be revealed before the Lord and all our brethren in that day, so we may as well be in this life. "We must all *appear* before the judgment seat" (2 Cor. 5:10 AV) doesn't therefore just mean we'll put in an appearance. The Greek means to be exposed utterly. We shall have "our lives laid open" (NEB). Then, the unshareable self will be revealed; that essence of personality which is unknown even to us.

*That each one may receive the result of the things done in a bodily form, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad*- We note again the reference to the body. Paul has been urging us to not be "at home" in the body but to instead be "at home" with the Lord and His family (see on :6). The things done "in the body" (AV) will be judged with eternal consequence. All "the things done" will then be judged. Somehow, the judgment event will take account of every single action, every good or bad. This is what gives significance to human life, thought and action, every moment. All shall have eternal moment and consequence at the last day. We shall then "receive" for the good (Eph. 6:8) and bad which we have done (Col. 3:25).

5:11- see on 1 Jn. 3:19.



*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men-* "Persuade" is the same word used of how Paul had initially visited Corinth and "persuaded" the Corinthians of the Gospel (Acts 18:4). His preaching was now passive presentation of theological truths. Given the eternal moment of the issues arising from believing or rejecting the Gospel, he unashamedly, proactively sought to persuade men of the positive response they should make. And he did so knowing "the fear" or "terror"(AV) of the Lord's rejection at the day of judgment.

*But we are revealed to God, and I hope that we are revealed also in your consciences-* As noted on :10, we shall be revealed to God at the last day; and yet the essence of judgment is right now. Paul hopes that in their hearts, the Corinthians knew that the Paul they saw and heard was the real Paul; he was speaking and acting as if before the judgment throne of the Lord, right now. He did not in fact have any other persona or agendas, as they falsely accused him of. See on :10 and :12.

Fearing God's judgment and righteousness is not in itself a bad motivation. It may not be the highest motivation, but in practice, because we so often understand no other language, the real fear of God is a necessary motivation. Knowing the "terror of the Lord" (a phrase used in the OT with reference to coming judgment), Paul persuaded men to accept His grace (2 Cor. 5:11). Noah went into the ark (cp. baptism) from fear of the coming flood (Gen. 7:7), as Israel crossed the Red Sea (again, baptism) from fear of the approaching Egyptians, as men fled to the city of refuge (again, Christ, Heb. 6:18) from fear of the avenger of blood, and as circumcision (cp. baptism) was performed with the threat of exclusion from the community (possibly by death) hanging over the child. Biblically, *phobos* is the motivation for a pure life (1 Pet. 3:2; 2 Cor. 7:11), for humility in our dealings with each other (Eph. 5:21), for accepting the Gospel in the first place (2 Cor. 5:11). It must be remembered that the Gospel is not only good news, but also the warning of judgment to come on those who reject it (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38-40). The good news is *so* good that a man can't hear it and decide not to respond- without facing judgment for his rejection of God's love and Christ's death. There are many who know the Gospel (e.g. by being 'brought up in the Faith') but who calmly walk away from the call of the cross. I would suggest that they need more reminding than it seems they are given of the fear of God, the tragic inevitability of judgment to come, the sense of desperate self-hate and bitter regret that will engulf men then, the sense of no place to run... . Paul used "the terror of the Lord" , the concept of fearing God, to persuade men who had rejected his beseeching (2 Cor. 5:11).

The idea of conditional salvation, and that not for everybody but a tiny minority, I find both hard to accept and yet the very thing that clinches the actual reality of 'the truth' we hold. Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). And this book was in some way a joy and rejoicing to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). And when those that had already believed (Acts 19:18 Gk.) saw how the condemned sons of Sceva fled away from the spirit of Jesus naked and wounded, in anticipation of the final judgment, they ceased being secret believers and came out openly with their confessions of unworthiness and need for salvation. In the light of that foretaste of judgment to come, they realized that nothing else mattered. The image of them fleeing naked definitely alludes to Am. 2:16: "The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, Says the Lord" (NKJV).

5:12 *We are not commending ourselves to you again-* Perhaps Paul was quoting back to them what he knew some said about him: 'Here he goes again, commending himself'. The immediate reference would be to Paul's claim that he is transparent, because he stands now as

before the judgment seat of Christ, revealed to them as he would be then (see previous commentary on this chapter). He has just said that they know this to be true in their consciences (:11). And he has used the same argument in 3:1 and 4:2; his commendation is in fact within their consciences ("commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God", 4:2).

*But giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart-* Paul is setting the scene for his forthcoming self-commendation in human terms which he will make in chapter 6- "In all things approving [s.w. "commending"] ourselves as the ministers of God" in all his sufferings (2 Cor. 6:4). He is speaking in human terms- for he is clear that it is not he who commends himself who is approved, but whom the Lord commends (2 Cor. 10:18). This commendation of the Lord was in their consciences (:11)- by the work of the Spirit in their hearts, if they were indeed open to it. He notes that it is the false teachers, who humanly speaking were his competitors, who commended themselves (2 Cor. 10:12). But he will go on to make a self-commendation so that they can still engage with those false teachers ["who boast about outward appearance"] on their own terms. The boat should not be about outward things, but about "what is in the heart". And what was that? He has just said that they ought to have the Spirit in their hearts (:5), and it was that Spirit which ought to have worked within them so that the commendation of Paul was within their hearts, in their consciences (see on :11). Paul could of course have refused to engage with these people on their own terms. But he does, in the same way as some believers find it appropriate to engage with the arguments of scientific atheists in the terms of science. Even though the higher arguments for God's existence are beyond the scientific paradigm. "I speak in human terms" is a phrase Paul several times uses. He sought by all means to persuade men.

Like the Lord, Paul's transparency was what connected him with people. He says that he needs no letter of recommendation to them, because he is written on their hearts; "by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God... we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (2 Cor. 3:3; 4:2; 5:11 AV). There were those in Corinth who thought in terms of appearances rather than the heart; those who demanded letters of recommendation before accepting Paul (2 Cor. 5:12); but Paul's response is that because he is transparent to God, it is inevitable that he is transparent before them his brethren. They knew in their hearts / consciences, no matter how they sought to deny it, that he was sincere. And this was why Paul could be so open with the critical Corinthians about his personal life. "Be ye also enlarged" invites us to be like him in this. To be asked to have the openness of Paul is a challenge indeed. Even in our Christian experience, those brethren and sisters who have the most influence on others are those who artlessly radiate their own spirit, whose struggle with sin, devotion and example is unconcealable and uncontrived.

*5:13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you-* Paul is presumably quoting from accusations made about his mental stability. Festus made the same accusation (Acts 26:24). We note that Paul doesn't accuse the slanderers of slander; he reasons from the assumption, for a moment, that what they said was true. The Lord did likewise in His teaching. But the idea of appearing mad or in fact being 'right minded' are clearly in the spirit of Paul's opening position to the Corinthians which we find in 1 Cor. 1. It is the mind devoid of the Spirit which would consider a spiritual person to be "foolish". By considering Paul to be 'a fool', the Corinthians indicated how they were simply "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) despite having been given the Spirit. "If we are out of our mind"

would be more strictly translated "when we were out of our mind", with reference to a specific past incident; compared to "we are in our right mind" which is a more continuous tense. The being 'out of our mind' and perceived as mad could refer to a single incident of ecstatic in-Spirit behaviour which the Corinthians had observed in Paul whilst he was amongst them. Plato (*Phaedrus* 244) describes the supposedly spirit-filled priestesses at Delphi [near to Corinth] as "mad" when they were [supposedly] filled by a spirit, and "in their right mind" [s.w. as here in 2 Cor. 5:13] when they were not possessed by a spirit. This apparent madness was 'to God'; but Paul related to the Corinthians in his right mind (Gk. 'soberly'). They had as it were eavesdropped on Paul's personal relationship with God in some Spirit ecstasy, and were mocking him for it. But his interactions with the Corinthians had, Paul says, been of an utterly sober nature.

5:14- see on 2 Cor. 8:9.

*For the love of Christ controls us*- The love of Christ (and this phrase is almost always used in the NT of the cross) must *constrain us* (2 Cor. 5:14); we must reflect upon it until with Paul we pray with bowed knees to know the length, and the breadth and the height, of that love of Christ (on Calvary) that passes our unaided human knowledge (Eph. 3:19). For this alone is what will drive our passivity from us; here at last is something to respond to with all our heart and soul. The image of soldiers in their time of dying has often been used afterwards as a motivation for a nation: "Earn this" is the message their faces give. And it is no more true than in the death of the Lord. "The love of Christ", an idea elsewhere used of His death (Jn. 13:1; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 8:32,34,35; Eph. 5:2,25; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5 cp. 1 Jn. 4:10), *constrains us*; it doesn't force us, but rather shuts us up unto one way, as in a narrow, walled path. We cannot sit passively before the cross of the Lord. That "love of Christ" there passes our human knowledge, and yet our hearts can be opened, as Paul prayed, that we might know the length, breadth and height of it. The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God.

The Lord died as He did so that the love of God, the real meaning of love, might be displayed in a cameo, in an intense, visual, physical form which could be remembered and meditated upon. Observing the memorial meeting is the very least we can do to this end; and this itself is only a beginning. "The love of Christ *constraineth us*" (AV) not to live for ourselves, but unto him that died for us, and to show this by our concern for our brethren, in the context. Marvin Vincent has a telling comment on the Greek word translated "controls": "The idea is not urging or driving, but *shutting up* to one line or purpose, as in a narrow, walled road" (*Word Studies Of The N.T.*). We shouldn't be driven men and women; we are not urged or driven by the cross, but shut up by it to one purpose. There are only two ways before us, to death or life; and we are shut up by the cross in that road to life. In this lies the sustaining and transforming power of the cross, if only we would meditate upon it. It is an epitome of every facet of the love of God and of Christ. There the Name of God was declared, that the love that was in the Father and Son may be in us (Jn. 17:26). The same word is used about the Lord in Lk. 22:63, where we read He was "bound", constrained, limited in movement- as He was constrained for us in His final sufferings, we should likewise be for Him.

*Because we have judged that in that one has died for all, therefore all have died*- If the classic idea of substitution were correct, then surely this should read "One has died for all, therefore all have *lived*". But the death of Christ *for us* rather shows us how to *die* in a death like His, that we through identity with His death might share in His life. If we really think of the Lord's passion seriously, our thoughts will be punctuated with the realization: "I would not have done that. I would simply not have held on". But in that He died for us all in Him, it is reckoned that we all died with Him the death of the cross. We are graciously counted as

having died with Him in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), and now we try to live this out in practice. And in appreciating this, inevitably our patience with our brethren will be the more thoroughgoing.

5:15 *And he died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and rose again-* The representative nature of the Lord's death means that we are pledged to live out His self-crucifixion as far as we can; to re-live the crucifixion process in our imagination, to come to that point where we *know* we wouldn't have gone through with it, and to grasp with real wonder and gratitude the salvation of the cross. Paul is surely alluding to the idea of baptism, whereby we identify with His death and resurrection; the language here is similar to that concerning baptism in Rom. 6:8. "As one has died for all, then all have died, and that He died for all in order to have the living live no longer for themselves but for Him who died and rose for them" (2 Cor. 5:14,15 Moffatt). It has been powerfully commented: "To know oneself to have been involved in the sacrificial death of Christ, on account of its representational character, is to see oneself committed to a sacrificial life, to a re-enactment in oneself of the cross" (W.F. Barling, *The Letters To Corinth*).

All that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes in some sense, at some time, true of each of us who are in Him. It's true that nowhere in the Bible is the Lord Jesus actually called our "representative", but the idea is clearly there. I suggest it's especially clear in all the Bible passages which speak of Him acting *huper* us- what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation". Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon define *huper* in the genitive as meaning "'for', 'in behalf of', 'for the sake of' someone. When used in the sense of representation, *huper* is associated with verbs like 'request, pray, care, work, feel, suffer, die, support'". So in the same way as the Lord representatively prays, died, cares, suffers, works "for" us, we are to do likewise, if He indeed is our representative and we His. Our prayers for another, our caring for them, is no longer a rushed salving of our conscience through some good deed. Instead 2 Cor. 5:15 becomes our motivation: "He died for (*huper*) all [of us], that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for (*huper*) them". We are, in our turn, to go forth and be "ambassadors for (*huper*) Christ... we pray you in Christ's stead (*huper* Christ), be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Grasping Him as our representative means that we will be His representatives in this world, and not leave that to others or think that our relationship in Him is so internal we needn't breathe nor show a word of it to others. As He suffered "the just for (*huper*) the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18), our living, caring, praying for others is no longer done "for" those whom we consider good enough, worthy enough, sharing our religious convictions and theology. For whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died *huper* us (Rom. 5:6). And this representative death is to find an issue in our praying *huper* others (Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11), just as He makes intercession *huper* us (Rom. 8:26,34). We are to spend and be spent *huper* others, after the pattern of the Lord in His final nakedness of death on the cross (2 Cor. 12:15). These must all be far more than fine ideas for us. These are the principles which we are to live by in hour by hour life. And they demand a huge amount, even the cross itself. For unto us is given "in the behalf of Christ [*huper* Christ], not only to [quietly, painlessly, theoretically] believe on Him, but also to suffer for (*huper*) his sake" (Phil. 1:29). In all this, then, we see that the Lord's being our representative was not only at the time of His death; the fact He continues to be our representative makes Him our ongoing challenge.

5:16 *Therefore we, from this time forward, know no one after the flesh. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more-* In the context, Paul has written of how baptism into Christ makes us totally identified with Him. His death and

resurrection, and His ongoing life, are all to become ours. Paul is determined to perceive his fellow believers as in Christ; which would explain why he can criticize and perceive so clearly their serious failures, and yet write and feel so positively about them. He would not know them after the flesh, but [by implication] after the Spirit. And although Paul had met Christ in the flesh, perhaps during the Lord's ministry [at which time Paul was living in Jerusalem] or certainly on the Damascus road- that literal meeting with the Lord was now irrelevant to Paul. For knowing the Lord Jesus after the Spirit was and is the true way to achieve and perceive His presence near and real. The promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was to make the presence of the Lord Jesus as real as when He was literally on earth- and in a more profound and personal sense. Paul had previously gloried in his having physically met the Lord Jesus- but he says that now he knows Him like that no more. All is of the Spirit, and having the Lord's presence in the heart through the Comforter.

*5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation-* The context is full of Paul's allusions to his Damascus road conversion, when he did indeed know Christ after the flesh (:16). Paul is surely saying that he was in a sense everyman there; what happened to him can happen to "any man". The emphasis is therefore to be placed on the word "any". Paul really is our pattern.

F.F. Bruce has observed: "Something of Paul's native impetuosity is apparent in his epistolary style... time and again Paul starts a sentence that never reaches a grammatical end, for before he is well launched on it a new thought strikes him and he turns aside to deal with that" (*Paul: Apostle Of The Free Spirit*, Exeter: 1980, p. 456). This style is exemplified here in 2 Cor. 5:17. The Greek text here is a sentence in which there are no verbs: "If anyone in Christ- new creation". It is as if the thrill of it leads him to just blurt it out. And observe that this was to be found in a man of extraordinary culture and intellectual ability. By perceiving this tension, the passion behind his style is thereby accentuated the more. Likewise consider how in Galatians Paul uses so many negatives, as if his passion and almost rage at the false teachers is coming out. See on Gal. 1:1.

The idea of a "new creation" is using a technical term known in Judaism for the conversion of a person from idolatry to Judaism and monotheism. Rabbi Eliezer apparently wrote that "He who converts a man to the true religion is the same as if he had created him". So seeing that Paul was the converter of the Corinthians, his description of them as a new creation may be a reminder of their debt to him.

God is seeking to work a new creation in the experience of men and women. He has done this for us in Christ, and yet the reality of it is still dependent upon whether we will allow ourselves to put on the new man after the image of God, whether we will become born again after His image and likeness (Eph. 4:23,24). "A new creation" is very much the language of Rev. 21:5 concerning the creation of new things on the ruins of the old, at Christ's return. Yet this dramatic change must occur within the believer as a result of being in Christ in this life, before he can share in the wonders of that future age.

The Greek of 2 Cor. 5:17 is tellingly ambiguous; the sense can be: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature", or, "If any man be in Christ, let him be a new creature". The fact of becoming in Christ through baptism means that we are new creations potentially, and therefore must work towards being new creations. We must go on further than just being baptized into Christ.

*The old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new-* As a new born baby sees a chair, a table, a brother or sister, for the very first time, so do we after baptism. It is so hard for us to appreciate the newness of everything to a baby or small child. "All things are

become new" in our attitude of mind after baptism. Yet we live in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), as if this process of birth is ongoing throughout our spiritual lives. After baptism, therefore, we set out on a life in which we should be gazing, in wide eyed wonder, at new spiritual concepts and realities. How patient we should be with others who are in this position. "Old things are passed away" at baptism, just as the old world order will "pass away" at the Lord's return (Rev. 21:5). The dramatic change that will come upon this planet in the Kingdom should therefore be paralleled in our new spiritual vistas after baptism, and throughout the process of being re-born and becoming a new creation. The contemporary Jewish writings and the Apocrypha use the term "new creation" to describe the situation which would be brought about at the last day (1 Enoch 72:1; 2 Apoc. Baruch 32:6). Further exemplification is presented in Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 297. Yet Paul applies what could be called 'future Kingdom language' to our status in Christ right now.

5:18 *But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation-* The Greek for "reconciled" implies to mutually change both sides. Both God and man were in some sense changed by the work of Christ. God reconciled us by the cross, and *therefore* to us was given the work of preaching the Gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18,20)- a sharing with others of our own experience. This was clearly what fired the first century ecclesia. On the basis of our experience of reconciliation with God, we have been given "the ministry of reconciliation", in that God "has put in us [Gk. settled deep within us] the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18,19). That which is deeply internal issues in an outward witness. For this reason all discussion of how that outward witness should be made is somewhat irrelevant- the witness naturally springs from deep within. If it doesn't, we have to ask whether we have anything much deep within.

"Ministry" is a word repeatedly used by Paul in 2 Corinthians for his ministry or service to the brotherhood (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1,12,13; 11:8). Because we have been reconciled to God by forgiveness, through the ministry of the suffering servant, we are to respond by ministering to others practically. Thus "the ministry of reconciliation" isn't simply 'preaching the Gospel' or reconciling others to God. It refers also to the practical ministry / service which is "of" or inspired by reconciliation. Classical Greek only uses the word translated "reconcile" regarding personal relationships of humans; and never about God or in a theological sense. The idea of having a personal reconciliation with God personally was a huge paradigm breaker in the first century world- and properly understood, it is today too. Thus "the ministry of reconciliation" is parallel with the ministry of the Spirit and of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6,8). The reconciliation achieved is by the Spirit, deep in the heart of the believer- for that is where personal relationships exist.

God reconciled the world; but the word of reconciliation is committed unto us. All men were reconciled to God on the cross, even while they were sinners (Rom. 5:10); but it depends upon us to take that Gospel of reconciliation to them. So far as we fail in this, so far we leave His death for them in vain, only a potential achievement. We were given reconciliation personally (Rom. 5:11 RV); and we are also given "the ministry of reconciliation", the command to preach that reconciliation and share it with others . To be reconciled to God is to be given a charge to reconcile others.

Our preaching should flow naturally out of our own personal experience of God's grace. The fact that we were reconciled is tied up with the fact that we have been given, as part of this "being reconciled", the ministry of preaching reconciliation. It is the greatness of God's grace which will form the content of our preaching, not our own practical experience of it. Our

experience will only motivate us personally, not anyone else. We preach not ourselves, but Christ as Lord and Saviour. Let's really get down to serious self examination, to more finely appreciating the holiness of God and the horror of sin. If we can do this- and only if- our preaching, our speaking, our reasoning, even our very body language, will be stamped with the vital hallmark: humility.

Note that the style of 5:18-21 suggests it may have been a hymn well known to Paul's early Christian readership, or even a baptismal confessional statement.

5:19- see on Ps. 32:2.

*That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses to them-* Christ "reconciled the world" in that He obtained forgiveness for *us* (2 Cor. 5:19)- *we* are "the world" which was reconciled, we are the "all things" purged by His blood (Heb. 9:22). God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" seems to be a comment on the death, rather than the nature, of the Lord Jesus. It is in the context of the statement that Christ died for all men (2 Cor. 5:14). In that death, God was especially in Christ. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

*And has committed to us the word of reconciliation-* We are the means by which God is appealing to mankind; and we must do this while there is the opportunity for salvation. As Moses delivered God's people "with the hand of the angel", we likewise are working in cooperation with huge Angelic forces (Acts 7:35 RV). In prospect, God reconciled the whole world to Himself on the cross, the devil was destroyed, *all* sin was overcome then, in prospect. In this sense Christ is the propitiation for our sins as much as He is for those of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). On the cross, He bore away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). So now we must spread this good news to the whole world, for *all* men's' sins were conquered on the cross.

5:20 *Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating the world by us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God-* We are the face of Christ to this world, and to our brethren; He has no arms or legs or face on this earth apart from us, His body. God "makes His appeal by us" (2 Cor. 5:20 RSV). Paul's logic here parallels the Corinthians with "the world". He begs them to be reconciled to God (knowing that some of them weren't in relationship with God and "had not the knowledge of God", 1 Cor. 15:34). And yet Paul elsewhere writes so positively about them. Their status in Christ meant that he on one hand felt towards them as to the Lord Jesus, confident of their salvation. But Paul is a realist, his love didn't make him blind. And sensing the real possibility of their condemnation, of the eternity they might miss, he *begs* them. The Lord's passion for the world's reconciliation led Him to the cross; and it is that same passion which He seeks to articulate through us. The other references to Paul's 'begging' or 'beseeching' the Corinthians relate to practical matters- the same word is used of begging them to accept back the disciplined brother (2 Cor. 2:8) and to contribute to the Jerusalem Poor Fund (2 Cor. 9:5). It was through these things that they were in practice reconciled with God. For our relationship with Him depends upon our relationship with our brethren. Paul will conclude 2 Corinthians by begging the Corinthians to "be comforted" (13:11), using the same word as here translated "beg". Paul knows that the Corinthians must make the choice to accept the appeal he was making, but he appeals to them by all means.

God desires to "reason together" with men (Is. 1:18). This is extraordinary indeed. God is seeking to persuade men to accept the forgiveness available in the blood of His Son. And He asks us to do this work for Him, to reflect this aspect of His character to the world, with that same spirit of earnest humility: "As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God". No wonder in the context Paul says that we should *therefore* watch our behaviour and attitudes. The fact men turn away from God's *beseeking*, His *praying* that they will accept His grace, is surely the greatest tragedy in the whole cosmos, in the whole of existence.

*Because* of the cross, the atonement which God wrought in Christ's offering, we beseech men to be reconciled to God. Appreciating the cross and the nature of the atonement should be the basis of our appeal to men. And indeed, such an appeal is *God* appealing to men and women, in that there on the cross "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". The blood and spittle covered body of the Lord lifted up was and is the appeal, the *beseeking* of God Himself to men. And this is the message that we are honoured to preach on His behalf; we preach the appeal of God through the cross. See on Jn. 19:19. "All men" can have their part in a sacrifice which represented "all men". And this motivates us to preach to "all men".

5:21 *He who knew no sin, he became a sin offering on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him*- 2 Cor. 5:14-21 urges us to preach the salvation in Christ to all men, because He died for us, as our representative. He died *for* [the sake of] all (5:14,15), He was made sin *for* our sake (5:21); and therefore we are ambassadors *for* [s.w.] His sake (5:20). Because He was our representative, so we must be His representatives in witnessing Him to the world. This is why the preaching of Acts was consistently motivated by the Lord's death and resurrection for the preachers. See on Heb. 2:9.

There was a child-likeness about the Lord. Not in that He was naive- He was the least naive of all men. But rather did He have an innocence about sin, as if He were a sweet child caught up within the web of sinful men around Him. Indeed the point has been made that when Paul spoke of the Lord as being one "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), he was using the very phrase used in rabbinic and other contemporary writings to describe children, who were too young to 'know sin'. This child-likeness was beautifully related to His utter naturalness, which was so much a part of His moral perfection.

Paul's teaching here about imputed righteousness was fundamental to how he himself viewed the Corinthians. This was how God viewed them; and it was how Paul viewed them. This explains his positive language about them, despite being aware of their deep weaknesses of practice and understanding.



## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *And working together with him we entreat you not to receive the grace of God in vain-* God's desire for the salvation of the Corinthians involved Him working through Paul. And in that sense God and Paul became fellow workers (see on 1 Sam. 14:45). Paul seems to have the great commission in mind, when he wrote in 5:19-21 that to all of us has been committed the ministry of reconciliation, and in discharging it we are 'workers together' with God- the very same word used in Mk. 16:20 concerning how the Lord Jesus 'worked with' His men as they fulfilled the commission.

The "grace" in view is surely the *charis* of the Spirit. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit at baptism, but had not made use of it. They had received it in vain. The same word for "received" is used in 1 Cor. 2:14 to lament how the natural man does not receive the Spirit. And yet 1 Cor. 1 is clear that the Corinthians had received the Spirit. But they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Spirit had been received, but in vain. In contrast, Paul can say that he has not received God's grace in vain (1 Cor. 15:10); he is bidding them follow his example of transformation.

6:2- see on Ps. 69:13.

*For He said: In a time of acceptance I hearkened to you, and in a day of salvation did I succour you. Behold, now is the time of acceptance; behold, now is the day of salvation-* This quotation is in support of the statement that we have received God's grace, *charis*, gift of the Spirit; but we are not to receive it in vain, but rather make use of it. The 'succouring' in view refers to just that. The same word is used in Heb. 2:18 of how the Lord Jesus gives us such help in time of temptation. Seeing that temptation is internal to the human mind, this help is surely psychological, within the heart- which is exactly what the gift of the Spirit is all about. Forgiveness is indeed in view, but beyond that- strength against falling into sin.

There's an allusion here to Ps. 32:6. For every sinner, for whom David is our example, *now* is the time when God may be "found" in the sense of experiencing His forgiveness. God *is* love towards men, He *is* forgiveness. To experience this and respond back to it is therefore to find the knowledge of God. This "time when You (i.e. God's forgiveness, which *is* God) may be found" which David speaks of is that of 2 Cor. 6:2: "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation". Paul was speaking of how all sinners, baptized or not, need to realize this; we are all in David's position. Some complain that they did not experience a very great upsurge in finding and knowing God at the point of baptism. This may be due to an insufficient emphasis on the need for repentance and appreciating the seriousness of sin before baptism; and not being willing to make use of the Spirit gift which we are then given. We must not think that we know God because we believe a Statement of Faith and have been baptized. "Now is the accepted time", Paul wrote to the baptized Corinthians, to truly take on board the marvel of God's forgiveness, to know it and respond to it for ourselves, and thereby to come to a dynamic, two-way relationship with God.

But the allusion is also to Is. 49:8 "In an acceptable time have I heard you". This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. Is. 49:8,9: "In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you" is quoted about us in 2 Cor. 6:2 in the context of us being preachers, labouring with God. Isaiah continues: "And I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; saying to them that are bound, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves" (RV). This is the language of the Lord's preaching, which freed men from the prison house (Is. 61:1,2). Yet because we are in Him, we too have His ministry; our words too can *make men*

*inherit* the Kingdom, and free men from their bondage. "We are witnesses [through being] in him" (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). As the Lord in Isaiah's servant songs was the suffering, saving, atoning servant, lifted up to give salvation world-wide- so are we. This is why a Messianic passage like Is. 49:8 is quoted by Paul in 2 Cor. 6 about *us*. The next verse, Is. 49:9, must therefore also be about us: "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves... they shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water" (AV). In the same way as *we* have experienced the "acceptable time" in this life, so we will be able to encourage others to make use of the "accepted time" of God's grace.

6:3 *We aim to give no reason for stumbling in anything, that our ministry is not blamed-* The "ministry" received is to speak and act on God's behalf; for "our ministry" is *His* ministry of reconciliation which has been given to us (5:19). It is therefore critical that our service or ministry saves others, or works towards that; and therefore we will be careful not to cause any to stumble from the path towards that great salvation. As an "ambassador" (5:20), we must be careful not to discredit the Lord whom we represent and whose messengers and representatives we are.

6:4 *But in everything, commending ourselves as servants of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses-* An "ambassador" (5:20) was a servant. The authentication of him as an ambassador was in all the troubles he had experienced for the sake of that work, and his patient response to them. "Patience" or endurance was [and still is] the foremost qualification and characteristic. All the afflictions, necessities etc. were endured and did not stop Paul from continuing- for the idea of "patience", *hupomone*, is of "endurance". This is what authenticates a servant of God- keeping on keeping on, rather than a brief impressive mission trip or moment of sacrifice. We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25). It is primarily *people* who communicate, not words or ideas. Personal authenticity is undoubtedly the strongest credential in our work of communicating the message. Thus Paul could speak of his afflictions as being his credentials (2 Cor. 11:21-33; 1 Thess. 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:10-12). And God's true servant commends himself by the endurance of opposition (2 Cor. 6:4,5).

6:5 *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings-* These kinds of afflictions, especially the riots ["tumults"], had come upon Paul in Corinth and surrounding areas (Acts 18:13). His readership knew he was telling the truth. "Watchings" is literally 'sleepless nights' (NIV); the reference could be to how his hard labour as a tentmaker had to be done through the night at times, so that he could do ministry work during the day (1 Thess. 2:9 gives an example).

6:6 *In pureness, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness-* This group of sufferings refer to Paul's internal efforts and sacrifices in order for the ministry to go ahead. Paul's loving patience and care for the Corinthians exemplified all these characteristics.

*In the Holy Spirit-* The fruit of the gift of the Spirit included love and all that flows from it. Paul could sense that this fruit had been brought forth in him. Hence he goes on to list real love. This is why he so often links the Holy Spirit with love (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 2:1,2).

*In sincere love-* There is repeated N.T. warning against the ease of slipping into a mindset which thinks itself to be 'loving' when actually it isn't. "Let love be without dissimulation" (s.w. "unfeigned"; Rom. 12:9). The fact he knew himself to have "love unfeigned" (2 Cor. 6:6) was one of Paul's credentials as a genuine apostle. James 3:17 speaks of the true spirituality, including gentleness, patience, kindness etc., as being "without hypocrisy" (s.w. "unfeigned"). A true response to the doctrines of the basic Gospel will result in "love unfeigned" (1 Pet. 1:22). Israel of old failed in this: "With their mouth they shew much love; but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (Ez. 33:31). This is all some emphasis. It helps explain why both in ourselves and in others it is possible to behold a great emphasis on love whilst at the same time harbouring a very unloving attitude. I think all of us with any ecclesial experience will be able to recall conversations where 'love' has been advocated, or 'unloving behaviour' criticized, in language which simply *breathes* bitterness and contempt!

*6:7 In the word of truth, in the power of God-* The word of truth is the Gospel (Col. 1:5), and Paul's truthful preaching of it was confirmed by the power of God allowing miracles to be done to confirm his preaching.

*By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left-* The idea is of a warrior holding weapons in both hands, defensive in one, offensive weapons in the other.

*6:8 By glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report. As deceivers and yet true-* Paul lists these things as an evidence that he is well authenticated as a preacher or minister of the Gospel. But the personal integrity of every true preacher is always going to be questioned. Paul was not beyond criticism or false accusation. That can never be a required feature of those who minister the Gospel; for according to Paul here, the very fact the preacher becomes the object of slander and even exaggerated "good report" is all what confirms the credentials of a true minister of Christ. We could conclude that being unfairly gossiped about is a characteristic of the true servant of God. So here when Paul lists the things which confirm his apostleship, he not only lists his imprisonments and shipwrecks; he says that the fact he has been slandered is another proof that he is a servant of Christ. See on 1 Tim. 5:19.

*6:9 As unknown and yet well known-* The accusation was that Paul was a nobody, unknown. When as they knew, he was well known. This may explain the otherwise strange comment of the Jews in Rome that they had never heard of Paul. They surely had, but they treated him as "unknown".

*As dying and behold we live-* It is common for public figures to be gossiped about as having an illness, being terminally ill, and having only limited time left. It seems Paul had experienced that.

*As chastened and not killed-* Chastening may refer to public whipping, as it does in Lk. 23:16,22. Paul had five times been whipped or 'chastened' by the Jewish synagogue courts with 39 lashes (2 Cor. 11:24). Forty lashes were considered enough to kill- Paul was taken right up to the point of death. But he didn't die. Perhaps he has in mind the resurrection which occurred on one occasion after he was whipped to death in Acts 14:19,20.

6:10- see on Mt. 26:39.

*As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing-* In :9, Paul has cited the false accusations against him and answered them. Now he appears to comment upon some of his characteristics which his critics disliked, and justifies them, or at least presents them in another light. He so often writes of his tears and worry for his brethren; he was sorrowful, and yet it is part of the Christian life to also at the same time have joy. He has in view the Lord Jesus, who was the

man of sorrows on the cross, and yet could speak of "My joy" at the same time. But surely he also alludes to how he has used the same words in telling the Corinthians that he had sorrow from them when he ought to have rejoicing from them (2 Cor. 2:3). He sorrowed over them, and yet he also rejoiced over them for who they were by status in Christ (2 Cor. 7:7,9,13,16; 13:9).

*As poor, yet making many rich-* Critics leave the accused guilty whatever the truth is. Paul was accused of seeking wealth from his ministry, and yet apparently mocked for being poor-for wealth was seen, as today, as proof that a minister was of God. Paul clearly intends a linkage with his teaching in 8:9 that it was through the poverty of the Lord Jesus that we are made rich. And Paul saw that working out in his own life. He speaks of how we received the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:18; 2:7; 3:8,16); and yet in writing to the Corinthians he uses only to them a specific Greek word meaning 'to enrich'. He reminds them of how we are *enriched by Him* in the knowledge of forgiveness which we have (1 Cor. 1:5; 2 Cor. 9:11), and *therefore* we are to 'enrich' others in our preaching to them of the same grace (2 Cor. 6:10).

*As having nothing-* In our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. Paul could say that he was *as if* he possessed nothing, although he evidently had at least some money to his name (Acts 24:26), and could offer to re-imburse Philemon for any damages. There is a great freedom in this, if only we would know it.

*And yet possessing all things-* It is the Lord Jesus who possesses all things. The three characteristics mentioned in this verse each apply to the Lord Jesus in His time of dying. Clearly Paul felt identity with Him.

6:11- see on 2 Cor. 8:24.

*Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged-* The openness of Paul, his self-revelation of his innermost spirit, especially to his detractors at Corinth, is incredible. In such situations one tends to be cagey and reserved rather than open-hearted. But much of what we learn about Paul's innermost struggles comes from his letters to the Corinthians, who seemed ready to abuse his every word. And he asks them, as his very own children, to respond to his transparency by being open with him: "In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also" (2 Cor. 6:13). Many find that human leaders or elders come between them and a personal following of Jesus. Yet we need to remember that Jesus never delegated his personal authority over His people to anyone. This is where the Catholic idea of the Pope as the personal representative of Jesus is so wrong. Much as we should respect our elders, this respect shouldn't come between us and the Lord Jesus. Note how Paul never demanded power over his converts. He made himself vulnerable to them, in the hope that they would respond to him in an open relationship. Note the parallel between mouth and heart. This is very common in the Bible (at least 25 examples)- for our words issue from the heart.

6:12 *You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections-* The GNB seems to well summarize this awkward phrasing: "It is not we who have closed our hearts to you; it is you who have closed your hearts to us". This sounds as if one of the criticisms of Paul was that he had closed his heart to the Corinthians, he was all theory and no heart, a distant man hidden behind his own theology. And Paul's openhearted sharing of his life and feelings is therefore to be understood as a response to that slander.

Their sense of 'limitation' or being 'cramped' [Gk.] was not due to what he'd said, but more because of their own consciences as believers: "You are not cramped in us, but you are cramped by your own hearts... be you also enlarged! Be not unequally yoked together with

unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?" (2 Cor. 6:12-14). He's saying that the apparent 'cramping' or 'limitation' of being separate from the ways of the world is actually not a cramping at all- it's an enlargement of the heart's horizons. And this fits in admirably with the Hebrew idea of 'holiness'- a separation *from* sin /the world *unto* so much more.

6:13 *In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also-* The "return" was in that Paul wanted them to respond to his open hearted position before them. He wanted his attitude of transparency to elicit the same from them. Despite their revolt against him, he considers them his spiritual children (although he had baptized few of them); and so he wanted them to mimic his attitude in this.

6:14 *Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers-* Paul now attempts to put his finger on why they were not acting to him as towards a parent, mimicking his openness (:13). It is because of associations with others. Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. Thus Paul warns Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), or else he would come to them and not spare. He is quoting the LXX of Num. 25:3 concerning how Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, resulting in Moses commanding the murder of all those guilty- just as Paul later did to Corinth. Israel were not to sow "mingled seed" in their fields, or make clothes of "mingled" materials (s.w. LXX Lev. 19:19). The materials would, as the Lord Himself mentioned, tear apart. The garment wouldn't last. And sowing different seeds together likewise would bring no fruit to perfection. But the LXX in these passages is quoted in one place only in the NT: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). If we are, *the relationship can't work*. So don't think that if we yoke with unbelievers, as Corinth were with the Judaizers, or if we marry out of the Faith, it will all work out OK somehow. Unless there is serious repentance (and even then, not always), *it won't work*. It will be a garment patched up with two different materials.

*For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion has light with darkness?-* "Fellowship" and "communion", *koinonia*, here carries the sense of 'What do they have in common?'. The Corinthians thought that they could be Christians, yoked to the Lord, whilst involved in idol worship and Judaism. But if Christ is the light- then all else is darkness. Paul has earlier used the metaphor of how in the new creation, light shines forth out of the darkness. Although Paul was very tolerant of the Corinthians, he knew that ultimately there can be no compromise. It's not that they 'ought not to fellowship' with darkness; his point is that light and darkness are mutually exclusive categories, there is nothing in common between them. This is all being said in support of the appeal earlier in this verse not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Equal yoking is in order to get a job done- ploughing for the Lord, doing His work. And we shall not be able to participate in His work if we are unequally yoked. Not because we are not 'allowed' to, but because in practice we will be pulling different ways.

6:15 *And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what portion has a believer with an unbeliever?-* "Belial" was a specifically Jewish term for 'satan'. The fact Paul uses it here demonstrates the degree of Judaist influence upon the Corinthians. The Bible doesn't teach the existence of a cosmic Satan figure as believed in by first century Judaism; the word "Belial" never occurs again in the Bible. But (as he often does) Paul reasons with them from their perspective. It was unthinkable in Judaism to suggest that there was middle ground between Belial and God; but this in practice was how they were living. But when "Belial" occurs in the Old Testament, the Septuagint translates it as transgressor, impious, foolish or pest. It does not occur in the Septuagint as a proper name- i.e. 'Satan' as a personal cosmic being. *Belial* in Hebrew means 'worthless', and it seems that it became personified in Jewish

thought, eventually being twisted by them into a term for the cosmic 'Satan' figure which they came to wrongly believe in. So it could be that Paul is putting 'Belial' for what the Old Testament would call "sons of Belial", i.e. wicked men. They are then made parallel with "unbelievers", just as "Christ" is matched by "believers".

6:16 *And what agreement has a temple of God with idols?*- Paul here appeals to the Jewish obsession with the sanctity of the temple. To have idols within it was the greatest sacrilege. And yet the Corinthians were worshipping idols within the church, which is God's temple.

*For we are a temple of the living God, even as God said-* God 'lived' in the temple in that His glory and Spirit were present there; and He has placed His Spirit within each person who has believed and been baptized into His Son. But the Corinthians refused to be aware of this; hence in their personal and collective lives they were unaware of His presence and activity, and the need to keep themselves from defiling that holy space with idolatry. The quotation is not from any one place, but as was commonly done by Rabbis, is a mixture of language from Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:11,12; Ez. 37:26,27; 43:7 and Zech. 2:10,11.

*I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people-* God now dwells in His people through the Spirit ("In whom you also are being built up together for a dwelling place of God by the Spirit", Eph. 2:22). John's Gospel records the many times where the Lord Jesus speaks of abiding or dwelling within His people, especially through the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit. Paul has questioned whether the Corinthians appreciate that the Spirit is indeed within them, thereby making them the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16,17). The presence of the Spirit makes our hearts and lives exclusively God's. But because Corinth failed to permit the Spirit to function and were wilfully ignorant of it, they therefore failed to perceive the exclusivity of God's claim upon them, and were involved with idol worship. Paul is writing to a church which included Gentiles who had fallen under the influence of Judaism. He is saying that the Old Testament people of God are now the baptized Christian community, indwelt by the Spirit, for whom holy place and space is now the heart of the believer and the collective church of God. If God is walking amongst us and within us- then to be yoked together with an unbeliever is going to be impossible (:14).

The experience of God as "their God" was only if they came out from the world (:17). Paul has earlier stated that some of them have no relationship with God; "some have not the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34). God was not "their God"; for in practice, they refused to be indwelt by His Spirit, which was His stamp of exclusive ownership of them. Paul spoke of how those who join themselves with unbelievers (and marriage must surely have been in his mind) had to retract or repent of that relationship, and *then* God would receive them and *be their God* (2 Cor. 6:14-17). He was referring back to the Abrahamic promise of Gen. 17:7, that God would be the God of Abraham's seed. Although baptism makes us the seed of Abraham, we can step out of that covenant; and it seems this is what the Corinthians had done.

6:17 *Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will welcome you-* This is a quotation of Is. 52:11,12, initially concerning the need for the Jews to quit Babylon. Clearly Paul felt that the Corinthians were still within "Babylon" and needed to leave it, lest they be consumed in its judgments. This would be one of many examples of where Paul clearly saw the apostasy of the Corinthians; and yet he respects their status "in Christ" and assumes their final salvation, for he cannot personally consign them as individuals to condemnation at the last day. For we are not to judge in that sense.

God will confirm us in coming out from the world. He told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7).

Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

We are to "be separate" in this life, as an act of choice in the myriad of daily decisions we face (2 Cor. 6:17)- and yet at the judgment, the Lord will "sever" (s.w.) the wicked from the just (Mt. 13:49), or "separate" the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:32). But we are to live out the judgment now in our separation from wickedness. And if we do this, wicked men shall "separate" from us- the judgment is worked out ahead of time (Lk. 6:22).

6:18 *And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty-* Some in Corinth did not have "the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34), i.e. living relationship with Him. If they came out from the world, then God would accept them as His children. And yet Paul writes and feels towards Corinth as if they are indeed God's children; even though in another sense he appeals for them to enter exclusive covenant with Him and become His children. This is a powerful paradigm for us to follow, in our struggles as to how we should relate to children of God who by behaviour and beliefs are apparently not His children. We are to accept them *as* His children, ever honouring and respecting their commitment to Christ in baptism- but appeal for them to act appropriately and repent of their inappropriate positions.

Paul is alluding here to the LXX of 2 Sam. 7:14, where God promises David that He will be a father to David's Son, the Lord Jesus. As noted earlier, Paul applies language specifically relevant to the Lord Jesus to us; for this is what it means to be "in Christ".

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 Therefore beloved, having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God-* The promises which concluded chapter 6 related to God's people being His temple, where He would live through the Spirit. Paul is arguing that they have already been fulfilled in the Spirit-filled believer, and he is urging the Corinthians to behave appropriately to that status. So we could understand "Having these promises" as meaning 'Having had such promises fulfilled in us'. Yet for many in Corinth, it seems that they were still promises which they had not yet attained to, because of their resistance of the Spirit and the spiritual life.

The call to leave Babylon in Is. 52:11 has been quoted about the Corinthians in chapter 6. They were to live appropriate to the calling received. The usage of Is. 52:11 suggests that the people referred to were actually *in* spiritual Babylon; they had unequally yoked themselves together with unbelievers; they needed to separate (s.w. to divide, sever) themselves, and come out from among them. The idea of unequal yoking could be a marriage allusion. We must wash ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit even after baptism (2 Cor. 7:1); by doing so, we as it were go through the death-and-resurrection process of baptism again; we live it all once again. See on Gal. 3:27.

2 Cor. 7:1 exhorts us to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh, not being like those sinners who "defile the flesh" (Jude 8). These passages would imply that the flesh is defiled not by who we are naturally, but by human behaviour and mindsets from which we can separate ourselves. Whilst we consider ourselves so awful that we consider our flesh to be defiled *naturally*, we will never value the human person, and will give way too easily to sin as if it's just our natural fate. See on Rom. 8:3. The cleansing had already been done to them at their baptisms, when they were given the cleansing or sanctifying of the Spirit, as noted in 1 Cor. 1 and 2 Cor. 1. God thereby purified or cleansed their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). But they had not made use of this, and needed to believe and experience it again.

"Flesh and spirit" is a term Paul has used in appealing for sexual purity at Corinth (1 Cor. 7:34). This verse is really an appeal to quit the idol worshipping and sexual misbehaviour which characterized the church.

*7:2 Open your hearts to us-* The appeal to open their hearts (see on 6:11 and 6:13) was in order for them to get in touch with their own consciences, and realize that indeed, Paul had not wronged anyone. As noted on 5:11, Paul appealed for them to look at their consciences, to look within their hearts- for their, potentially, the Spirit of God was dwelling and active, if they would allow it to be. The allegations that Paul had wronged or abused others were untrue, and Paul baldly states as much.

*We wronged no one-* The same word used by the Lord of Himself in the parable of Mt. 20:13: "I did you no wrong". Consciously or unconsciously, Paul's thinking was saturated with the Gospels. Paul twice uses the term in Act 25:10,11 in insisting that he had done no wrong to the Jews; so again we sense that it was Judaists who were behind this false accusation.

*We corrupted no one-* The word Paul uses about the Jewish false teachers corrupting the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:3). Perhaps the emphasis is therefore upon the word "we". Paul had not corrupted them- others had.

*We took advantage of no one-* This sounds like the usual accusations against Christian leaders of seeking sexual or financial advantage. Paul uses it in a financial sense in 2 Cor. 12:17,18 and in a sexual sense in 1 Thess. 4:6. The 'Satan', the adversary, the Jewish opposition, did



indeed get an advantage over the Corinthians (s.w. 2 Cor. 2:11). Paul is stressing that *he* had not done this; but others had.

*7:3 I say it not to condemn you-* Paul can tell some at Corinth that they have no knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34), that they need to re-enter covenant with Him and come out from Babylon (as he has just said at the end of chapter 6). But he still refuses to condemn them- and therefore as he cannot pre-judge the outcome of the judgment seat of Christ, he accepts them as his brethren, uncondemned by him. Even if he begs them to act in a way which is appropriate for those who are the Lord's.

*For as I have said before, you are in our hearts, to die together and live together-* Dying and living together is the language of baptism. Just as we died and live together with Him and His body (Rom. 6:3-5), so we do with all the others who are in His body. Time and again, Paul feels that his salvation, his resurrection and glorification at the last day, is absolutely tied up with that of the Corinthians.

*7:4 Great is my confidence in you-* The following verses, climaxing at the end of the chapter with his claim to have "perfect confidence in you all", are all hard to square with what we know about the Paul-Corinth relationship. They were sceptical and critical of him, and throughout the Corinthian correspondence he is directly and indirectly answering their slander of him. But now he appears to launch into a section of ecstatic joy and praise of them, claiming things for them which clearly were not true. And he concludes the letter by threatening judgment upon them, deeply saddened by their rejection of him. The logic of his argument in this section appears faulty, as if they are words uttered on the cusp of emotional experience, not connected with reality, and as if he were just madly 'in love' with them, willing to see them as something which they simply were not in reality. And which reality he continually states and laments, both immediately before and after this section.

There are various possible explanations. The positive language about them may be pure sarcasm, of the kind he uses in 11:4; but it would be so extensive and never signalled as such to make this unlikely. He may have so counted them as "in Christ", imputing them as righteous when they were not, that he allows himself to express his emotions about them in writing in this way. Or he may have been 'buttering them up' because he moves straight on to ask them to come up with some money for the Jerusalem Poor Fund. Or perhaps he was so obsessed with his projects of saving them and of the Jerusalem Poor Fund, that the slightest positive news about them was amplified by him into ridiculously positive positions and claims on their behalf. Inspiration in this case would have allowed the letter to be written as is, full of Paul's irrational emotions at this point, just as the bitter rantings of David against his enemies are likewise recorded under inspiration in the Psalms.

It would be rather like the boy who madly loves a girl who isn't that interested in him. He invites her for countless dates, and she refuses. But then she calls him and asks if she can just drop by his place to pick up her favourite umbrella, which she left there a month ago. The boy of course agrees with glee, and as he waits for her to come, he gets onto social media and tells his friends that the girl has agreed to marry him and is on her initiative coming to visit him. And then afterwards she calls him and says her brother will just drop by and pick up the umbrella, as he is working in that area today, and she's too busy... This kind of irrational 'in love' behaviour can be seen in Hosea, where Hosea's wildly oscillating love and anger with Gomer reflect God's feelings for His faithless Israel.

*Great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort, in all our affliction I am overflowing with joy!*- This outbreak of basting, comfort and joy was because of some positive report from Titus, who had just come to Paul after a visit to Corinth. This letter is

therefore being written in real time; Titus as it were comes through the door with the news, whilst Paul is up to chapter 7:3 of his letter. And instead of going back and editing what he has written earlier in the light of the coming of Titus, he just leaves it as is and utters this burst of enthusiasm for the Corinthians- to return to reality in chapter 8.

It should be noted that an alternative is to view 7:4 as picking up from 2:14, with the intervening material as some huge digression. But 2:15 flows right on in context from 2:14. Such a break is unnatural; and all the same, the position Paul held about the Corinthians in chapter 2 remains contradictory with the outburst of confidence he has in them in chapter 7, and that outburst also contradicts the position and lack of confidence he has in them throughout the rest of the letter. So this ingenious idea doesn't really help things.

*7:5 For even when we went into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief, but we were afflicted on every side. Without were conflicts, within were fears-* "Our flesh" might mean that Paul's bodily health reflected his internal worries about the Corinthians and his ministry. "Even when..." would be a reference to the fact that the Lord had specifically called Paul to go and preach in Macedonia in a vision (Acts 16:9,10). And yet despite that specific invitation, the way was not easy and Paul was wracked with pressures and difficulties. Paul paints a hard picture of his time in Macedonia, as the backdrop against which the good news from Titus was received by him.

*7:6 Nevertheless God that comforts the lowly comforted us by the coming of Titus-* This is an allusion to the LXX of Is. 49:13. It would seem that Paul was so saturated with the Scriptures that he alludes to phrases at times without any significant relevance to his purpose or context; he is just using language and phrases which are in his mind at the time, just as we all do. God's comfort came to Paul through a human mechanism- Titus. It's as if Paul is seeking to provide an exemplification of the principles he stated at the beginning of this letter- that our experiences are in order to "comfort" others. Seeing that the Corinthians remained an awful concern for Paul, as witnessed by the rest of the letter, we can suspect that Paul is wilfully seeking to paint things in these terms.

*7:7 And not by his coming only, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you-* The Corinthians are commended for comforting Titus who in turn passed on that comfort to Paul. This again is an attempt to make the situation a fulfilment of the principles of 1:3-6, where Paul states that God's comfort to believers is mediated through the comfort of others. On :6 I noted that there seems an element of forcing the situation with Titus to fit those requirements, when in reality there was not so much comfort at all from the Corinthians. For Paul has to go on to badger them to come up with the cash they have promised for his Jerusalem Poor Fund. It seems from 12:16-18 that the Corinthians accused Paul of using Titus to 'craftily... take advantage' of them. Yet here Paul wishes to give the impression that the Corinthians comforted Titus, who relayed that comfort to Paul, and thus Paul was deeply grateful to the Corinthians for comforting him. It seems Paul here in chapter 7 is exaggerating things in his own mind; see on :4 for an explanation of why.

*While he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me. So that I rejoiced yet more-* Both before and after this section in chapter 7, Paul is dealing extensively with the cynicism and criticisms of the Corinthians against him. If indeed their love for Paul was so deep and credible, why does he have to state in 8:8: "I am probing the sincerity of your love"? If their love for him was so passionate, why in chapter 11 does he have to defend himself against their cynicism towards him, to the point that he even gets sarcastic with them: "For if he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept- it seems you think you do well to go along with him" (11:4). "Forgive me this wrong" (12:13)

is another example of a sarcasm which would be inappropriate in a mutually loving and respectful relationship. Clearly they were forsaking Paul in order to follow his enemies. This was hardly "your longing... your zeal for me". Zeal for him was what Paul subconsciously hoped for... and the news that they had been partially obedient to Paul on some point was perhaps wildly over-interpreted to mean they were zealous for him. The deep love for Paul which he likes to imagine as Titus gives him some news from Corinth is hardly for real, if he has to write to them: "I have become foolish. You compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you" (12:11). He desperately gave them reason to respect him- when such reasons ought to have been forthcoming from them. But they were not. 12:15 certainly sounds like they were falling out of love with Paul, rather than the more in love with him: "If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less by you?". They directly accused him of dishonesty: "You say I was crafty, and got the better of you by deceit" (12:16), and "you seek proof that Christ speaks in me" (13:3). Is this really reconcilable with Paul's claim to have heard of "your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me"? Especially powerful is 12:19: "You think all this time that we are excusing ourselves to you". "All this time" means that throughout their relationship over the course of the correspondence, the Corinthians didn't trust Paul and thought he was making excuses for having abused them through the visit of Titus and in other ways. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this exalting language of chapter 7 is either bitter sarcasm, or Paul being overly positive about them.

We hardly get the impression that they were longing for him, zealous for him and mourning their disobedience to him. If that were indeed the case, surely Paul would have put a red line through what he had previously written in 2 Corinthians, and then not written as he did in the rest of the letter. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Paul *interpreted* the report of Titus in terms of his deepest psychological hopes for the Corinthians. "Mourning" is an intense term, only used of the women weeping for their baby children who had been murdered (Mt. 2:18). Such deep lamentation is hard to square with the rest of the letter. "So that I rejoiced *yet* more" suggests Paul was already rejoicing over the Corinthians, and now he did so the more after the report from Titus. But he has earlier explained that he cancelled an intended visit to them because he knew they would give him sorrow rather than the rejoicing he hoped to have for them (2:3). He hoped to rejoice in them- and that psychological expectation was so deep in his subconscious that when Titus mentioned some potentially positive things about them, he found himself rejoicing, and imagining that even before that, he had been rejoicing. See my explanation and analogy offered on :4.

The words Paul uses for longing, mourning and zeal are found in essence in his description of their response to his command to separate from the immoral man (:11,12). Yet the terms can mean 'indignation' and can equally refer to their self-justification in explaining why they had not initially removed the immoral person. Paul likes to turn that around to mean they were zealous "for me". But the rest of the letter shows that to be wishful thinking. These terms are also used by Paul in describing his longing, mourning and zeal for his brethren. It's as if he is subconsciously hoping that his feelings towards the Corinthians are theirs for him. He has explicitly stated that he hopes that his attitude of mind toward them will be theirs toward him (see on 6:11,13).

The language here in 7:7-11 is allusive to David's penitence, because Paul wished to interpret the news from Titus as meaning that the Corinthians had repented of their deep immorality: "Ye were made sorry... ye sorrowed to repentance...ye were made sorry after a *Godly* manner (cp. "every one that is *Godly*...", Ps. 32:6)... for *Godly* sorrow worketh repentance to salvation... ye sorrowed after a *Godly* sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation (cp. David's in 2 Sam. 12:5)... what zeal... your

mourning, your fervent mind" (AV). Allusion after allusion to David is being piled up here. The eight references to their "sorrow" in four verses is surely a signpost back to David's intense sorrow for his sin with Bathsheba: "My sin is ever before me (Ps. 51:3)... my sorrow is continually before me... I will be sorry for my sin... many sorrows shall be to the wicked" who, unlike David, refused to repent (Ps. 38:17,18; 32:10). This association between sin and sorrow is a common one (Job 9:28; 1 Tim. 6:10; Ex. 4:31; Is. 35:10. The last two references show how Israel's sorrowing in Egypt was on account of their sinfulness). We must pause to ask whether our consciousness of sin leads us to a like sorrowing, whether our repentance features a similar depth of remorse. It would appear that Paul is likening Corinth to David. They too were guilty of sexual "uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness" (2 Cor. 12:21). As David's repentance was made in a "day of salvation", so in 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul told Corinth that they were in a similar position to him; they too had the chance of repentance. Those who had heeded this call earlier had experienced the zeal and clear conscience which David did on his repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-11). In this case, Paul would be likening himself to Nathan the prophet. This zeal which was seen in both David and Corinth is a sure sign of clear conscience and a joyful openness with God. Again, we ask how much of our zeal is motivated by this, or is it just a continuation of a level of service which we set ourselves in more spiritual days, which we now struggle to maintain for appearances sake?

*7:8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though only for a time-* We meet here the intriguing situation whereby Paul wrote an inspired letter with a command concerning the immoral man- and then regretted writing it. It seems that for a time Paul took false guilt over the matter. But he emerged from that, refusing to feel guilty for it. And there are other Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. Recall how the Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her for her rape (2 Sam. 13:20).

On a more human level, it seems that the Corinthians had replied that they were 'most upset' by Paul's letter commanding them to remove the immoral man, and criticizing them for not having done so. Yet Paul turns that pouting, self-justifying 'We are most upset by how you wrote to us, you know' into a claim that they had sorrowed unto repentance. He is making a word play with "sorrow". But the rest of 2 Corinthians shows that they still needed to experience Godly sorrow leading to real repentance (12:20,21).

7:9- see on Lk. 9:23-25.

*I now rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry to repentance. For you were made sorry in a Godly way-* Paul writes here as if they were made sorrowful unto repentance by his letter, asking them to remove the immoral man from amongst them. And he therefore rejoices at their heart felt obedience to him. We would therefore assume that he could now go to Corinth with joy- for I noted on chapter 2 that Paul had delayed going to Corinth because he didn't want to have sorrow from them on his coming, but rather joy. But even by the end of this letter, Paul states clearly and repeatedly his unallayed fear that if he does visit them, "I shall not find you such as I would" (2 Cor. 12:20,21). He urges them to repent in response to his letter, because otherwise if he visited them, the Lord might use him to seriously punish them (2 Cor. 13:10). So his claim to be totally confident of their

repentance and obedience seems somewhat hollow- for if they indeed had done all he had asked, then he could come to them with joy and not sorrow. But that clearly was not the case. If indeed the Corinthians had sorrowed to repentance, then why passages like: "See my suggestions for his exaggerated 'rejoicing' over them on :4.

*That you might suffer harm from us in nothing-* He appears to be quoting back to them their complaint that he had harmed them. He appears to be desperately trying to argue that all is good now, because their sorrow and hurt has led to their repentance and reconciliation with Paul. Although the rest of the letter shows this was not the case.

*7:10 For Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, it brings no regret; but the sorrow of the world works death-* Paul is trying to turn around their 'We were really upset you know by your letter, really sad you should write to us like that' as meaning they had sorrowed with Godly sorrow. But this was a desperate attempt to make things seem right.

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" by God (2 Cor. 7:10 AV) could mean that if we repent / change our minds, then God will not repent of His plan for saving us. But more likely is Paul's fear that they will regret their repentance, repenting of a repentance, as it were. And he says that this cannot be the case as Godly sorrow and repentance leads to salvation, and going back on it would mean death. Clearly Paul fears the Corinthians are unstable.

*7:11 For observe this very thing: you sorrowed in a Godly manner, and what diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be pure in the matter-* See on 7:7. This diligence and zeal after repentance must be squared with 12:20,21: "I fear, lest by any means, when I come, I should find you not as I would wish, and should myself be found by you such as you would not wish. Lest by any means there should be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality and sensuality that they have practiced". It could be argued that Paul is thrilled at their obedience over "the matter", some specific point of obedience. But the overall tenor of chapter 7 is that he is thrilled with them and has complete confidence in them "in everything" (:16). The comparison with 12:20,21 [and similar passages] leaves me concluding that Paul here is carried away with a loving positivity about the Corinthians. In 13:5 he seems to doubt whether they are really "in the faith"; yet here he speaks so positively of their Godly zeal. Their "indignation" and 'vehemence' may well have been indignation that Paul had asked them to separate from the immoral brother. But Paul now likes to interpret that as part of their Godly zeal. "You proved yourselves to be pure" sounds like they may have given some reason excusing them for not having previously separated from the immoral brother (1 Cor. 5); and Paul accepts that explanation as he understands it from Titus. Their 'clearing of themselves', *apologia*, self defence, sounds like self justification- doubtless giving excuses as to why they had not initially removed the immoral brother, and had now done so, in apparent obedience to Paul's demand they do so. Paul wishes to understand their indignant self-justification as Godly sorrow.

The Greek word *zelos* means both zeal in a good sense (2 Cor. 7:11,12; 9:2; 11:2)- and also it's translated jealousy, strife, envying (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20). Likewise, *thumos* is used both about righteous anger, and also fits of anger which are sinful. It's clear enough from these linguistic facts, quite apart from our practical experience, that zeal turns

into strife far too often and far too easily. The problem is, we so easily defend the strife, the jealousy, the anger... as righteous zeal, Godly anger. The line seems to us very fine, although it isn't in God's eyes. I observe too often brethren who appear so full of anger, but never reveal it openly... until it comes to some matter connected with their religious life. And then, wow, they let it all rip on some poor person, feeling they are justified.

*7:12 So although I wrote to you, I wrote not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong; but that your earnest care for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God-* This argument seems desperate. The reasons given for demanding the removal of the immoral man were given in 1 Cor. 5 as being because a little yeast affects the whole lump of dough. But now, Paul says that the whole thing was just a test to make them realize before God, in their consciences, how much they cared for / respected Paul. Paul has earlier appealed to their consciences as being proof of his sincerity, and now he says that the whole command to discipline the immoral brother was in order for them to have revealed to themselves how much they cared for Paul. If the whole request to remove the brother were really just an experiment to prove this, then it reveals a marked lack of care for the person involved; for Paul urges them to receive the brother back lest he be psychologically shattered by the exclusion experienced (2:7). All the contradictions within the argument can only really be explained by reading Paul here as utterly desperate to be reconciled with the Corinthians, taking blame on himself as much as he could, and trying to slip past the problem by saying it had all only been an experiment. Their "care" is the same word as in the preceding :11, translated "diligence" (AV "carefulness"). Paul is saying that the fact they did eventually remove the immoral man shows their diligence *towards him*. But that was just how he wished to see it. For the rest of the letter shows their deep disrespect of Paul.

*7:13 Therefore we have been comforted, and in our comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all-* Was this really what had happened, with Titus feeling joyful and refreshed by them? 8:23 and 12:18 imply that they accused Titus of being Paul's puppet and part of a crafty scheme to get money out of them. According to the [uninspired] footnote at the end of the letter, 2 Corinthians was written by Paul and Titus. The "us" references in the letter would therefore refer to Paul and Titus; and it is clear that Corinth were cynical and critical towards the "us", which would include Titus.

Yet all the same, Paul's joy for the joy of Titus is instructive. Paul sincerely felt the joy of others as being his personal joy (Rom. 12:15 cp. 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 2:3). Because we are in one body, we rejoice with those who rejoice. "We are partakers of *your* joy", Paul could write. The comfort which Titus felt was that which Paul felt (2 Cor. 7:6,7,13); Corinth's joy was Paul's (2 Cor. 7:13). This should ensure a true richness of experience for the believer in Christ, sharing in the joys and sorrows, the tragedies and triumphs, of the one body on the Lord. "He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire" (Prov. 18:1 RV). This says it all. Any separation from our brethren, whether it be from personal dislike of them or for fear of losing friends amongst others who order us to separate from them... is all ultimately selfish.

*7:14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true-* If Paul wrote so toughly to the Corinthians in both the recorded epistles, it is unlikely he kept Titus in the dark about their problems. So it seems Paul is surely putting the most positive possible interpretation on his guidance to Titus before Titus went to visit Corinth. Yet he insists that he 'boasted' to Titus of their obedience, and he feels he had been justified. We will go on to read that he had boasted of the Corinthians' intention to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund- even though it seems they never came through on their promises. So Paul boasted of them

because he so loved them that he dearly wished them to be spiritual and obedient. He counted them as far more than they really were.

*7:15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him-* Again, as noted on :13, we have to recall that 8:23 and 12:18 imply that they accused Titus of being Paul's puppet and part of a crafty scheme to get money out of them. If indeed they received Titus with "fear and trembling" then this was of little lasting consequence. And their "obedience" was hardly very significant, because in 10:6 Paul speaks of their "obedience" (s.w.) as not having been yet achieved. Again we are left with the impression that Paul is interpreting their behaviour in the most positive possible way, to the point of being unrealistic.

*7:16 I rejoice that in everything I can have perfect confidence in you-* Paul had every reason not to have confidence in them. The confidence he exudes here may be a radical example of imputing righteousness to those in Christ. Or it may also be an example of him being caught up on the cusp of obsessive-compulsive emotion, wildly over-positive about them. The word for "confidence" is used almost exclusively in 2 Corinthians (5:6,8; 10:1,2). Paul's confidence in the Lord spilled over into his confidence about his brethren. Whatever, we have here a great example of love and positive attitude toward those who are hopelessly weak.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Moreover brothers, we make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia-* Paul now turns his attention to his pet project- the Jerusalem Poor Fund. The Corinthians had agreed to contribute, but apart from a handful of pro-Paul loyalists listed in 1 Cor. 16, donations had not been forthcoming. Paul is now trying to persuade them to donate as they had promised. There seems no evidence that his project every really worked out- he has to ask for prayers that whatever he gathered would even be accepted by the Jerusalem elders (Rom. 15:31)- which makes us wonder how severe the plight really was in Jerusalem, for hungry people will accept food from whoever. When he finally arrived in Jerusalem, it appears [see my commentary on Acts] that he was arrested at the investigation of the Jerusalem Christians. The entourage which accompanied the cash and goods taken to Jerusalem doesn't include anyone from Corinth (Acts 20:4); and there is no record that the Corinthians ever heeded Paul's appeals here and actually donated. Further, there is no historical evidence for a long drawn out famine in Jerusalem lasting several years. Paul later in this chapter says that his Fund had begun over a year previously, and by the time the goods or cash were collected and taken to Jerusalem, we must allow at least another year. We wonder whether there was indeed the urgent need in Jerusalem which Paul imagines there was. He wished to assist "the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26)- not Palestine generally, nor all the believers at Jerusalem, but an impoverished group amongst the Jerusalem church. It would seem to me that Paul is fixated with Jerusalem (as I noted several times in commentary on Acts and Paul's determination to make a witness there), and wishes to force some fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which envisage Gentile wealth being brought up to the Jerusalem temple. It is noteworthy that Paul gives four reasons for the Jerusalem Poor Fund, and only one of them is the actual relief of poverty; the others are of a more abstract and spiritual nature (9:13).

Paul begins his delicate exercise by pointing out the generosity of the Macedonian churches, where he was located at the time of writing 2 Corinthians. Paul often uses *charis*, "gift" or "grace", with reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart which all believers receive at baptism. The Corinthians had been given the same gift, but hadn't actualized it, and were therefore still not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). By "the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia", Paul effectively means 'I want to tell you how much they have given'. But he speaks instead of the grace / gift given to them. The intentional confusion is to make the point that the gift / grace give to the Macedonians had elicited in them a grace / giving to the Lord's cause. Paul's repeated subtext throughout the Corinthian correspondence is that the key to their greater spiritual response is their awareness of the Spirit within them. The same words for 'grace given' are used of how the Spirit is given to all believers (Jn. 1:17; Eph. 4:7 "unto every one of us is given grace", and often); and specifically of how grace had likewise been given to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4).

8:2 *For in a severe test of affliction-* The severe famine in Palestine was matched by a severe test of some sort in Macedonia; perhaps there was a famine there too.

*Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part-* They were indeed cheerful givers, for their joy was the motivation for their giving. Their joy for what the Lord had done for them, for the "abundance" [s.w.] of His grace and giving to them (Rom. 5:17), led to their giving to the poor. The request for the Corinthians to be cheerful givers was therefore directly based on the Macedonian example (9:7). Likewise the "generosity" of the Macedonians was to be emulated by the Corinthians (9:11,13).



8:3 *For according to their power, I testify, yes and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord-* The idea of *kata* their *dunamis* occurs in the parable of the talents, which are given to believers on conversion (Mt. 25:11 AV "according to his several ability"). That this refers to the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of believers after baptism is confirmed by *kata dunamis* being used in exactly this context in Ephesians. The Spirit is given according to God's power (Eph. 1:17,19). We are strengthened according to God's power in the Spirit within the "inner man" (a point made three times, each time using *kata dunamis*- Eph. 3:7,16,20, repeated in Col. 1:11,29). The Macedonians had been given the *charis*, the gift of the Spirit; and according to that gift, they in turn were giving. The Spirit therefore influenced them and confirmed them in their generosity; it worked within the "inner man". For that is where decisions relating to generosity are taken. But *beyond* the psychological power inspired by the Spirit, the Macedonians donated even more. And that is quite something. This makes the best sense of what is otherwise an awkward verse: "For *kata* their power [*dunamis*], I bear record, and *huper* their power [*dunamis*], they were willing of themselves" (AV). This last phrase [which is the literal translation of the Greek] finally makes sense- once we realize that they gave according to the power and will of the Spirit within them, but they of themselves, beyond the influence of the Spirit, donated even more. Paul's persistent concern is that the Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). He seems to blame their lack of donations as related to the same essential problem.

We can give on some kind of proportionate level to what we have. Or we can give *more than we can afford*; the kind of giving the Philippians are commended for (and no, Paul didn't scold them for being irresponsible): "In their deep poverty... to their power... yea, and *beyond their power*" (2 Cor. 8:2). The basic message of so many of the parables is that our generosity to the Lord's cause should be offered without a calculated weighing up process first of all, and with a recognition that such giving may be contrary to all human wisdom. Thus the rich man sells *all he has* and buys a pearl- he's left with nothing, just this useless ornament. He doesn't sell what he has spare, his over-and-above... *all he had* went on that pearl, for the sheer joy and surpassing, all-demanding excellence thereof. His wife, colleagues, employees- would have counted him crazy. He acted against all the conventions of human wisdom. Likewise the shepherd leaves 99% of his flock unguarded and goes chasing madly after the one weak, straying one. This was crazy, humanly; one per cent loss wasn't unreasonable. But he risked all, for love of the one. And in this He set us a pattern for forsaking all we have.

8:4 *Begging us earnestly to accept this grace as a token of their fellowship in this service to the saints-* The begging was perhaps necessary because Paul realized they had given more than they could sensibly afford to give. It was "a token of their fellowship in this service" in the sense that Paul understood donating to the Fund as an evidence that they fellowshipped their poorer brethren in Jerusalem. The language of "fellowship" is used (as in 9:13) because Paul's intention was to bind together in fellowship the Jerusalem Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in pagan Corinth. It was a grand idea and concept, but the Jerusalem Christians returned to the temple system of Judaism, not heeding the calls in Revelation to come out from that latter day Babylon [spiritually] lest they be consumed in her AD70 judgments.

8:5 *And their giving was beyond our hope; for through the will of God, first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us-* "First" can mean 'most importantly'. He saw their response to the Lord as their response to him- because he appreciated the degree to which he as their converter was a full manifestation of the Lord whom he preached. But all the same, on a human level, Paul's position on support for the Jerusalem Poor Fund seems far too personal. He sees support of it as support for him. He perceives it as a test of their personal loyalty to

him. And here he says so explicitly. Their generosity was beyond even what the Spirit had enabled them to give (see on :3). But to Paul, even more importantly, the Macedonians had given themselves "to the Lord and to us". Paul sees himself as manifesting the Lord Jesus to them; and thereby their attitude to him was their attitude to the Lord. We too can easily seek personal loyalty from others, rather than the overall service of the Lord Jesus by them.

Paul parallels *giving* to the poor believers with *giving* our own selves to the Lord. Every act of generosity to the Lord's people is a giving to Him personally. Paul had obviously grasped the huge implications of the Lord's teaching that whenever His people are cold, thirsty, in need... then He is in such need, and every ministration to them is a ministration to Him. 2 Cor. 8:9 teaches that our response to the Lord's sacrifice should be giving to others *until we are poor*, reflecting the Lord's making of Himself 'poor' to the extent of being left naked and dead, hanging upon a stake of wood. We must review all our generosity in this light. Is it a giving of our abundance, or is it a giving until we make ourselves poor...? The practical implications of this are *huge*.

8:6 *So much so that we urged Titus*- Paul asked Titus to visit the Corinthians. He himself "of his own accord" decided to visit them. But God put the idea in the heart of Titus (2 Cor. 8:6,16,17). The freewill desire of Titus was confirmed by the hand of God operating on the heart of Titus. It could be argued that it was God who put the idea there in the first place, foreknowing that of Titus's "own accord" he would wish to do this work.

*That as he had started, so he should complete among you also this act of grace*- "This act of grace" is literally as AV "the same grace". Paul wants the Corinthians to respond to the Spirit gift / grace given to them just as the Macedonians had. So the mission of Titus was to make the Corinthians respond to grace in the same way as the Macedonians had- by donating to his pet project, the Jerusalem Poor Fund. But response to God's grace is not uniform... Titus had "started" the work by arranging their contributions, and now he was asked to complete it by getting the promised cash and donations out of them. Again, "grace" is put for their response to God's grace- in giving / being gracious. And this is true for all time, not just in the particular situation here in view. God's grace cannot be passively received. We are to respond to it by likewise giving and being gracious.

8:7 *So as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge and in all earnestness and in your love to us, see that you excel in this grace also*- These are references to the Spirit gifts which the Corinthians had potentially received, and which they claimed to practice (1 Cor. 1:5; 12:8-10). Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 has revealed that in reality they were only pretending to have the Spirit gifts of speech and knowledge. They were acting as the pagans acted at the Delfi oracle, speaking in unintelligible utterances and calling this the Spirit gift of the Spirit. They didn't really practice the actual gifts of the Spirit, for they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). They *claimed to* "abound" in the Spirit gifts, but as noted throughout 1 Cor. 12, they did not in reality. Likewise their abounding "love to us" was imputed by Paul- for the rest of 2 Corinthians shows that they were far from being in love with him. But Paul takes a positive view of them, and reasons that if indeed they feel filled with the Spirit and with love, then they will also perform this *charis*, this grace or Spirit gift- by actually giving in material terms. Again, Paul is arguing that their actual giving will be a function of the gift or grace of the Spirit being allowed to operate within them.

We cannot know God's grace without likewise 'abounding' with it ourselves. This can be in acts of generosity; the early believers were to 'abound' in generosity to the needy (2 Cor. 8:7- the same word used about the abounding of God's grace). But the spirit of 'abounding' is far more than material generosity. We are to 'abound' in the work of edifying the church (1 Cor.

14:12; 15:58); abounding in prayer for each other (1 Thess. 3:10), rather than just praying once about someone else's problem as a conscience-salving formality. Ask yourself- whether your prayer for others is of the 'abounding' quality that the Lord's intercession was and is *for* you? We are to 'abound' in praise- for God's abounding grace abounds through us to His glory if we praise Him for that grace (2 Cor. 4:15). And so... how is your praise? A mouthing off of familiar words and lyrics, that you've hummed and hymned for years? Or the internal praise that has some real fire and flame to it? As God makes His grace *abound* to us, *we* are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to 'abound' in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God's abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

8:8 *I speak not as direct commandment*- The Jerusalem Poor Fund project was not a direct commandment from the Lord Jesus nor directly inspired by some Holy Spirit edict. It was Paul's own initiative. Yet more specifically, Paul is writing of his request that they actually give the promised contributions to Titus at this time.

*But rather through showing you the earnestness of others I am probing the sincerity of your love*- AV "But by occasion of the forwardness of others". Those "others" are the Macedonians. Paul excuses his urging of Corinth to come up with the cash because the speed [Gk.] or diligence of the Macedonians requires the Corinthians to now respond. The whole argument sounds somewhat contrived. The "probing" or testing is an image from metallurgy, and has been used about the final crucible of judgment day in 1 Cor. 3:13. Is it too much to think that Paul thought that their final judgment was related to whether they gave toward their poor brethren in this way? In which case he appears to be far too obsessive about garnering support for his project. If indeed Corinth had such passionate love and "fervent mind" toward Paul as he claims in 7:7, and if truly "I have perfect confidence in you all" (7:16), then why this need to probe the sincerity of that love? Clearly his argument is contradictory- because his outpouring of enthusiasm in chapter 7 was on the cusp of emotion, although the recording of it is Divinely inspired.

But whatever, love must of course be sincere. Unless our 'love' reflects a genuine care and respect for the other person, it isn't love. William Barclay suggests that the Greek word *porneia*, prostitution, is rooted in the verb *pernumi*- to sell. If our love is the love which is bought and sold, which goes to the highest bidder, which treats its object as a thing which can be discarded, or 'loved' without truly intimate union... then it's actually a form of prostitution. Each time we ditch a friend because the going got tough, withheld love because we weren't getting from it what we intended... we're essentially showing a spirit of prostitution rather than love. This is why love in the end must always find practical expression in a self-sacrificial way. The Corinthians were to show the sincerity of their love [implying there can be a fake 'love'] by their generosity to the poor believers in Judea (2 Cor. 8:7,8,24).

8:9- see on Mt. 13:46.

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor as a pauper, that you through his poverty might become rich*- I have argued throughout this section that Paul is going too far in trying to patch things up with the Corinthians and is urging them to donate to the Jerusalem Poor Fund using whatever

reasoning he can lay hold of. He now urges giving on the basis that the Lord Jesus was rich but became poor for us so that we who were poor might be made rich, and therefore they ought to give of their material wealth to the poorer brethren in Jerusalem. But 1 Corinthians 1 has stated that there were not many wealthy individuals in the Corinthian church. And thinking through the argument used here, the logic is far from tight. For the Lord Jesus was not materially rich. Our enrichment by Him is surely spiritually. But He did not lose his spiritual riches, becoming spiritually poor, in order that we who are spiritually poor should be enriched spiritually. Neither did He lose any material riches in order to spiritually enrich us. Not only is the logic of the argument not tight, but the meaning of riches and poverty is confused. The Lord's self giving on the cross should indeed motivate us to material generosity to the poor. But the metaphors used here are too mixed to make a very compelling argument once it is more closely analysed. He seems to make a similar mistake in :15 (see note there). This seems typical of the desperate tactics Paul is using to cajole the Corinthians into giving to the fund. There is no evidence they ever did, nor that what support was gathered from other churches was ever actually accepted when it arrived in Jerusalem.

We have each been touched by God's grace, and His influence upon us leads us to reach out to influence others by lives of grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus cannot be received passively. The Corinthians' response must be to make themselves poor, so that their poor Jewish brethren might be made richer. *Every* person who has been enriched in the Lord Jesus will in turn respond in a life and even a body language that somehow transforms others. Prov. 13:8 speaks of how our attitude to wealth is a crucial factor in our eternal destiny: "The ransom of a man's life are his riches". Just prior to that we read in Prov. 13:7: "There is that makes himself poor, yet has great riches". This verse is actually part quoted in 2 Cor. 8:9 and Phil. 2:7, about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus made himself poor, of no reputation, and now has been so highly exalted. Our living out of the Lord's cross is shown in our making of ourselves poor. That is surely the unmistakable teaching of this allusion.

Do we struggle to be truly generous to the Lord's cause, and to turn our words and vague feelings of commitment into action? Corinth too were talkers, boasting of their plans to give material support to the poor brethren in Jerusalem, but doing nothing concrete. Paul sought to shake them into action by reminding them of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). Corinth had few wealthy members, but Paul knew that the cross of Christ would inspire in them a generous spirit to those even poorer than they. The richer should be made poor by what the Lord did, Paul is saying- not harmlessly giving of their pocket money. For He gave in ways that hurt Him, ways that were real, meaningful and thereby effective and powerful.

To put it mildly, our experience of His death for us should lead us to be generous spirited in all ways. In appealing for financial generosity to poorer brethren, Paul sought to inspire the Corinthians with the picture of Christ crucified: "For ye know the grace [gift / giving] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor [Gk. a pauper], that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In the light of this, we should not just be generous from the abundance of what we have; we should become as paupers in our giving. The Lord's giving wasn't financial; it was emotional and spiritual. And so, Paul says, both materially and in these ways, we should likewise respond to our brethren, poorer materially or spiritually than we are. "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14 Philippians; it "urges us on", NRSV).

Because in the Kingdom we will be given all the wealth that is Christ's, therefore we should sell what we now have and give to the poor (Lk. 12:33 cp. 44 NIV). But more than this, in a sense God *has now* given us the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32 NIV), and therefore we should in natural response to this give of our blessings (in whatever form) to make the poor rich, just as Christ did to us (2 Cor. 8:9 alludes here). Basically, according to this, generosity (both of spirit and material giving) is proportionate to our faith that we both have now and will receive the matchless riches of God's grace in Christ. "Grace" is used by Paul in 2 Cor. to refer to both the grace God has given us and the grace of giving which the Corinthians ought to respond to it with; as God had reached into their lives, so they should reach into the lives of their poverty stricken brethren.

In appealing for the Corinthians to be generous, Paul points out that the Lord Jesus became a pauper for our sakes, and therefore, because of the riches of salvation He has given to us, the *least* we can do is to reach out into the lives of others with what riches we may have (2 Cor. 8:9 Gk.). This is why in 2 Cor. 8:1,19; 9:14, Paul uses the word "grace" to mean both the grace of God and also our grace (gifts) in works of response. Thus he talks of bringing the "grace" of the money collected for the poor saints; he is talking about the gift they had made; but in the same context he speaks of God's grace in Christ. If we have received the grace of God's forgiveness and salvation (and so much more) in Christ, we must show that grace, that gift, by giving. Our heart tells us to give, our heart is in our giving, it's a natural outcome of a believing mind (2 Cor. 9:5-8, J.B. Phillips). Our giving is a quite natural outcome of our faith in and experience of the cross.

The suggestion has been made that because Jesus increased in favour with men, He may have gotten on quite well in His secular life. Paul speaks about how although Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor [a pauper, Gk.] that we through His poverty might be rich. Clearly the reference is to the 'poverty' of the cross, that we might be spiritually rich- for He doesn't enable us to get materially rich through following Him. And yet the context of Paul's words is about the need to give up our material riches for Christ's people, and he cites the example of Jesus to inspire us in this.

8:10 *And herein I give my judgment-* The idea is 'my advice'. Paul has stated that in these matters he is not speaking by direct Divine commandment (:8); this is all his personal initiative.

*For this is expedient for you-* There is no clear reason given for the expediency which would arise from their giving to the Fund. The word means 'profitable' and is used in 1 Cor. 12:7 of how the Corinthians had been given the Spirit for their 'profit'. Perhaps Paul means that if the Spirit is really within them, then they will make the donation and 'profit' thereby.

*Who were the first to make a beginning a year ago, not only to desire to give but to actually give-* The beginning was apparently in undertakings given to Titus that they would donate to the collection. Hence :6 speaks of Titus having begun this work in them, and now coming to them to finish it. This would place the previous visit of Titus about a year previously. Paul says that they had begun to do it a year ago- but then in :11 he asks them to "perform the doing of it" (AV). Again, Paul appears to be exaggerating. Had they actually begun 'doing', actually giving, i.e. putting money aside in collections, a year ago? Apparently not, for he asks them now to 'do' so (:11). But he likes to imagine that they began collecting a year previously as they had apparently undertaken to Titus.

8:11 *But now complete the doing also*- See on :10.

*That as there was the willingness to want to give, so there may be the completion of the desire also, according to your ability*- Again there seems a contradiction; Paul has said that they began actually giving a year ago (:10), but now a verse later he downgrades that to saying that they had only expressed a willingness to give, and he urges them to now complete or (AV) 'perform' what they had intimated. We get the consistent impression of weak argumentation, because Paul is seeking by any means possible to get them to actually donate. "according to your ability" is an attempt to render a difficult and ambiguous Greek phrase; the GNB may be better with "do it with what you now have", as if to say 'As you haven't been actually collecting funds, well OK, just give what you right now have in your pocket'. This would mean that his claim that they had begun 'actually giving' a year ago (:10) was at best exaggerated. The loose logic in argumentation arises it seems from a desire by all means to get something out of them, in order to make the grand concept come true- of Gentile Corinthian Christians giving funds towards the welfare of conservative orthodox Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul's focus upon the positive is really tremendous, especially coming from a man so far spiritually ahead of the weak Corinthians. He commends their "readiness" to donate, whilst pointing out they are more talk than action; and later speaks to others of "our readiness", identifying himself with the Corinthian brethren whose lack of actual action had got him into so many problems in fulfilling what he had confidently promised on their behalf (2 Cor. 8:11,12,19). He even gloried to others of their "readiness" (2 Cor. 9:2), whilst clearly not turning a blind eye to their failure to actually produce anything concrete.

The allusion here may be to Mk. 12:43. Paul saw those generous ecclesias as the widow with one mite, and also as rich Mary giving what she had (Mk. 14:8 = 2 Cor. 8:11). This reveals his sensitivity; he knew some of them were poor, some rich. Yet he saw they were all making a real effort. And he understood this in terms of characters in the Gospels.

8:12 *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has*- See on :11. The "readiness" would refer to their agreement a year ago to support the Fund. They are to give from what they have in hand right away, and not to worry if the actual sum was small. The language of 'acceptability' is appropriate to sacrifices on the altar being accepted by God (1 Pet. 2:5). Yet Rom. 15:31 uses the same word in casting doubt upon whether the collection would be 'accepted' by the Jerusalem Jews. Even if men don't accept our sacrifices, then God does.

*Not according to what he does not have*- He is saying that lack of great resources need not stop their actual giving, because the desire to give ("the readiness") is critical. And that principle is true for all time. A mean spirit is often excused by the knowledge that one doesn't have much to give. But the desire to be generous is critical, and means that the amount given is not of itself important. Paul had boasted for the past year that the Corinthians were "ready" (9:2); but that meant nothing if the cash had not been actually donated. The Greek of 8:19 could mean that if they actually gave, then they would glorify their own readiness of mind, which Paul sees as so critical in any giving.

The Lord taught men to give alms of such things as they had (Lk. 11:41); as we have opportunity / ability, we must be generous to all men (Gal. 6:10). These passages are teaching a *spirit* of generosity; and even a believer with literally *no* money can have a generous spirit. "If there be first (i.e. most importantly) a *willing mind*, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not". *Every man* was to contribute to the building of

the tabernacle (cp. the ecclesia) *with a willing heart* (Ex. 25:2- Paul surely alludes here). They weren't told: 'Whoever is willing and able to contribute, please do so'. And yet the majority of us have at least *something* materially; and as we have been blessed, so let us give. "*Every man* according as he *purposeth in his heart* (generosity is a mental attitude), so let him give; *not grudgingly*, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver". See on Acts 11:29.

Our intentions to do good can be counted as if they were performed. Thus if we have a generous spirit, and would love to be generous to the needy, but just can't do it – it's counted as if we've done it.

8:13 *For I do not say this so that others may be eased and you distressed-* Paul is not asking them to give to their serious detriment or "distress". He is looking for a symbolic donation- but there is no record that they made even that. "Distressed" is a term commonly used by Paul for the distress or affliction which almost inevitably accompanies the Christian life; but Paul doesn't wish to bring even that upon them.

8:14 *But that as a matter of fairness-* The idea is of equality, that the surplus of Corinth may meet the deficit in Jerusalem.

*Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be an equality-* Paul is asking them to give only of what they had in 'abundance', superfluous to basic needs. Considering that there were not many wealthy in Corinth (1 Cor. 1) and that most people lived a hand to mouth existence, we can conclude that by asking for this, Paul is seeking just a symbolic gift. The abundance of Jerusalem which supplied Gentile need is surely a reference to spiritual things. The language of 'supplying need' is used in a spiritual sense by Paul in Phil. 4:19. The idea of Jewish spiritual things being recompensed with Gentile material things is found in Rom. 15:26,27: "For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to them also to minister to them in material things". Achaia here refers to Corinth. All the efforts of Paul to make them actually pay up gives the lie to his claim that "they were pleased to do it". There would have been no need for the high pressure of 2 Cor. 8 if that were true. Again it seems Paul is obsessed with the idea of the Jerusalem Poor Fund, and loves to boast of the support he liked to imagine it had received. The Romans 15 passage goes on to speak of Paul's intended visit to Spain- and that too, so far as we know, never happened.

8:15 *As it is written: He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little had no lack-* The preceding verse has argued that Jewish Christian spiritual abundance should elicit material support from Gentile Christians. But that was not true to reality- for the Jerusalem Jewish Christians soon returned to Judaism, and were against Gentile Christians, being largely responsible for Paul's arrest when he arrived in Jerusalem with what had been collected, and probably behind much of the Judaist trouble making in the Christian churches he founded. And now he uses an argument which is not completely apposite to the case he is trying to make. In the wilderness, some families could collect more manna than others due to weak health or lack of opportunity. But they shared the manna collected in a collective way, according to Jewish tradition, so that nobody had too much or too less. Those who could collect more gave their abundance to those who could not gather enough. This posits a material giving of our superfluous material wealth to those in the community who have a deficit in material wealth, and in this way "an equality" is achieved. But :14 has argued differently- that Jerusalem's *spiritual* wealth should be matched by Gentile *material* giving.

The argument from the Jewish manna tradition about the stronger sharing with the weaker (which is not Biblically attested) is therefore not completely relevant. The Biblical account is that each family should gather their own manna for their family; so that Jewish tradition may not even have been correct or historically actual in any case. I noted on :9 that Paul makes a similar poor argument and confusion of category concerning the wealth of the Lord Jesus. He confuses material and spiritual, in a way out of character for Paul the intellectual rabbi, whose arguments are usually logically tight, compelling and watertight. All this arose, I suggest, from a desperate desire to make things work out regarding the Poor Fund and his vision of Jewish-Gentile unity within the wider church. Many well intentioned Christian leaders have made similar mistakes when seeking to enforce a unity in practice upon believers who are simply not mature enough nor ready for it.

Paul pleads with Corinth to see the similarities between them and the ecclesia in the wilderness; he wants them to personalize it all. He sees their gathering and redistribution of wealth as exactly analogous to Israel's gathering of manna (2 Cor. 8:15)- and he so wishes his Corinthians to think themselves into Israel's shoes. For then they would realize that as Israel had to have a willing heart to give back to God the wealth of Egypt which He had given them, so they were to have a willing heart in being generous to their poorer brethren (Ex. 35:5 = 2 Cor. 8:12). And they would have realized that as "last year" they had made this offer (2 Cor. 8:10 Gk.), so the year before, Israel had received Egypt's wealth with a similar undertaking to use it for the Lord's cause. As Moses had to remind them a second time of their obligations in Ex. 35, so Paul had to bring it again before Corinth. And if they had seen these similarities, they would have got the sense of Paul's lament that there was not one wise hearted man amongst them- for the "wise hearted" were to convert Israel's gold and silver into tools for Yahweh's service (Ex. 35:10 = 1 Cor. 6:5; 2 Cor. 10:12).

They were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20). There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

8:16 *But thanks be to God, who put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus-* We note that God can act directly upon the human heart. Although it may be that again Paul is exaggerating- for he had surely briefed Titus of his own expectations and intended outcomes, and I have argued on chapter 7 that Paul chose to over interpret the report of Titus when he returned to Paul from Corinth. "The same earnest care" refers to how the Macedonians had an



"earnestness" (:8 s.w.) for the project. Titus and the Macedonians had the same urgency for the project, and Paul wants Corinth to likewise respond "urgently"- for the Greek for "earnest care" carries the basic idea of haste. The urgency was because Corinth had not in fact been collecting for the Fund as they had intimated they were doing, and something at least had to be contributed from them for Paul's boasting about them to be validated, and for the project to work out.

There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others. When Paul thanks God that Titus has a heart of "earnest care" for the Corinthians, he uses a Greek word [*spoude*] which literally means "speed", and is elsewhere translated "haste" – as well as "haste" and "business" (2 Cor. 8:16). The heart that really cares will be characterized by a speedy and quick response, not a careful weighing up of a situation, nor a resignation of responsibilities to ponderous committees. See on Lk. 14:5.

8:17 *For he indeed accepted our appeal; but being very earnest, he went to you of his own accord-* As noted on :16, it was Paul who appealed to Titus to go to Corinth and get them to donate to the Fund. But he says that Titus also went of his own will, in response to God confirming his 'earnestness' with more 'earnest care' placed in his heart (:16). We see here a cameo of how Christian action works out in practice. There are various stimuli- a request from another brother, a passion placed in our heart, and our own freewill passion of our own accord. God will not force anyone to work for Him against their will; but He will place callings in their heart, and confirm their response to it.

8:18 *And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches-* The obvious questions are as to who this brother was, and why the anonymity? Another brother is apparently mentioned anonymously in :22- although that may be another description of the same brother. If the anonymity was to preserve from persecution, why would a specific brother be targeted for persecution for being involved in a welfare project? If persecution is indeed a reason, then one suspects it was Paul's Jewish enemies who were trying to stymie the project. Which is why when Paul arrives at Jerusalem with what had been collected, the Jews get him arrested. And with the Judaist influence at Corinth being such a problem for Paul, we can imagine it was that same Jewish influence which was seeking to hamper Paul's pet project. The brother with a good reputation amongst the churches was Timothy (Acts 16:2,3). 2 Cor. 1:1 states that this letter was written by Paul and Timothy; it could be that although the letter was written by both of them, Paul is writing here, and referring to his co-author in this indirect way because that was appropriate literary protocol at the time. Paul wants to remind the audience of Timothy's strong qualifications, but he is aware that this a letter ostensibly co-authored by himself and Timothy. So he has to refer to Timothy in this indirect manner.

8:19 *And not only this but he is the one who was appointed by the churches to travel with us in this act of grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord and to show our own willingness to help-* Paul carefully doesn't define which churches had appointed this brother [Timothy?] to carry the collection. We can assume they were churches founded by Paul and loyal to him. What would have added to the credibility and success of the project was if those "churches" included the Jerusalem church and other Jewish churches in Palestine. The group of brethren who took the gathering to Jerusalem in Acts 20:3 were certainly pro-Paul loyalists and include no "circumcision" Christians. So whilst Paul was right to seek to glorify the Lord and to administer the project with integrity, placing himself beyond reproach as to financial mismanagement, the whole approach was forcing something on to others which they were clearly not supportive or nor willing to support. This is the problem with obsessive enforcement of projects upon others. Paul was clearly the administrator of the project, as he says himself here. And he simply lacked credibility with the hard core circumcision party

who dominated the Jerusalem church; this was not his fault, indeed there was likely nobody who had the confidence of all the various factions to be able to pull off a project of this scope and scale. "To show our own willingness to help" is an attempt to translate two Greek words which literally mean "your ready mind" (as AV). The text could be stating that the "act of grace", the giving to the Fund in response to God's grace, would glorify both the Lord Jesus and also their willingness to assist in His work. But offering glorification of self as a reason to donate is really getting desperate.

8:20 *This was to avoid being blamed by anyone in this matter of charity which is ministered by us-* The "matter of charity", AV "this abundance", uses a term which concerns a large sum: "lavish gift" (NAB), "large sum" (NJB), "large fund" (JB). But the Corinthians hadn't yet donated anything, and as noted above, time was passing, Paul didn't want them to be burdened, and he was looking for just a symbolic donation from them. But he uses this term because of the huge significance which he saw in their donations. It really seems Paul was exaggerating things in his mind. Paul wisely got others involved in transporting the funds so that his integrity could not be questioned.

8:21 *For we take care to do things honourably, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men-* This is a quotation from Prov. 3:4 LXX. It is not enough to reason that we are correct before God; if we have a sense of His glory and our responsibility as His witnesses in this world, then we must be careful to appear correct before men too. Not because we wish their approbation, but because we seek to glorify God in the eyes of this world.

8:22 *And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have many times proved earnest in many things; but now, much more earnest, by reason of the great confidence which he has in you-* This could be a parallel description of the brother in :18. Or it could be another anonymous brother. The word "earnest" is used elsewhere only of Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:17), whose name means literally 'the bearer / carrier of profit', which would be relevant to bearing / carrying the Poor Fund to Jerusalem. I noted on 7:16 that Paul's "great confidence" in the Corinthians was because he wished to see them in a positive light, he over interpreted the report from Titus as meaning that they were indeed who he wished they were. And here too, this anonymous brother is described as having the same "great confidence" in the Corinthians. But as noted throughout chapter 7, I suggest that this is Paul projecting onto another brother his own [mistaken] feelings towards the Corinthians. He has decided that this anonymous brother will have the same view of them as he does. This is not to say that the record here is not inspired, nor that the Spirit was not with Paul. But as we read of David's bitter ranting against his enemies, his feelings on the cusp of emotion are recorded in God's words, so the record of Paul's feelings for the Corinthians are recorded- contradictory as they are, just as human emotion is often self-contradictory when love and personal investment are involved.

8:23 *Whether any inquire about Titus, he is my partner and my fellow-worker toward you; or our brothers, they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ-* The Corinthians knew Titus, for he had already visited them. So this 'enquiry' would not be in the sense that they didn't know who he was. It was Titus who had visited them and 'begun' the project with them, and he had just returned to Paul from a visit to Corinth (7:13). And Paul was now sending him to them again in the hope they would give him the promised donations. So the 'enquiry' was rather of another kind, reflecting a hostility towards Titus and the brothers with him. This reveals that Paul's claim about the mutual love between Titus and the Corinthians was again an emotional exaggeration, and he had to as it were come down to earth and in reality defend Titus against the scepticism the Corinthians had about him.

8:24 *Therefore show them in the presence of the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf*- Paul dealt with a very difficult situation in Corinth by being totally open hearted, when his natural sense must have been to be very cagey with them (2 Cor. 6:11). Indeed, some of his most revealing autobiographical passages are found in 2 Corinthians, as he opens his heart to them. And he encouraged them to likewise *openly show before the ecclesias* their love for others (2 Cor. 8:24 s.w.). He surely had in mind the Lord's teaching that our light should shine before others, because all things will ultimately be brought into the open (Lk. 8:16,17). This doesn't just refer to preaching; it refers to an open shining out of whatever spirituality we have, to everyone.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *For concerning the service to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you-* I have noted throughout commentary on chapters 7 and 8 that Paul's arguments are very emotional and desperate in many ways. He is seeking some actual real donation from the Corinthians as they had earlier promised. And he is using every possible argument, including some desperate ones, to get them to agree to give Titus and his team some cash or material donations when they come. So within the two chapters of high pressure reasoning which we have in chapters 8 and 9, it is hardly true that half way through he here says that it was really unnecessary for him to be writing to them about their donations, because he is so sure they are going to donate. He says he has "no need" (GNB) to be writing this because he knows their willing hearts (:2). So... why then write two chapters of desperate urging if it was unnecessary? Again (see on 8:9,15), Paul's logic and persuasion is uncharacteristically weak and unconvincing.

9:2- see on Jn. 19:39; Rom. 11:14; 2 Cor. 8:11.

*For I know your readiness, of which I boast on your behalf to those in Macedonia, that Achaia has been prepared for the past year-* Paul could have taken the view that they were all talk, as people often are when it comes to money matters. Instead he boasts of their talk about wanting to support his project. In all human relationships, we can take a cup half full or cup half empty approach. Paul was so 'in love' with the weak Corinthians that he acted as if he really believed them, when clearly all the evidence was that he should have been wary of their promises. After all, these are the same Corinthians to whom he wrote 1 Corinthians. It was surely an exaggeration to say that Achaia [Corinth and the churches around it] had been "prepared" for a year. Prepared to give? Or does he imply they had collected each week as he advised in 1 Corinthians 16, and were now ready for the donations to be picked up by Titus and his team, in order to be taken to Jerusalem? According to the usage of "prepared" in :3, that seems more the idea. As suggested on chapter 7, this is the boasting of a man deeply in love with a woman who just isn't going to come through on his expectations and hopes for her. Hope had morphed into reality in Paul's mind.

*And your zeal has stirred up very many of them-* Paul could bid men follow him, that they might follow Christ. And the inspired word does bid us go down the road of comparing our behaviour with that of others. Paul boasted of the Corinthians' enthusiasm in planning to make donations in order to provoke the ecclesias in Macedonia to a like generosity. Their zeal "provoked very many" (AV). We should provoke one another to love and good works, by example (Heb. 10:24). This is why Christian fellowship is built into our spiritual journey- for we take strength from others as well as from the Lord directly. He mediates His encouragement through others.

9:3 *But I have sent the brothers, that our boasting on your behalf may not be made void in this respect. That, even as I said: You may be prepared-* Paul had already sent Titus and the two anonymous brothers mentioned in chapter 8, and it would seem they were carrying 2 Corinthians in their hands to give to the Corinthians. He asks them now to "be prepared", i.e. to hand over some actual donations; whereas he had boasted to others that Corinth was already "prepared" (:2). He wants them to live up to his exaggerated hopes and expectations of them. And this is exactly what causes so much friction in human relationships, especially in the spiritual sphere.

9:4 *Lest by any means, if there come with me-* This sounds as if Paul was actually going to accompany Titus, but according to how he has earlier written of his travel plans, we can assume that Paul intended himself to come to Corinth after Titus had actually secured the donations from them. Hence in :5 he writes of Titus and his team going on ahead of him to

Corinth. But in 13:2 Paul speaks as if his coming to Corinth was under question, and if he did visit them again, it would be in serious judgment upon them. We can conclude that this letter is a 'flow of consciousness' letter, Paul is writing down his thoughts and feelings as they come to him, in line with his policy of being completely open hearted to the Corinthians (see on 6:11). He writes here as if all is going to work out, Titus will prepare them for the donations and they will make them, and then Paul and some Macedonians will come and be present when the donations are collected and taken on towards Jerusalem. But in 13:2 he concludes the letter by writing that his visit is in question and it will be for judgment of the Corinthians. This kind of flow of consciousness writing is to be found often in the Psalms, Lamentations and at times in prophets like Jeremiah. It is all inspired, but gives us an insight into the internal thought processes of believers, with all their anger and irrationality and the contradictions of thought which we all experience as we cope with situations.

*Some Macedonians and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you) would be embarrassed for my being so confident of your generosity-* These Macedonians were presumably Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus, mentioned in Acts 20:4 as those travelling to Jerusalem with the collection. Paul mentions his own embarrassment first, and theirs only secondarily, in passing. He had too much personally invested in the project. Loss of face was far more significant in the first century world than we can imagine. To reason 'You had better donate or else I shall be embarrassed' is not a particularly strong argument, and reflects the urgent desperation Paul felt to by all means make this project work. But don't be too hard on Paul- he was sincerely motivated, but like many believers of his personality type, his pet project in the Lord's service had become obsessive for him.

9:5- see on 2 Cor. 8:9.

*So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you-* The 'urging' suggests Titus and his team were not altogether confident of the whole plan, and Paul had to urge them. This gives the lie to Paul's rejoicing in chapter 7 that Titus had been welcomed by the Corinthians and was relieved and confident in their giving. That, I suggested, was written on the cusp of the joy which comes from the love which believes all things, on the slenderest and most unrealistic of evidence.

*And arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not, as it were, as an extortion-* Again there appears a tension within Paul's argument. He says that the gift must be "willing" and not extorted or pressured out of them. But he has just asked them to make the gift lest they be ashamed (:4). We are left with the impression of high pressure tactics being palmed off as 'things which don't really need to be said but I'll just mention them' (:1). "Extortion" is the word for coveting. We can give money generously, apparently, but do so from a motive of *covetousness*- the very opposite of true generosity and acceptable sacrifice. We can covet respect, admiration from our brethren... and not give as a pure and private reflection of the endless grace we have received.

9:6 *But this I say: He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully-* Paul now gives a more spiritual reason for their generosity. Our generosity to others now will lead to a reaping at the time of harvest, which is at the Lord's return. And yet from 1 Cor. 15 we know that some of the Corinthians didn't believe in the Lord's resurrection and were sceptical of a claim of future harvest at the resurrection. So the whole appeal was at a level inappropriate to the spiritual level of the Corinthians; and we can learn from that in our dealings with weaker believers. "Bountifully" is the same word used in :5 for "gift"; the AV in :5 brings out the connection by calling their "gift" a "bounty". They would receive again the "bounty" or gift they sowed- but at the

harvest, which 1 Cor. 15 has explained is at the Lord's return and will be in the form of the nature of our resurrection body. Our generosity now has eternal consequence. And as 1 Cor. 15 points out, there is an out of proportion increase between the seed sown and the body that later arises. We don't just get what we sow, but so much more. In the end, this is a question of levels. It's not that the "sparing" shall not be saved; but rather that they shall not eternally reap the blessings of their generosity in this brief mortal life.

*9:7 Let each man do according to what he intends in his heart-* The Greek suggests that they were to do this in the future (AV "so let him give"). Which rather gives the lie to Paul's over enthusiastic claim that they had already started donating in actuality (8:10). He is asking them to now give something, even on a symbolic level. But for all the desperation of his position and pressuring of the Corinthians to donate, Paul does to his credit recognize that all giving must be from the heart. It was there in the heart that the Holy Spirit resided, at least potentially; and Paul is again hinting that their giving would be actualized by allowing the path of the Spirit in their thinking and actions. Giving according to the heart is an allusion to Israel donating towards the work of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:2; 35:21). The new tabernacle is the poorest of the Christian believers.

*Not grudgingly, or of necessity-* Yet some of the reasons Paul urges for their giving were indeed from a motive "of necessity", e.g. to save face (:4). As discussed previously, this is another example of apparent contradiction within Paul's reasoning, so desperate is he to see this project work, at least on some level.

*For God loves a cheerful giver-* The quotation is from Prov. 22:8 LXX "God blesses a cheerful and giving man". The blessing may be alluded to in :8-10 where the idea is that God blesses the generous with even more to give. Paul has written of how the abounding joy of the poor brethren in Macedonia abounded unto a generosity which was actually beyond their means (2 Cor. 8:2). And here when he goes on to speak of how God loves a "cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7), he uses a word which James Strong defines as meaning 'hilarious', from the Greek *hilaros*. And yet our giving tends to so often be a matter of phlegmatic planning, to salve an otherwise uneasy conscience. But the picture Paul paints is of a man or woman *hilarious* in their giving to the poor. This isn't the giving which watches for the response, and is offended if it isn't what we expect. This is a picture of giving from the joy of giving, reflecting the Father's generosity to us. And this, Paul says, *God loves*. Quite simply. We touch the heart of Almighty God by such giving. And yet this hilarious giving isn't merely the emotion of a moment, the sort of thing played upon in many a Pentecostal gathering. It is to be a giving as a person 'purposes in their heart' (2 Cor. 9:7); and again, Strong challenges us with his definition of the Greek word translated 'purposes': "to *choose* for oneself *before* another thing (*prefer*), that is, (by implication) to *propose* (*intend*)". But having made this conscious decision, to put, say, Sister Svetlana's need before your preference for a new piece of furniture, we are to perform the actual giving with the hilarity of the cheerful giver. And as we know, Paul makes the point that such acts of generosity are acts of sowing, bringing forth fruits of righteousness; and the Lord will grant us yet more seed to sow in the same way. Forsaking all we have may not mean we are left with nothing.

*9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that you, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound to every good work-* Paul often uses *charis*, "gift" or "grace", in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift, he feels, should elicit giving and grace within us, which is why in this section he puts "grace" for their giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. They had been asked to abound in this grace (see on 8:7), which in practice meant giving to the poor; and God was able in turn to make all grace abound to

them. In this sense we receive grace for grace (Jn. 1:16). The gift of grace is not just a one off gift at baptism; in response to how we use it, so it will be given yet more to us. The simple principle is that God will empower us to do good works; we cannot blame a lack of good works on God not having empowered us.

*9:9 As it is written: He has scattered abroad, He has given to the poor. His righteousness abides for ever-* The generosity of God is to be a direct pattern for our own. And His giving is liberal and abundant, and is part of a righteousness which is eternal. Giving now has eternal consequence.

*9:10 And He that supplies seed to the sower and bread for food shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing-* Seed is multiplied in order to be sowed, and not to be hoarded. Paul is not simply saying that if wealth comes our way, it is in order to give it away. For he was writing (according to 1 Cor. 1) to those who were not "mighty" in this world or secular reckoning. He is writing to low wage earners, and encouraging *them* to be generous with what they had, and to believe that they will be given "seed" in order to sow it by being generous to others. If we want to be sowers, which is part of our Christian calling, then God will give us the seed to sow. God will empower us to meet the needs and fulfil the callings received. 2 Thess. 1:11 is explicit about this too: "To which end we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling and fulfil every desire of goodness and work of faith, with power". The desire to do good shall be fulfilled by God's empowerment. This takes quite some faith to believe, and it seems the Corinthians also stumbled at it. But the principles here stand true as a challenge for all time.

Paul likens generosity to sowing seed. If we do this for our poor brethren, then God will multiply our seed for sowing (RV); He will give us yet more with which to be generous with. We are "enriched unto all liberality" (2 Cor. 9:11 RV)- this is *why* we receive anything, to be liberal with it. And thus he writes in conclusion of "the proving of you by this ministration" (2 Cor. 9:13 RV). This brief but vital teaching of Paul here is a proof of our spirituality. Our response to ministering to others is a proving of us. It's as simple and as clear as that. And remember that Paul was writing these words to a *poor* ecclesia, amongst whom there were not many wealthy folk (1 Cor. 1:26-28). Paul speaks of joy as a motive for generosity.

*And increase the fruits of your righteousness-* The Old Testament allusions are to the LXX of Is. 55:10 and Hos. 10:12. These passages imply an eternal quality to the righteousness, just as God's righteousness abides for ever (:9). The fruit of our generosity in this temporal life is eternal.

9:11- see on 2 Cor. 6:10.

*You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God-* "Enriched... for" could be translated as AV "enriched... to". Either way, the idea is in harmony with the teaching of the preceding verses, that we are enriched so that we may be generous- in whatever terms that enrichment comes. As stated earlier, we are given seed in order to sow it, rather than hoard it. Any enrichment for generosity is not as it were a reward for having been generous, but merely a provision to continue doing it. The fruit which sprung up from the seed sown, or the enrichment caused by generosity, is envisaged as being in spiritual terms. Thanksgiving to God would be produced as a result of their generosity. But again, the argument is true as it stands, but appears somewhat forced- please give your money as I direct you, so that I and my team can then give thanksgiving to God. I have noted through chapters 7-9 that Paul seems to use every argument possible to persuade the Corinthians to part with their cash, and at times his desperation is apparent. The

idea of enrichment however is how Paul opened the Corinthian correspondence, reminding them that they had been "enriched in every way (1 Cor. 1:5) in having been given the Spirit in so many different ways- even though they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) because they had not let the Spirit function. The similarity of wording is significant. The giving or grace of the Corinthians was to be enabled and rooted in the Spirit *charis* or gift / enrichment they had been given. It was in this sense that Paul could say he had "made many rich" by his preaching ministry (2 Cor. 6:10).

9:12 *For the administration of this charity not only provides for the wants of the saints, but abounds also through many thanksgivings to God-* Paul was clearly the administrator of the charity project, although he sees himself as a 'deacon' or servant of it (NEV "administration"). And yet it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the project and its success had become obsessive to him. He sees it is a way in which poverty could be relieved, but much praise and glory elicited for God and His grace, if orthodox Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could fall to their knees in praise and thanks for their Gentile brethren's generosity to them in Corinth. Visions of Christian unity are likewise not unknown today to become obsessive, and those involved in them become too personally caught up in their success or failure. I pointed out on chapters 7 and 8 that there is no evidence that the famine continued in Palestine as severely nor as long as Paul's passion for the Poor Fund required; to the point that he had to ask others to pray that when he finally arrived in Jerusalem with the food and cash, it would be accepted by the brethren (Rom. 15:31).

Thanksgiving to God and His glorification can be elicited in multiple ways, and even if the Poor Fund project failed, glory to God could surely be achieved another way. But it seems too much had been personally invested in it. The fascinating story is recorded for our learning, and the lessons are powerful. The truth is that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem with the Poor Fund, the Jerusalem Jewish Christians provoked a riot, were certainly not happy to see him, forced him to demonstrate loyalty to the Jewish law, and I have argued in commentary on Acts- got him arrested and imprisoned. It is fantasy to imagine Paul arriving with those carrying the money and goods, and the saints in Jerusalem falling to their knees in praise to God for Paul's initiative and administration of the Corinthian's generosity. That's just not what happened. Paul's project was intended indeed to elicit many thanksgivings to God, but that was not the outcome. He writes here of what he hoped and dearly wanted to happen as if it had happened. There is in Hebrew [and he clearly thought in Hebrew whilst writing in Greek] a prophetic perfect tense, whereby God often expresses His hopes for the future in the past tense, as if they have happened. And Paul does the same here, writing of how his project has resulted [i.e. surely *will* result] in thanksgiving as a result of Corinthian generosity. The idea that this refers to some previous support of the Poor Fund doesn't really fit with the flow of the argument in this chapter. Paul had been asked by the Jerusalem elders to "remember the [Jewish Christian, perhaps specifically Jerusalem] poor" in return for not demanding the circumcision of Gentile converts (Gal. 2:10). Paul dearly wished to be acceptable to the Jerusalem elders; for him culturally, Jerusalem was still the centre of the world. Perhaps his obsession with the Poor Fund arose partly from his desperation to be acceptable and pleasing to the Jerusalem elders. It would have been so very hard for Paul to experience a hostile reception by his Jerusalem brethren and perhaps a refusal of what support he had managed to gather for them. He was then forced by them to prove his orthodoxy, and it seems the Jerusalem Jewish Christians were the ones who orchestrated his arrest and imprisonment. The Lord surely worked to correct Paul's desire to please men.

9:13 *By their approval of this service-* "Their approval" is an attempt to grapple with what seems an awkward phrase, rendered correctly by AV "By the experiment of this" service. Paul rather likes the idea of things being an experiment; for he has written earlier using the



same word about his command for them to separate from the immoral brother (2:9). This was a test or experiment of their loyalty, rather than being necessary for the sake of that brother or those whom he had wronged (7:12). There must be divisions within the church so that the tested / experimented with / approved might be made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19). In these kinds of issues- division in the church, a case of an immoral brother or a project to support poor believers of a different ethnicity- the crucial issue is how we respond to the test or "experiment" which the situations provide. The apparently central issues (e.g. the poor at Jerusalem or the immoral brother) are in this sense the furniture of the scene. It is how we respond to the tests or experiments which is so critical.

*They glorify God for your loyalty which you confess to the gospel of Christ, and for the generosity of your contribution to them and to all-* As noted above, Paul is speaking of his hopes as if they had actually happened. The Jerusalem Christians were not glorifying God for Corinthian generosity at that time; and there is no evidence they ever did, or that Corinth gave anything. The use of the word "loyalty" is unfortunate because the careful reader is already suspicious that Paul is too concerned with Corinthian loyalty to him and his pet project. It is also simply not the case that by not supporting a particular welfare initiative, we are being disloyal to the Gospel. Again the argument is high pressure and not completely sound. Here at the very end of the section about the Poor Fund, Paul perhaps betrays the way that what he hopes for in the Corinthians is what he wishes to see and states as having happened. He says that the Jerusalem poor are praising God for the way the Corinthians are generous to them "and to all". But this was surely the fantasy of love. There was no evidence the Corinthians were donating "to all", and all the other evidence in the letters reveals their serious immorality and spiritual weakness.

Initially, the Corinthians agreed to take up a collection for their poor Jewish brethren. Paul later encouraged them in this when their will to carry it out flagged, but the initial inspiration was from "the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 9:13 NIV). That Gospel doesn't state that to obey it, one must give money to the poor believers in Jerusalem. But Paul perceived that *effectively* it did; this was, in their context, part and parcel of confessing the Gospel. We learn from this that the Gospel has abiding power to transform lives after conversion as well as before.

9:14 *While they also, with prayers on your behalf, long after you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you-* I noted earlier that Paul had exaggerated about the Corinthians supposedly longing for Titus and himself. And he makes a similar exaggeration here. The Jerusalem Christians likely had little knowledge of the Corinthians, and so the language of longing and praying is exaggeration. It was Paul who uses the word "long after you" several times about his longing after his brethren; and he imagines that the Corinthians have the same attitude to their brethren as he does. The grace (gift) "in you" is a reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the Corinthians, within them, which Paul has so often alluded to in his Corinthian correspondence. He urges the Corinthians to make use of that gift, to allow the path of the Spirit, which would elicit in them a giving of grace to others. But it is questionable whether in reality the Jerusalem Jewish Christians longed for the Corinthians upon that basis. But in theory, yes- the "fellowship of the Spirit" was and is a fellowship experienced on the basis of each believer having the Spirit at work in their hearts, and responding to it. This creates a fellowship with others who are allowing the same process.

9:15 *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift-* As noted on :14, the gift in view is that of the Spirit, within the hearts of the believers. Paul thanks God for it, with the implication that the Corinthians should be more appreciative of and responsive to it.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now I Paul-* The appeal to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund in chapters 7-9 is now finished, and Paul now returns to tackle the Corinthians over their serious spiritual inadequacies. For all the love, enthusiasm, imputation of righteousness, the loving them with a love which imagines good and exaggerated their spirituality- Paul was also realistically aware that they were heading the wrong way in their spiritual lives. "Now I..." suggests that the argument flows straight on from the preceding chapters. Chapters 7-9 appear to present the Corinthians in an unrealistically positive light, but now Paul turns to realities. The break in style is such that some have suggested that chapters 7-9 form a separate piece of correspondence. But "Now I..." indicates that Paul is fully aware of what he has just written, and is now returning to dealing with their suspicions of him and need for exhortation.

*I myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-* "I myself" emphasizes his personal approach to them. And he himself was acting as Christ to them, with His gentleness. His sarcasm and anger later in this letter must be read therefore either as a departure from his aim as here stated, or we are to read it as all the same expressing the Lord's meekness and gentleness. "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" is surely a reference to the Lord's description of Himself as being, there and then, "meek and lowly of heart" (Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Paul's point is that as the Lord was in His life, so He is now, in His heavenly glory.

*I who in your presence am lowly among you-* "Lowly" was likely a reference to how his critics described his literal presence, perhaps hinting at some physical deformity. But the ultimate "lowly" one was of course the Lord Jesus, and Paul has just stated that he seeks to relate to them as Him, with His meekness. For the same word is used by the Lord in saying that He was "lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29). And he has earlier stated that he feels "lowly" because of the bad state of affairs in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6 s.w.). The Lord's lowliness of mind (s.w.) was at its zenith during His time of dying (Phil. 2:3), and Paul sets that humbling of mind as the pattern for every Christian.

*But being absent am bold toward you-* The contrast is between being present and yet being now absent from them. He is keenly aware of his absence from them (10:11; 13:2,10). But he warns them that he will visit them and be in presence as he is when absent in his letters (:11). He earlier warned them that although he was absent yet through the Spirit he was present with them (1 Cor. 5:3; also Col. 2:5 "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit"). Therefore his presence or absence was not to be understood by them as significant. Any attempt to criticize the difference between his written style when absent and personal style when present was ill founded- because through the Spirit, he was present with them although absent. So they were not to think that what he was now going to write was just mere words, and his personal presence would be far less demanding.

10:2 *I beg you now, so that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh-* Paul has earlier expressed his fear that if he visits them, then he will boldly judge them. Indeed, he has given this as the reason why he delayed his planned visit to them. This attitude to his next visit stands in contrast to the claims in chapters 7-9 that they love him and he can't wait to see them and oversee the collection of their donations for the Jerusalem Poor Fund. He intended to boldly judge those who consider him as an unspiritual person, walking according to the flesh. The Spirit through Paul would judge them- and they would realize that he walked according to the Spirit and not the flesh. Paul was "confident" that he would judge

some of them severely, and yet in 8:22 he has written of the confidence he has that they will respond to his appeals, and his "confidence in you in all things" (7:16). These were statements written on the cusp of loving enthusiasm for them, thinking the best of them. But he is also confident that not all is well with them, and that he shall have to judge some of them severely.

10:3 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not fight in a fleshly way-* This is likely a quotation from the Corinthian detractors, who claimed that Paul conducted himself "in a fleshly way". Walking after the flesh rather than the Spirit is the way of condemnation (Rom. 8:1,4; Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 2:10). Paul is having to defend himself against those who consider that he is not at all Spiritual. Paul has used the same word for "fight" with reference to his ministry generally in 1 Cor. 9:7, and uses the same metaphor to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4). 2 Cor. 10:3,4 is perhaps an allusion to the way that Jericho was taken with such a humanly weak battle plan. The point of the allusion is for us to see ourselves as those nervous Israelites desperately clinging on to their faith in God's victory rather than human strength. And we each have our Jerichos- habits, life-dominating patterns of thinking, that seem so impossible to shift.

10:4 *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds-* The allusion is to the LXX of Prov. 21:22: "A wise man attacks fortified cities and demolishes the fortress in which the ungodly trusted". Note that in 9:6 Paul has quoted from Prov. 22:8, so this part of Proverbs was in his mind in formulating his argument in this part of the letter. We see here how the inspiration process worked- the ideas of the Spirit are reworked by the Spirit within the mind or spirit of the inspired writer. Paul sees himself really at war, using wisdom (according to the Proverbs allusion) to bring down all kinds of apparently solid and impregnable structures. His sense here is exactly that of 1 Cor. 1, where he says that the Spirit overthrows the unspiritual wisdom of men which seems so strong. He perceives those strongholds as being in the minds of the Corinthians and the false teaching received.

10:5 *Casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ-* The "imaginations" are the "strongholds" of :4. The "high thing" continues the metaphor of bringing down fortifications, the reference being to high towers of defence. The picture is of the strongholds being stormed, and the captives taken into another citadel- where they are obedient to Christ. The whole metaphor is descriptive of internal thought processes and reflects how Paul realized that the state of mind is what Christianity is all about. It is thoughts and prideful attitudes which have to be overcome before obedience to Christ can be achieved in the mind. Paul has just written of being obedient to the Gospel in obeying its implications- in giving to the poor (2 Cor. 9:13). It is pride and the strongholds of human strength which hinder that obedience. Paul parallels "the knowledge of God" and having our thoughts in "captivity to the obedience of Christ". This is what it means to know God; the correct theological conclusions about God are not therefore in view when Paul writes of "the knowledge of God"; he uses 'knowledge' in the sense of relationship. He has earlier lamented that some in Corinth "have not the knowledge of God". To know God is to live in mental obedience to His Son. It is a matter of the Spirit in the mind, of having the spirit or mind of Christ within us.

Isaiah is full of references to the proud being 'made low' by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our

repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at the day of judgment. We're calling people to humility. And we must ask whether the content and style of our preaching really does that.

Like John, Paul makes a seamless connection between defending true doctrine, and spiritually minded living in practice. Through destroying arguments and "every pretension that exalts itself against the knowledge of God", we can "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5 RV). This is because, as Neville Smart put it, "of the radical part played in the salvation of the individual by the ideas and beliefs he holds in his mind. They are in fact the roots from which his fixed attitudes and his daily actions spring, and from which they take their particular tone and colouring".

"Though we walk in the flesh (cp. Paul's recognition of his fleshly side in Rom. 7)... the weapons of our (mental) warfare are not carnal (of our fleshly man), but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds". These strong holds which are pulled down are defined in v.5 as "imagination... every thought" which have to be 'cast (cp. 'pulled') down'. Those strong holds exist in the recesses of our natural minds. Rom. 6:13 encourages us not to yield our minds as weapons of sin, but as weapons of God (Rom. 6:13 AVmg.). Our thinking is a weapon, which both sides in this conflict can use. The sinful man within us is "warring against the law of my (spiritual) mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23). Yet 2 Cor. 10:5 describes our spiritual man as overthrowing our carnal man, and bringing those thoughts into captivity to the Christ man. The impression is created of constant attrition, with victories for both sides. In Rom. 7 the impression is given that the carnal man is winning; whilst 2 Cor. 10:2-5 paints the picture of the Christ man triumphant. To get this picture over, perhaps the Spirit used a spiritually depressed Paul in Rom. 7, and a triumphant Paul at the time of writing 2 Cor. 10?

10:6 *And being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full-* This could mean that when they were fully obedient to Christ (:5), and had shown this in practice by obeying his command they donate to the Jerusalem Poor Fund, then he would punish the disobedience of others within the Corinthian church. On this basis we would have to assume that when Paul writes to 'you' here, he is writing to a subgroup within the church who will be obedient to him. But he seems to use "you" in a more general and natural sense throughout the letter. We get no impression elsewhere that he is writing to an obedient subgroup within the church. So we must consider other possibilities for interpretation. One possibility is that the more God's word abides in us, the more we will know our sinfulness (1 Jn. 1:10). Thus Paul would be speaking here as if when Corinth are more obedient, he will reveal further to them the extent of their weakness (2 Cor. 10:6).

Or it could be that the obedience of Corinth to Christ refers to their general spiritual maturity; once that was complete, then Paul could go further and move on to judge the disobedience of others apart from Corinth. This would connect with how Paul goes straight on to speak of how he had received, as it were, a measuring line which enabled him to preach in certain areas, including Corinth. When the spiritual growth of the Corinthian converts was complete, then his measuring line would be extended, and the Lord would allow him "to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" (this is how I would interpret 2 Cor. 10:6,13-16 RV). But a measuring line is Ezekiel's figure of Divine judgment; as if to say that once Corinth are obedient, then Paul can move on to other areas to revenge all disobedience / judge / measure them out.

10:7 *Look at the things that are before your face, staring at you. If anyone trusts in himself that he is Christ's-* Any serious study of a Bible passage requires us to look at it in different translations and make some effort to understand the real meaning of the original- for sometimes the sense of a passage can completely change, depending on translation (especially in Job). Thus in the AV of 2 Cor. 10:7, Paul is made to ask a question: "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?". In the RV, this becomes an affirmation: "Ye look at the things that are before your face". But in other versions, it becomes a blunt demand from Paul that the Corinthians should open their eyes to the true facts: "Look at things which stare you in the face!" (J.B. Phillips).

On balance, on the strength of the context, I would go for a translation to the effect that Paul is rebuking them for looking at things from the outward appearance. For the same word translated "before your face" has been used by him in exactly this sense when he rebukes them for following those who look at life after the outward appearance (5:12). Paul's presence or face / outward appearance has just been described as unattractive and lowly (10:1). Paul is now rebuking them for looking at things externally, whereas he has just explained in :4,5 that the essence of the Gospel is about internal transformation and spiritual things. By judging according to external appearances, they were concluding that Paul was not even "Christ's".

*Let him remind himself that, even as he is Christ's, so also are we!*- There's definitely a tendency to think that we can have a relationship with the Father and Son, and this is all that matters. John countered this tendency, by arguing that "If a man say [and apparently this *was* being said by some brethren], "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20). Paul foresaw this same tendency here in 2 Cor. 10:7: "If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him *of himself* think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's". "Of himself" suggests that our internal thinking, our self-perception, of ourselves as "in Christ" cannot be valid unless we perceive "Christ" as having our brethren "in Him" also. And Paul's own example showed what he meant; for in all his hardships he was comforted not just by the Father and Son directly, but by the faith of his brethren- even if that faith was weak (e.g. 1 Thess. 3:7). If we are sure we are the Lord's, let's remember that we aren't the *only* person He died for. Therefore we *must* receive one another, as Christ received us, with all our inadequacies of understanding and behaviour (Rom. 15:7). We are thereby taught of God to love one another; we must forgive and forbear each other, as the Lord did and does with us (1 Thess. 4:9; Eph. 4:32).

10:8 *I could boast, unashamedly and somewhat abundantly, concerning our authority- authority which the Lord gave for building you up and not for casting you down-* This doesn't mean that the authority given could not be used for 'casting down'. For the same word is used about how Paul could do just that (:4; 13:10). The idea is that the power had been given Paul not so much for casting down, but for building up [edifying]. Paul had the power / authority to judge them, and he purposefully delayed visiting them lest the Spirit lead him to punish them, perhaps in a literal sense. His attitude reflects that of the Lord- who came more to save than to judge / condemn, although that doesn't mean that He will not judge / condemn some.

10:9 *But I will not, lest I appear to terrify you by my letters-* We see here how Corinthians is very much a flow of consciousness letter. He says he will not boast of his authority- but later he does, at great length (11:1,16). Likewise in chapter 7 he writes down his passionate feelings of love and confidence in the Corinthians- and then comes down to a more realistic view of them. And he begins this current section by saying he will have the meekness and

gentleness of Christ (:1) when in fact chapters 10-13 are Paul at his most bitter, sarcastic and angry.

10:10 *For they say: His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account-* But was his physical presence indeed "of no account"? The Roman Governor Felix *trembled* at Paul's incisive logic- even in his prison uniform (Acts 24:25). Hardened Agrippa was almost persuaded by Paul, on his own public admission, to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). The Galatian converts would have pulled out their eyes from their sockets and given them to partially sighted Paul (Gal. 4:15). The aggressive crowd, baying for Paul's blood, were held in one of history's most uncanny silences by the sheer personality of that preacher. He beckoned with his hand, and "there was made a great silence...and when they heard how (Gk.) he spake... they kept the more silence" (Acts 21:39-22:2). Pagans at Lystra were so overcome by his oratory that they were convinced he was the god Mercury come down to earth; it took Paul quite some effort to persuade them that he was an ordinary man (Acts 14:12). This was the man Paul. He had undoubted ability as a preacher. Yet apparently the Corinthians mocked his weak physical presence; although Paul had undoubted charisma and power of personality, right up to the end. Was it not that he consciously suppressed the power of his personality when he visited Corinth? This was humility and self-knowledge indeed. Indeed, his reasoning in 2 Cor. 10,11 is that he could present himself to Corinth as quite a different brother Paul than what he did. Although Paul did have a significant physical presence, he doesn't dispute with the Corinthians about it. Instead he more humbly makes the point that presence or absence is insignificant in spiritual terms.

So I suggest that Paul made himself a weak person in his dealings with Corinth, just as the Lord also humbled himself, made Himself lowly as an act of the will. He could truly be all things to all people, he wasn't constrained by his natural personality type as so many of us allow ourselves to be. This is why Paul could go on in :11 to warn Corinth that the next time he visits them, he won't be weak. He will 'be' as he is in his letters. In all this we see the full import of the sacrifice and crucifixion of self of which the Lord repeatedly speaks. Putting meaning into words, this means that we will genuinely 'be' the person we need to be in order to help others.

"His letters, say they (Paul's detractors in the new Israel) are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible... though I be rude in speech... Christ sent me... to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words (mg. speech)" (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17). This is all the language of Moses, Paul's hero. Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words" (Acts 7:22), even though Moses felt "I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words)... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10). Maybe Paul likewise was mighty in words and wisdom, but felt like Moses that he wasn't. He allowed Moses' legendary humility to personally inspire him, rather than just admire it from afar, ticking the box, saying yes, Moses was humble...

It was believed that nature and destiny had decreed your place, and there was to be no questioning of it. Thus according to the first century principle of 'physiognomics', a slave was born with a muscular, servile body, an upper class female Roman was born beautiful, etc. The idea of education was to train them up to be as they were intended to be by nature. The ancient world believed that all that was decreed and predestined by nature would have some sort of physical reality in the appearance of a person. Hence the challenging nature of Paul's command not to judge by the outward appearance; and again, Divine providence overturned

all this by choosing Paul as such a "chosen vessel", when his outward appearance and manner of speaking were so weak and unimpressive, literally 'lacking strength' (2 Cor. 10:10).

10:11 *Well, let such a person reckon this, that what we are in word by letters, when we are absent, such will we be also in deed, when we are present-* As noted on :1 *But being absent am bold toward you*, there is effectively no difference between Paul's presence and his absence, for in his physical absence he is still spiritually present with them, just as the Lord Jesus is. Paul is moving towards the position that when he does come and visit Corinth in the flesh, he is likely to be led by the Spirit to be seriously judgmental towards them. This is a far cry from his earlier positive comments in this letter that he is delaying coming to them so that when he does come, they will have fixed things up and made donation to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. These apparent contradictions within the letter have been explained by some on the basis that we have here various letters stitched together. But why do that? And the various proposed sections all join to each other seamlessly. I therefore have adopted the view that the letter was written under inspiration as a flow of consciousness, just as the inspired Psalmists both curse and bless their enemies within the same Psalm.

10:12 *For we are not bold enough to class or compare ourselves with those that commend themselves-* The sarcasm here seems at variance with Paul's opening statement in :1 that he is going to appeal to them with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Again, as noted on :11, this is a flow of consciousness letter, with Paul writing how he felt at the moment. The AV offers: "We dare not make ourselves of the number", and "the number" may be a technical term referring to a group of self-declared apostles who claimed that they were "the number", perhaps referring to how the initial apostles are described with the term "the number of the names" (Acts 1:15). Although Paul says he will not compare himself with those who commend themselves, he goes on at length to do just that in chapters 11 and 12. Rather like he begins this section by saying he will appeal by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (:1) and proceeds to write in anything but that tone. Once again- this is a flow of consciousness letter, with Paul expressing one feeling and then going on to write in a different way. The only other time the Greek word for "compare" occurs is again to the Corinthians, where Paul insists we must compare spiritual things with spiritual things and not confuse the categories by comparing fleshly things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13). But here Paul will go on to do just that, justifying himself in fleshly terms in order to confirm his spiritual authority. Paul has said that he needs no commendation of himself, because that commendation is known in their consciences, if they have the Spirit within and are in touch with it (2 Cor. 4:2). But then he says that in order for them to answer those who glory in outward appearance, he will give them some good ammunition to use by boasting of his qualifications (2 Cor. 5:12; 6:4). He will now go on again to commend himself, claiming that it is their fault, and their refusal to commend him according to their own consciences, the Spirit within them, has compelled him to boast (2 Cor. 12:11). In all this we see the rather jumbled logic which accompanies a desperate desire to persuade by all means, and even under Divine inspiration of the record, the jumbled logic reflects this desire of Paul to by all means get them onside.

*These are without understanding, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, which is unwise-* Paul points out the weakness of all peer-reviewed criticism. They measured themselves by their own standards and benchmarks which they themselves had chosen, rather than by God's standards. And Paul will now use the same word for 'measuring' to describe how he has been given a measure by God to teach and pastor them (:13).

10:13 *But we will not boast beyond our measure but rather according to the measure of the province which God apportioned to us- a measure to reach even to you-* The image of

'measuring' according to the measure God had given Paul connects with how the false teachers measured themselves according to measures and benchmarks of their own creation (see on :12 *Measuring themselves*). Paul considered they were geographically and spiritually within a measure or allotted territory given to him and therefore they should respect him and not follow the false teachers. Whether he was specifically given such an allotment of authority is not recorded. We wonder whether Paul is now using every possible argument he can to get the Corinthians onside with him, rather as we saw him doing in appealing for them to donate to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. We recall from 1 Cor. 1 that Paul initially claimed to be approaching the Corinthians with only a Christ-centered attitude, stating he had baptized few of them, and all following of personal preachers was wrong. But his desperate appeal for authority at this final stage of the correspondence seems rather more human than that initial approach. Christ is not "divided", Paul had originally argued (1 Cor. 1:13), but now he uses the same word to say that God had apportioned (s.w. "divided") to him and his team the authority and responsibility for Corinth.

10:14 *For we are not overextending ourselves in our boasting, as though we did not reach unto you-* "Overextending" may be a quote from what the critics were saying about Paul. Perhaps the argument from the false teachers was that they were the local pastors, and for Paul to claim any authority in Corinth was an overextension of his authority.

*For we were the first to come as far as you in preaching the gospel of Christ-* As noted on : 13, Paul's claim to have authority over the Corinthians because he first preached to them is at variance with his attitude in 1 Cor. 1, where he rightly claims that Christ is paramount, and who preached or baptized them is irrelevant. And he repeated that in 1 Cor. 15:11, where he argues that God's grace working through the preachers is all important, and who preached the Gospel to the Corinthians is irrelevant because whoever it was ("I or they"), they were just vehicles for God's saving grace.

10:15 *So we are not boasting beyond our measure in other men's labours; but rather we hope that as your faith grows, our influence among you may be greatly increased-* The critics may have claimed that it was their labours which were responsible for the church at Corinth. Paul is paving the way to boast of all his labours for the Corinthians which we will read in chapters 11 and 12. Paul's hope was that his influence amongst the Corinthians would increase as they matured spiritually. But this desire for personal influence and loyalty (a card he played in his appeal for their donations to his Poor Fund in chapters 7-9) is a far cry from his earlier claim to not want any personal influence but just to see the influence of the Lord Jesus growing in his converts. See on :14. But the AV is again more literally faithful to the difficult Greek here: "Having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly". This could mean that their spiritual maturity would enable his line or territory of work to be expanded. For Paul felt he would not be given new areas to preach in if the Corinthians had not matured in the faith. He in this case would be arguing that their immaturity and revolt against him was holding up his spreading of the Gospel further, as if God would "increase" his sphere of work if the Corinthians matured; and:16 seems to confirm this. Again, whether or not God had specifically stated that is unrecorded, and we could read this as another desperate argument to by all means keep the Corinthians loyal to him.

10:16 *So that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence-* See on :15. This can be read as a desperate appeal for Corinthian loyalty to him, lest other areas be as it were deprived of the Gospel. We are left to decide whether this was really the case or if it is just part of an increasingly desperate appeal for their personal loyalty. For Paul had earlier turned away from



unresponsive Jewish audiences in order to go preach further to the Gentiles, rather than remaining with those Jews until they accepted his message. And in Romans 15 he openly speaks of his ambition to preach in Rome and Spain, the "lands beyond" Corinth. He gives no condition to be fulfilled for that, but rather perceives it all as part of his calling.

Paul spoke of how both he and other brethren had their specific "line" or sphere in which they were intended to witness (2 Cor. 10:16 cp. Ps. 19:4 AVmg.; Am. 7:17). We each have ours, whether it be the people who live in our block of flats, an area of our own country or city; or another part of the world. Paul clearly had a purpose- to spread the Gospel in a semi-circle around the Roman empire (2 Cor. 10:15), beginning from Jerusalem, through Asia and Italy, then Spain (Rom. 15:19), North Africa and back to Jerusalem. Speaking of how he planned his journeys, he comments in 2 Cor. 1:17: "When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes yes, and no no?". Again we see a definite purpose, not the kind of human intention which vacillates between yes and no; for this is inimical to the person who has true purpose. The mission in our minds, the path ever before us, makes our decision making so much clearer than it is for those who dither over which flavour coffee to have tonight... Truly could Paul say at the end: "But you have followed my teaching, my conduct, and my purpose in life; you have observed my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, and my sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:10,11). And he is set up as a model for each of us (1 Tim. 1:16).

10:17 *But he that boasts, let him boast in the Lord-* This is the quotation from Jer. 9:24 with which Paul began his recorded letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:31). But I have shown in earlier commentary on this chapter that Paul's attitude is at variance with the non-partisan spirit which he had shown there. Despite knowing this principle, Paul is now as it were carried away to boast in the flesh. Again he states a principle and then appears to break it, as witnessed in his promise to entreat them by the gentleness of Christ (10:1) and going on to use bitter sarcasm and angry manipulation against them. This confirms my conclusion that this letter is an inspired 'flow of consciousness' recording of Paul's feelings. The context of Jer. 9:24 urges glorying in the Lord because judgment is coming- and that rather fits what Paul is going on to threaten.

10:18 *For it is not he that commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends-* For "commends", see on Lk. 12:8; 1 Cor. 4:5. And yet Paul goes on to commend himself in the next two chapters. Just as he says he will approach them in the gentle spirit of Christ (:1) and goes on to write to them otherwise. His immediate reference is to the false teachers who commended themselves (:12). Only the Lord's commendation is worth anything, and not the commendation of men. But in his desperate love for Corinth and desire to persuade them, he now embarks upon self-commendation, breaking his own principles and then blaming it on them for compelling him to do so (12:11).

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me-* Paul is asking them to bear with, or stick with, his reasoning as an unwise fool. He laments that they 'bear with' the false teachers, who demanded their loyalty and rejection of Paul; three times he uses the same word of how they 'bear with' these men who abuse them (:4,19,20). So the emphasis should be on the *me* in "[Please] bear with *me*", and not with these pretenders. This reading is confirmed by the way that :2 goes on to say that this is because Paul is as their father, who has betrothed them to Christ.

11:2- see on Mt. 3:7; Acts 13:9; 1 Cor. 15:10.

*For I am jealous over you with a Godly jealousy. For I betrothed you to one husband, that is, that I might present you a pure virgin to Christ-* The betrothal period lasted a year; the father of the bride was expected to keep her sexually pure. This period of a year may refer to the year he has already waited for them to produce the collection money (9:2). But during that betrothal period, he feared they had not been faithful to Christ because of their alliances with the false teachers. Paul considered himself their father and them to be his children (1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 6:13; 12:13-15). This analogy demonstrates that preaching is not all about getting a response which leads to conversion; the end point in view is not baptism, but a person remaining faithful for Christ until the end. The image of betrothal suggests that some guarantee had been given, and the guarantee in our relationship with the Lord Jesus is the Spirit given as the guarantee in our hearts; only here in 2 Corinthians is it spoken of in precisely that way (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 11:2 of 'presenting you' at the last day- he uses the same Greek work in a context of 'standing before' the judgment seat (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 4:14). Christ will present us to Himself at judgment day, as an unspotted bride / church (Eph. 5:27)- but Paul perceived that Christ will achieve this by working through people and pastors like himself. Paul aimed to "present" [s.w.] every man perfect in Christ by warning and exhorting them (Col. 1:28). We will present ourselves (2 Tim. 2:15 s.w.) to Him at the judgment; but He presents us, and others who have laboured for us will present us, because Christ will have worked through them to present us to Himself unspotted. The cross results in the suffering Lord being able to "*present* us holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight" at the day of judgment (Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:27). Having said that, Paul goes right on to say that his goal is to "*present* every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:22,28; 2 Cor. 11:2). The sufferings of Jesus were not lost on Paul. He understood that he likewise must share in them, in order to "present" his brethren acceptable at the last day. For Paul, the events of Calvary were not far away in time and place, a necessary piece of theology... They compelled him to act, to stay up late at night preparing something, to pray, to live the life of true concern for others, to warn, encourage, write, endlessly review his draft letters to get them right, search through Scripture for relevant guidance for his friends... this was the life begotten in him by the cross. As the Lord died to present us "perfect", so Paul laboured to present us perfect. And neither the Lord Jesus nor Paul are mere history for us. This is all our pattern... In one sense, we present ourselves before the judgment seat (Rom. 14:10 s.w.; AV "stand before"). In other ways, we are presented there by our elders, e.g. Paul; and yet above all, we are presented there spotless by the Lord's matchless advocacy for us. And of course the essence of judgment is being worked out right now, as we daily present ourselves to the Lord, as the bodies of the animals were presented to the priest for inspection before being offered (Rom. 12:1). We are presenting ourselves to the judge right now.

11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve with his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ-* Note the focus upon their minds.

Throughout Corinthians, Paul has taught that the role of the Spirit in the heart / mind is crucial to spirituality. The mind was and is the battleground for temptation, and the arena in which we develop spirituality. Paul did not want their minds to be led astray [NEV "corrupted"] from Christ. NEV "the simplicity that is in Christ" could as well be rendered as NIV "to Christ". The idea is that the Christian is mentally focused upon a man, the Lord Jesus. The problem with false theologies and other gospels is that they remove that focus, they are a corruption of the mind, and hence a different spirit (:4) from that which is to be Christ's. The corruption of the mind from this focus is described in :4 as receiving "a different spirit". The focus is intensely upon the human mind or heart, and whether or not the spirit of Jesus is there. This, in summary, is what Christianity is all about and how a Christian is defined- whether the spirit of Christ is in the heart or not. All the *angst* about doctrinal correctness and the struggle for correct interpretation must be seen in that light. If we have not the spirit of Christ, we are none of His; and if we do, then we are His.

Paul's imputation of righteousness to the Corinthians is reflected in the way he likens them here to the innocent Eve in Eden, when previous correspondence has revealed the depth of their moral (especially sexual) depravity. Clearly Paul read the Genesis account of the serpent as literal, seeing the literal serpent as now representative of the Judaizers who were preying upon the minds of the believers.

11:4 *For if he that comes*- "He that comes" could be a generic reference to the false teachers who came to them, presumably sent from Jerusalem to destabilize Paul's work; their 'coming' suggests they were not local Corinthians. There could however be a specific individual in view, whom Paul is careful not to name because he was well known and perhaps for fear of difficulties which would be created by specifically naming him. This may be the reference of 12:7, which speaks of a particular messenger or envoy of 'Satan', the Jewish opposition, sent to be a pain in the side for his ministry. The coming one, "he that comes", was understood in Judaism as the Messiah, "he that comes in the name of the Lord". The false teachers in view are therefore presented as anti-Christ, fake Messiahs, teaching and embodying "another Jesus".

*Preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept*- Receiving the spirit and accepting the Gospel of Jesus are paralleled. The situation in 1 Cor. 14 [see notes there] was that the Corinthians claimed to have Holy Spirit gifts, but actually the manifestations of ecstatic utterances they were claiming to experience were not at all Holy Spirit gifts, but rather an imitation of the idol cults. The aorists here would seem to imply that they accepted a gospel, another Jesus and another spirit at one specific moment. As if an individual had come and preached a fake imitation of Christianity- replete with a Jesus, a gospel and a spirit to be received. We note that the true Gospel features a receipt of the Spirit when the real Christ is accepted. This is not a reference to the miraculous gifts, but to the guarantee of salvation received in the heart, which must be responded to (1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). Perhaps the 'other Jesus' being taught was a Jesus who did not rise from the dead and was therefore currently inactive (recall the arguments of 1 Cor. 15) and who ministers no Spirit, therefore, to believers. This is worryingly similar, in practice, to the approach to Jesus taken by some conservative forms of Christianity today.

*It seems you think you do well to go along with him*- See on :3. They 'bore with' ["go along with"] these false teachers instead of bearing with Paul (:1).

11:5- see on 1 Tim. 1:16; Acts 23:6.

*But I reckon that I am not in the least inferior to these so called super apostles-* This group declared themselves to be "the number" (see on 10:12), the true apostles. But they had declared themselves as this, without any signs from the Lord affirming them as such. Paul "supposed", the same word translated "impute" as in 'imputed righteousness', that he was not inferior to these apostles, because he was a true apostle. He knew this was how his Lord counted him. But he felt himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8) and quite unworthy of the title apostle: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:9-10). He felt the status and acceptance imputed to him, as we should.

11:6 *Although rude in speech, I am not in knowledge. No, in every way have we made this manifest to you in all things-* Paul was falsely accused of being an *idiotes* ["rude"], an uneducated and simple person who pretended to the intelligentsia. This was patently untrue. But Paul doesn't attack the lies, he argues that even if that is true, and he doesn't bother justifying himself, then it could not be said that he was lacking in true knowledge. Again he is appealing to them to stop judging after the outward appearance (see on 10:7), but to look to the essence, the Spirit within. Paul can say that they surely know what "knowledge" he has, because he has been thoroughly manifested [Gk. *phaneroo*] to them in absolutely every way; there was nothing he knew which he hadn't shared with them. He is so open with them that he doesn't just write in a political, guarded way to them, watching every word.

11:7- see on Phil. 4:16; Lk. 3:5.

*Or did I commit a sin-* This kind of sarcasm is hardly in line with Paul's claim to now be appealing to them in the spirit of the Lord's gentleness and meekness (10:1). His bitterness reveals that his previous positivity about them in chapter 7 was uttered on the cusp of emotion, hoping against hope because of the love he had for them.

*In abasing myself so you might be exalted, because I preached to you the gospel of God for nothing?-* Paul told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted. This is one of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels; this time to Lk. 14:11; 18:14, which teach that he who abases himself will *himself* be exalted. But Paul was abasing himself so that Corinth could be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us. It was through refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians that he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted*- all language of the crucifixion (cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. We live in a world which has made the fulfilment of personal aims of paramount importance. It has affected the fabric of every society, and become embedded in every mind. To *live to serve*, to put oneself down that others may rise... this is strange indeed. John the Baptist had this spirit, for he rejoiced that he decreased whilst the Lord's cause increased. Paul likewise abased himself that others might be exalted, after the pattern of the cross. God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *ourselves*.

11:8 *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you-* Accepting support from other churches was hardly robbing them, and the idea of robbing holy places / churches was particularly viewed as the language of sacrilege (Rom. 2:22). Paul uses this particularly arresting term to grab attention, but it is also true to say that he was exaggerating his case, as so often in his very emotionally charged relationship with the Corinthians. His refusal to take money from the Corinthians is presented as a self-abasement;

but his decision must be tempered against the fact that he did in fact take support from others, just not Corinth.

*Took wages-* See on Acts 20:24 *The ministry that I received.*

2 Cor. 11:8-15, when properly translated, perhaps reflects Paul at his angriest and most abrasive: "I robbed other churches [an exaggeration!], getting money from them to be a minister to you!...as the truth of Christ is in me- I swear that this reason to be proud will not be stopped as long as I work in the area of Achaia! You ask me why do I do this? Do you think it's because I don't love you? God knows I do! It's because what I do- and I am going to go on doing it- shuts up some people who are trying to pretend they are as good as we are, those fakes! Such apostles are treacherous workmen. They deck themselves out as apostles of Christ and it's no wonder people are fooled... but they'll get what's coming to them!". Even through the barrier of words, time, culture and distance, the abrasion of Paul in full-flow comes down through the centuries. This was hardly the promised approach in the meekness and gentleness of Christ (10:1), which all goes to show that 2 Corinthians is written as a flow of consciousness letter- which explains many of the apparent contradictions and tensions within it.

11:9- see on 2 Cor. 13:4.

*And when I was present with you and was in want-* His time of "want" in Corinth was part of being "abased" whilst there amongst them (:7). The same word is translated "destitute" in Heb. 11:37. If he had asked for support or accepted it from the local Corinthians, the implication is that this abasement and want would have been avoided. Perhaps he was indeed destitute, until the Macedonians got assistance to him. "In want" is the Greek word translated "inferior" in :5. Paul was not at all lacking behind the so called "apostles"; but he had been lacking in material things. And that was his qualification as a true apostle. The fact Paul clearly at times had money, and came from a wealthy background, makes all the more impressive his being destitute and "abased" for the Gospel.

*I was not a burden on anyone. For the brothers, when they came from Macedonia, supplied all my needs; indeed in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will I remain-* Paul had the same policy in Thessalonica where he also resisted being burdensome (1 Thess. 2:6 s.w.). Acts 18:3 says that Paul worked in Corinth as a tentmaker when he first arrived there. The fact his needs had to be supplied by the Macedonians would indicate that he was unable to continue being self-supporting in this way, presumably because of an economic blockade against him organized by the Jews.

11:10 *As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me boasting about this throughout the regions of Achaia-* Paul's boasting about his independence from the Corinthians seems rather strange and somewhat human rather than spiritual. Seeing that he had been supported by wages paid by the Macedonians (:8,9), his financial independence from the Corinthians was not a great thing to boast about.

11:11 *And why? Because I do not love you? God knows, I do!-* "God knows", along with his appeal to the truth of Christ within him (:10), all suggests that Paul's claims here would be received cynically by the Corinthians, and so Paul feels the need to swear in some way to his truthfulness. But he might have perhaps taken more comfort from his own observation earlier, that his authenticity as an elder having authority over them was in fact known by them within their own consciences (see on 5:11). Yet in this section (chapters 10-13) Paul often seems to stray from his own principles as he is overly caught up with his personal investment in the situation at Corinth. He should have left it at that, but instead, he makes all kinds of oaths ["God knows!"] and human self-justification. We too can clearly understand

and espouse a principle yet allow the humanity of a situation to allow us to indulge in personal self-justification when we have claimed to understand that this is not the way to go.

11:12 *But what I do, that I will continue to do, so I may not provide an opportunity to those that desire such an opportunity, and so that their boasting will be shown to be not the same as ours-* Clearly there were some at Corinth seeking opportunity to bring Paul down. He was up against consciously organized opposition, which he understandably sums up as "the satan" / adversary. Paul's boasting is made, he claims, so that he can as it were outboast the opposition. He has made up his mind to go down the path of human boasting, and says he will continue to do so, because he will deprive his critics of any opportunity to boast. But as observed many times in this letter, we are here reading flow of consciousness writing. Paul is writing down his thoughts as they come into his mind, and all emotions are at first blush contradictory. For it is obvious that by justifying himself, he will not by any amount of autobiographical truth somehow shut down his opponents by outboasting them. Nor will he rid them of opportunity to attack him. And such a path of action is in contradiction to his correct principle of not comparing ourselves amongst ourselves as men (10:12).

11:13 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ-* Paul claimed Divine qualification and authentication of his apostleship, whereas these men had merely declared themselves ["fashioning themselves"] apostles. They branded themselves as "super apostles" (:5); Paul calls them *false* apostles. The transformation of these men into something they were not is the basis for :14; as these men 'fashioned themselves' so "Satan fashions himself". But the connection is not historical, to some supposed even in Eden when Satan turned into an Angel. For Genesis and the Bible are silent about this; it is an import from paganism. The present tenses here must be given their due weight. As the false apostles were fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ, so 'Satan' was fashioning himself into an angel of light. I take this as meaning that these men were part of a much larger system of adversarial opposition to Paul's work, which he sums as 'Satan', the adversary. And the context here and elsewhere points unmistakably to a Jewish satan. I have written about this at length in [The Real Devil 2-4](#).

There is indeed allusion to the deceit of the serpent in Eden, who was of course adversarial ['satan' = adversary], but this is not to say that Paul read the serpent as anything more than a literal "beast of the field" as indeed the serpent is presented in Genesis. As the serpent deceived Eve by his subtilty, so these false apostles worked deceitfully. These false apostles accused Paul of having the characteristics of the serpent- crafty and taking people in with guile (12:16). It is these very words and allusion to the serpent which Paul now uses about the false apostles here and in :3 and this explains the usage of serpent imagery. It all seems a rather tit for tat situation- he was trying to outboast them, and calls them the names they call him. This is all in contradiction of Paul's earlier arguments that he will not commend himself as others do nor compare himself with others. But he is carried away in a desire by all means and by every kind of argument to try to win the Corinthians to Christ and to himself.

11:14 *And no marvel. For even Satan fashions himself into an angel of light-* See on :13. For reasons why this is not supporting any idea of a cosmic satan, see my [The Real Devil 5-21](#) . It needs to be recognized that Paul's writings very often allude to extant Jewish and Gentile literature, sometimes quoting verbatim from them, in order to correct popular ideas. Thus Paul quotes Aratus (Acts 17:28), Menander (1 Corinthians 15:33) and Epimenides (Titus 1:12) – he uses odd phrases out of these uninspired writings by way of illustration. I've shown in *The Real Devil* that much of the Biblical literature does this kind of thing, e.g. the entire Pentateuch is alluding to the various myths and legends of creation and origins,

showing what the truth is. The fact Paul's 21st century readers are largely ignorant of that literature, coupled with Paul's rabbinic writing style not using specific quotation rubric or quotation marks, means that this point is often missed. It's rather like our reading of any historical literature – parts of it remain hard to understand because we simply don't appreciate the historical and immediate context in which it was written. When Paul speaks of Satan being transformed as a bright Angel, he's actually quoting from the first century AD *Life of Adam and Eve* (12–16) which speculated that 'Satan' refused to worship the image of God in Adam and therefore he came to earth as a bright Angel and deceived Eve: "Satan was wroth and transformed himself into the brightness of angels, and went away to the river" (For references, see Susan Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 45. *The Life of Adam and Eve* was apparently widely quoted and alluded to in the first century – see throughout M. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1992)). Paul's quoting from that document; although in a preceding verse (2 Cor. 11:3) he has stressed that "the *serpent* beguiled Eve by his subtilty". He's reaffirming the Genesis account, which doesn't speak of a personal Satan, but rather simply of a serpent, created as one of the "beasts of the field". So we could paraphrase Paul here: 'I know that the Jewish writings say that the serpent wasn't really a serpent, it was 'Satan', and was actually in the form of a bright Angel. Now that's not the case – let's stick with Genesis, which speaks of a literal serpent. But OK, in the same way as in the Jewish myth Satan became a bright, persuasive Angel, well, these false teachers from the Jews appear as wonderful, spiritual people – but following them will lead you to the same catastrophe as fell upon Eve as a result of being deceived'.

The way Paul uses the word *metaschematizo* ["transform"] three times is interesting – "the stress is so heavy here because Paul is turning their own word against his opponents" (Neil Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 269). If this is the case, then we would yet another example [of which there are so many in Corinthians] of Paul using a term used by his enemies in order to answer them – which would mean that he is not necessarily agreeing with it. Indeed the apocryphal Jewish *Apocalypse of Moses* claims that because Satan appeared as such a dazzling, shining Angel, Eve was inevitably deceived by him. Paul here would thus be alluding to this idea – not that his allusion means that he supported the idea.

11:15 *It is no great thing therefore if his servants also fashion themselves as servants of righteousness*- Servants or ministers of righteousness is a Jewish term, allusive to the priests. The Jewish Satan or opposition to Paul's work had servants / ministers who appeared to be righteous people. Judaism presented the faithful as "the righteous" and the servants of righteousness were those who ministered to Judaist congregations. But they were in fact servants of what Paul terms 'the Satan', his term [as previously referenced] for the Jewish opposition. And his later self-justification in this chapter implies that they presented themselves as true Jews of the seed of Abraham.

*Whose end shall be according to their work*- The lazy servant was punished out of his own mouth (Lk. 19:22); and even in Job's time, this principle of Divine condemnation was known (Job 9:20; 15:6). The Judaizers too were to have an "end [that] will correspond to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:14,15 RSV). Jewish theories of the time accept that God punished the Satan figure, but the demons got around the punishment and tempt men to sin– as if God somehow was outwitted in the supposed struggle. But here Paul says that these men will indeed be punished and will not get out of it. The *Apocalypse of Adam* likewise minimizes human sin by claiming that 'Satan' in fact raped Eve, thus leading to the fall; the *Apocalypse of Moses* claims that because Satan appeared as such a dazzling, shining Angel, Eve was inevitably deceived by him. Paul here alludes to this idea– not that his allusion means that he supported the idea.

11:16 *I say again, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, accept me as a fool so that I may also boast a little-* The accusation was that Paul was "foolish", lacking the wisdom which the false teachers claimed to have. Paul is breaking his own principles now, acting as a fool, comparing himself with others, boasting in the flesh rather than the Spirit, and not as earlier leaving the Corinthians to realize his sincerity in their own spirit / conscience. He is driven by a desire as he puts it elsewhere to "speak in human terms" to by all means persuade them to remain with him and not go after the false teachers. Again we note that he (like the Lord Jesus) faces false statements and beliefs by going along with them and reasoning from their wrong perspective. If they thought him a fool, he will reason with them from the starting point that he is a fool- rather than protesting multiple times that he is being slandered and is no fool.

11:17- see on 1 Cor. 7:11.

*What I will now speak in this confidence of boasting, I speak not after the Lord but as in foolishness-* "After the Lord" is a reference to his opening statement in this section that he is now going to reason with them according to the gentle humility of Christ (10:1). He is not saying that this record of his words is not Divinely inspired. This is yet further evidence that 2 Corinthians is an inspired record of a flow of consciousness, whereby Paul wrote down what he thought and felt at the time. This explains the apparent tensions- in this case, between approaching them "after the Lord" Jesus, and yet now departing from His meekness and gentleness in order by all means to persuade them on the terms of comparison which they had set up.

11:18 *Seeing that many boast after the flesh, I will boast also-* He is seeking to outboast his boastful competitors, despite having earlier stated that he dare not ever compare himself with others, for that was "not wise" (10:12). As noted on :16 and :17, this was a departure from his own principles.

11:19 *For being wise, you bear with the foolish gladly-* This kind of sarcasm is not really much of an argument, and seems more reflective of Paul's anger, the anger of love unrequited, than any serious attempt to persuade the Corinthians. He is calling the competitors "foolish", and clearly thinks the Corinthians are not really "wise" because they are following such fools. But in terms of winning their hearts and minds for Christ and himself, such language and quips were surely hardly effective, indeed quite the opposite.

11:20 *For it seems you follow a man if he brings you into bondage, if he devours you, if he takes you captive, if he exalts himself, if he hits you on the face-* The "bondage" and "captivity" was to the Mosaic law, and Paul often uses this imagery in writing of the Law in Romans and Galatians. The 'devouring' probably referred to the financial demands made upon them by the false teachers. Why would immoral Gentile Christians be at all attracted by such Judaists? As noted on Titus, such false teachers were attractive to the weak Gentile Christians because their conscience about their misbehaviour was salved, on the basis of paying some money and doing a few symbolic acts of obedience. Many religions have swept to mass popularity on the same basis. These false teachers exalted themselves over their flock and were aggressive to them ("hits you on the face"). And still they returned for more. One wonders why aggressive priests in popular churches have any loyalty from their flocks when they behave likewise. But they do- because they are all about guilt tripping a spiritually weak flock and then demanding money and symbolic obedience. Smiting on the face was a punishment for heresy or blasphemy within the synagogue system (Mt. 5:39; Acts 23:2), although it was often administered gently and more as a symbolic gesture. They who were so immoral, replete with church prostitutes according to 1 Corinthians, were willing to be beaten



for their supposed apostasy from Jewish ritual law. And doubtless after receiving it, they felt clean in their conscience and were willing to support and pay those who had punished them.

11:21 *To my shame, I can say, we were too weak to do that-* Such leadership as discussed on : 20 was seen as "strong". Paul sarcastically says that he was too weak to have treated his flock like that.

*Yet wherein any is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am bold* also- What follows is some sort of encomium, a list of a person's biographical achievements. But it is presented as a sarcasm about Paul's encomium [see on Gal. 1:10]. Here in 2 Cor. 11:21-12:10, all the classic elements of the encomium are to be found- his origin and birth, training, accomplishments, comparison with others etc. But he has written that those who compare themselves with others (*synkrinontes*) are fools (2 Cor. 10:12), and that he himself has been speaking as a fool, a raving madman. That was what he thought of an encomium after the flesh. This is all a needful lesson for our generation, surrounded as we are by pressure to trust in education, achievements, being humanly cool and impressive. Paul goes on to say that actually, he prefers as a Christian to "boast of things that show my weakness" (2 Cor. 11:30). Instead of speaking of glorious "deeds of the body", he speaks of his labours, imprisonments, beatings etc. And thus he draws out the paradox, incredible for the first century mind- his real strength and power is in his weakness, for it was this that made him trust in God and in the grace of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 12:10). Instead of impressing those around him, Paul sought to impress the Father and Son above. His strength was not, as society then thought, in what he had inherited and developed from the communities into which he was born- it was rather in the grace of God transforming his character. His patron, his teacher and elder, was the Lord Jesus, and the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Gal. 1:1; Rom. 8:11), rather than any visible 'elder' of his natural communities.

11:22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I-* Clearly the false teachers were Jews, confirming that the 'Satan' referred to in :14 is some kind of personification of the entire Jewish resistance to Paul's work. Paul could have argued on a more spiritual level, as he does in Romans and Galatians, that ethnic descent is irrelevant. But here he takes a more human approach, arguing with them on the same terms of reference which they use.

11:23 *Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as like a madman) I more, with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death-* We note that only a fraction of Paul's sufferings are recorded in Acts, which is a reminder that Biblical history is highly condensed. We see a fraction of the biography of the people we encounter in the pages of the Bible. Many of the imprisonments and beatings would have been at the hand of the synagogue system, which had the authority to discipline their members with temporary arrests and beatings. As we will also note on :24, Paul could have avoided these by making a clean break with Judaism, leaving the ministry to the Jew to Peter as the Lord intended, and going solely to the Gentiles. But he chose not to follow completely the Lord's intention for his ministry- and suffered for it. I have given multiple examples in commentary on Acts. This doesn't mean the Lord didn't work with him; but as in our own lives, going His way is easier than insisting upon our own ways. Some of the beatings may have been from the Romans; but in this case, we wonder why they beat him, seeing that they did not beat Roman citizens like Paul (Acts 22:25,26; 23:27). Perhaps he had been unable to prove his citizenship in some cases; or perhaps he preferred to identify as a Jew and downplayed his Roman citizenship, suffering for it, because he so wished to identify with Israel in order to bring Israel to the Lord Jesus. In Philippi he seems to have kept quiet about his citizenship until after he had been scourged. But again, so much of this could have been avoided if Paul had followed the path of ministry envisaged by the Lord, to go to the Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter.

Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:23).

11:24 *Of the Jews five times I received thirty nines lashes-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). But such punishments from the synagogue system could have been avoided if Paul had not gone to the Jews and left them to Peter; see on :23. Forty lashes were thought enough to kill a man, and the thirty nine lash punishment was only to be given to a man once in his lifetime, according to synagogue law. The repeated experience of such major beating would have left Paul's back a real mess. In Acts 22:25 we get the impression Paul was willing to be scourged yet again, but at the last minute played the card of his Roman citizenship to avoid it. Perhaps this was because the previous lashings had left him so deformed and infected that he realized that if he were to be lashed again he would probably die.

The pattern of preaching which we see in the Father and in the Lord Jesus must be our model. He identified with us in order to 'get through' to us; the power of His personality and work rests in the fact that He was genuinely human. God Himself chose this method, of manifestation in a Son of our nature, in order to redeem us. We can do likewise, in identifying with our audience; living as they do when in a mission field; learning their language, both literally and metaphorically; patient bearing with those suffering from depression, Aspergers, alcoholism, various neuroses... to win them. Thus to the Gentiles Paul became as a Gentile; and as a Jew in order that he might win them who were under the law (1 Cor. 9:20). This is exemplified by the fact that he underwent synagogue floggings (2 Cor. 11:24)- which were only administered to Jews who willingly submitted to the punishment because they were orthodox Jews. This was the extent to which Paul became as a Jew in the hope of winning the Jews. Fly by preachers, seeking to establish a colony of their home base, will never achieve much lasting success. Paul would pay any price in order to identify with his audience, in order to win them to Christ. He was living out the spirit of Jesus, who likewise identified Himself with us to the maximum extent in order to save us. "Forty lashes minus one" was a synagogue punishment, based on Dt. 25:2,3, which could only be administered to members of the synagogue community- and apparently, the members had the right under local Roman law to resign from the synagogue and escape the punishment. It would've been far easier for Paul to disown Judaism and insist he was not a member of any synagogue. But he didn't. Why? Surely because this was the extent to which he was willing to be all things to all men, to truly be a Jew in order to save the Jews. And we too can choose daily the extent to which we identify ourselves with those whom we seek to save. It's not simply the case of a Western missionary suffering privations along with the impoverished local population to whom he or she seeks to preach. It's about us each getting involved in the mess of others' lives, at great personal cost, in order to show true solidarity with them, on which basis we can more effectively witness to them. This is surely the way in which we are to 'love the world'; this inhuman world, this enormous collection of desperate, lonely people, into whose mundane experiences we can enter simply through genuine, caring, person-to-person encounter. And by doing this we will find ourselves. For it seems to me that the truly creative and original personalities, the Lord Jesus being the supremest, are those who give of themselves in order to enter into the lives and sufferings of others. And that, by the way, may explain why there are so few truly freethinking minds. Paul didn't just love the Jewish people in theory, he didn't draw a distinction between the Jews as persons, and their role or status before God. He loved them as persons, and so he suffered for them in order to save them.

11:25 *Three times I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been adrift at sea-* Only one beating with rods is recorded (Acts 16:22 s.w.), but Acts records only a fraction of Paul's sufferings. Beating with rods was forbidden to Roman citizens by the *Lex Porcia*, but Paul kept quiet about his Roman citizenship in order to receive it (Acts 16:37). He so wished to identify as a Jew in order to save the Jews; all he had to do was utter the words *Civis Romanus sum* and he could have avoided these beatings with rods, which often caused the death of the victim. We must ask to what extent we are willing to suffer in order to achieve identity with those we seek to save by our witness. The shipwrecks were prior to that on the journey to Rome; the Acts record of Paul's travels says nothing of them and we wonder how many other dramas were not recorded.

Paul endured one of the most traumatic lives ever lived- beaten with rods, shipwrecked, sleepless, cold, naked, betrayed, robbed, beaten, and so much of this isn't recorded (e.g. the three shipwrecks and two of the beatings with rods he speaks of in 2 Cor. 11 aren't mentioned in Acts). And yet he implies that even more than all that, he felt the pressure of care for his brethren in the churches. His heart so bled for them... Paul lived a traumatic life, lived with weakness, fear, trembling, tears, distress, dying daily, burdened beyond measure, despairing of life, having the sentence of death, sleeplessness... and all this would have had quite some effect upon him nervously. Almost certainly it would have lead him to be depressive, and this may explain some of these flashes of anger. Yet these flecks of pride and anger reflect something of Paul's former self. He is described as fuming out hatred against the Christians like an animal; he was driven by hate and anger. Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt. Although Paul changed from an angry man to one dominated by love, to the extent that he could write hymns of love such as 1 Cor. 13, there were times when under provocation the old bitterness and anger flashed back. We too have these moments, and yet in the fact that Paul too experienced them even in spiritual maturity, we have some measure of comfort.

11:26 *On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, in danger from false brothers-* Travel in the first century was a risky business; flash floods ["rivers"] in Asia Minor claimed many lives. And Paul additionally had to cope with the opposition of both Jews and Gentiles. To obey the great commission to take the Gospel out into the world was therefore a call to face danger and hardship. In spiritual terms, that same calling has not been made any less radical for we who face so many distractions and issues which would likewise discourage us from obeying it.

The "false brothers" were surely those of Gal. 2:4, the Jews bent on derailing Paul's missionary work by entering the churches he founded under the guise of being converts. Paul is here hinting that he knows exactly who the false teachers of Corinth are; or as he puts it in 2:11, he was not ignorant of the devices of the [Jewish] satan. Paul mentions this problem last in this list because he wanted to highlight how aware he was of it.

11:27 *In toil and hardship-* Literally, weariness and pain. Perhaps Paul's traumatic life resulted in some form of M.E. or similar disease, causing pain and sucking his energy, resulting in insomnia.

*In many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, in frequent fastings, in cold and nakedness-* Paul loved Israel with the love of Christ: he describes his hunger, thirst, nakedness, insomnia and loss of all things in the very language used about Israel's condemnation (2 Cor. 11:27 alludes Dt. 28:48). In other words, he saw himself as somehow bearing their punishment for apostasy in his own life, as if he was some kind of suffering representative for them. His sufferings were the very opposite of what the Judaists believed should accompany an accredited spiritual teacher, for they practiced a form of the prosperity Gospel, having a proverb that "a goodly house, a fair wife, and a soft couch" were the prerogatives of the "disciples of the wise". Paul is in a way confirming their secular view that he was 'unwise'. But as he has stated in 1 Cor. 1, there is a total inversion of secular wisdom and blessing for those who are of the Spirit.

11:28 *Besides those things that are without, there is the daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches-* Paul identified his biggest pressure as "the care of all the churches" which he said 'came upon (Gk. to throng / mob / rush at) (him) daily' (2 Cor. 11:28)- as if he woke up each morning and had these anxieties thronging his mind.

11:29- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*Who is weak, without me being weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?-* The word he uses for "weak" is one which features frequently in his writings, and it nearly always refers to the spiritually weak (Rom. 4:19; 14:1,2,21; 1 Cor. 8:9,11,12). He was so sensitive to his brethren that when he considered their spiritual weakness, he felt the same. He identified with them, he could put his arm around someone who was all slipping away and say "I'm with you" and so evidently mean it. He had a genuine and obvious sense of solidarity with them. He wasn't critical of them to the extent that he made a barrier between him and them. They knew his disapproval of their ways, but yet it was so evident that his heart bled for them. And when Paul saw a brother being offended, he burnt. His heart burnt and bled as he saw someone drifting away with a chip on their shoulder. He didn't just shrug and think 'Well that's up to them, their choice'. He cared for them. That brother, that sister, and their future meant so much to him. If Paul had lived in the 21st century, he would have telephoned them, written to them, visited them, met with them regularly. To be weak and to be offended are bracketed in Rom. 14:21: "Your brother is offended, or is made weak". And here in 2 Cor. 11:29 we have the same idea: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?". The parallels imply that if the weak brother was offended, Paul himself was as it were offended, even though he himself didn't stumble. He could identify with the spiritual weakness of others to the point of feeling that he himself had committed it or was in the shoes of the sinner- even though he himself was innocent. Paul could share with the Corinthians that he 'burnt' every time a brother stumbled from the way, feeling weak with the weak. The 'burning' could be a reference to the figurative usage of fire as the end destruction of the condemned at the last day. Paul felt their condemnation as if it were happening to him. He did not shrug and turn away but rather felt their spiritual situation as being his, such was his identity with them. He was no mere platform speaker, or a church member only theoretically connected with their brethren by common ascent to a statement of faith.

11:30 *If it is necessary for me to boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness-* The supreme qualification was in his weakness. We noted on :21 that Paul has been presenting a kind of inverted form of the biographical list of achievements which was commonly known as an 'encomium'. And now he sums up his humiliations with an incident which for him epitomized the humiliation which characterized his entire ministry. His glorying in his infirmities in 12:5 is similar.

11:31 *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed for always, knows that I do not lie to you-* The Corinthians considered Paul to be a liar, hence his frequent protestations that he is speaking the truth before God. Judaism spoke of God as the ever blessed One, but Paul here makes it clear that this title is true through His being the Father of the Lord Jesus, through whom His blessings are now articulated to men.

11:32 *In Damascus, the governor, under Aretas the king, guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to capture me-* Paul has his historical facts correct, for Aretas was an Arabian king from Petra who briefly ruled over Damascus. If the Bible is a forgery or uninspired, there would be major blunders in historical fact; but there are not. The Jews clearly had influence with him, far more than the Acts record indicates, and had his whole garrison (AV- an appropriate term, seeing Aretas of Petra had only recently taken control in Damascus) trying to catch Paul. There was therefore a mobilization of a large number of soldiers in order to stop Paul escaping Damascus. Hence the impression it left upon Paul.

11:33 *And only through a window I was let down in a basket by the wall and escaped his hands-* Paul sees this escape through a window in a basket as so humiliating because it associates him with David's escape from Saul's persecution. And Paul- the former Saul- saw himself as having persecuted David-Jesus and was ashamed of it. Paul seems to take a certain pleasure in this inversion of values. He boasts of how his greatest moment was when he was let *down* a wall in a basket, in fear for his life (2 Cor. 11:30-33). "In antiquity a Roman soldier who was first up a wall and into a conquered city would win a special award called a wall crown. Paul says he will boast of being first *down* the wall"- running from the enemy (Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* p. 124). He was the very reverse of the classical ancient warrior. This inversion of values is just as hard and counter-cultural to live by in our world. It's quite possible that garbage was lowered over the wall into a rubbish tip at the foot of the wall, which would have added to the humiliation. Outside the city, with wild dogs howling amongst the stinking garbage... this was the Biblical picture of condemnation. And Paul experienced it and through that humiliation was saved. In essence, we pass through the same experience.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *I must go on boasting (though there is nothing to be gained by it). I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord-* I have earlier explained the various tensions and apparent contradictions within 2 Corinthians by proposing that Paul is writing down his feelings and emotions as a flow of consciousness, albeit recorded under inspiration. This explains the volatile change of feelings and approach, one moment passionately 'in love' with them, the next bitterly angry and resentful against them. He has explained that indeed boasting or attempting to outboast his competitors is not the way to go. Here in 12:1 he again recognizes that, but feels compelled to go on boasting. In chapter 11, Paul has as it were concluded his list of sufferings by citing what to him was the supremest humiliation- being lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus into the rubbish tip beneath. But now he seems to revert to boasting about his qualifications in terms which might impress his competitors and their supporters. This reversion to a previous theme which he had supposedly concluded is evidence enough that indeed, we are dealing with a flow of consciousness record. "Visions and revelations" were the very things which the false teachers claimed to have.

12:2 *I knew a man in Christ, fourteen years ago-* Paul makes one of his most significant boasts mindful that he should not be boasting really. This may explain his reference to himself only in indirect terms, in an attempt not to boast overmuch about such a holy thing. He does this elsewhere (see on Gal. 1:6). "I knew a man" would be better "I know a man" (RV); the person in view was still alive. The vision which he received may well have included something about Jew and Gentile unity; for 14 years previously on some chronologies would take us to the time of the Jerusalem Council. Or the reference could be to the trance in the temple (Acts 22:17) in which he was told to go to the Gentiles.

*Whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows-* Paul stresses this twice. Perhaps his idea was that the mode of the vision was unimportant; it was the message which was all important. The mode of revelation was important to the Jewish mysticists; whilst Paul is indeed trying to outboast them ['foolishly'], he is also saying that the mode is insignificant. Whether a man went to Heaven in a bodily form to get a revelation is irrelevant compared to the message.

*Such a person was caught up to the third heaven-* The picture of being "caught up" is presented right after that of Paul being let down the wall of Damascus as refuse, into the rubbish tip at the foot of the walls; an incident he presents as his greatest humiliation. But it was that bringing down which was the basis for his being lifted up so high, following the pattern of the Lord Jesus.

The idea of seven heavens currently held in Judaism and Islam is not Biblical. There were at Paul's time only three understandings of heaven: the literal air, the sky, and Heaven itself where God dwells. Paul may simply mean 'Heaven' but he uses this Jewish terminology because his opponents in view were Judaists. Another popular suggestion is that the first heaven refers to the Mosaic law; the second heaven to the Christian dispensation, and the "third heaven" to the Kingdom age. But this is problematic because one would expect 'heavens and earth' to be the phrase used for a dispensation of things. And before the Mosaic law there was also some form of Divine dispensation upon earth, which this schema ignores. So I read Paul as simply referring to 'Heaven', which he parallels with "paradise" (:4). Paradise was understood in Jewish terms as Heaven; although one could argue that it refers to the Kingdom of God on earth when the paradise of Eden is restored. We would note in that case that Paul has recently presented the Corinthian church as Eve in paradise, now tempted by the serpent of the Judaizers (11:3). If paradise was where the Corinthians were now

situated, in prospect at least, perhaps Paul means that he saw a heavenly vision of how things really are for the church from the Heavenly viewpoint. It would be this vision which motivated Paul to keep on keeping on so tenaciously with the Corinthians, and would explain his obsessive insistence upon the success of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. This heavenly vision of how God saw the Gentile believers would have likewise inspired Paul to continually view them as being justified in Christ and acceptable to God. It would explain his extraordinary motivation for the Corinthians, and why he mentions this vision at this point. He doesn't utter in words what he saw- because his ministry for them was a public statement of his striving to achieve that ideal.

We are real life men and women, only too aware that although yes, we are in Christ, we are also all too human still. We still sin the sins and think the thoughts and feel the feelings of those around us. We are only who we are, born in such a town, living in such a city, doing a job, trying to provide for a family. In our minds eye we see the spotless lamb of God, moving around Galilee 2000 years ago, doing good, healing the sick. But He was there, and we are here now, today, in all our weakness and worldly distraction. He was as He was, but *we* are as we are. Reading through his letters, it is apparent that Paul saw himself as two people: a natural man, a Jew from Tarsus, a Roman citizen living in the Mediterranean world... and also, a man in Christ. This is why he here says of himself: "I knew a man in Christ", who had great visions 14 years previously (at the council of Jerusalem of Acts 15), and who was subsequently given a "thorn in the flesh". "Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory", he writes (2 Cor 12:5), as if separating himself from this more spiritually exalted man who saw these visions. Paul is surely telling us that he sees himself as two people. He makes the point clearly: "I will not be a fool... I am become a fool" (:6,11). He was the greatest apostle; although he was nothing (:11). This language comes to a crisis in 12:10: "When I [i.e. the natural Paul] am weak, then am I [the spiritual Paul] strong".

The Corinthians were mainly Gentiles, but Paul speaks of them as "When you were Gentiles..." (1 Cor. 12:2 RV). They had a new racial identity in Christ, and yet, he also reminded them at times that they were Gentiles. We too cannot obliterate who we are or where we came from. But superimposed upon this must be the realisation than now, we are in Christ.

Paul is in many ways a working model of how we should be aware of the two people within us. In writing to Corinth, he was highly sensitive to the danger of sinning by justifying himself as he needed to. To overcome this problem, he speaks (through the Spirit) as if he is two quite different people; the fleshly man, and the spiritual man. 2 Cor. 11 is full of statements concerning himself, which he makes "as a fool". His frequent usage of this word "fool" points us back to the Proverbs, where a "fool" is the man of the flesh. Ecc. 10:2 says that a fool has a 'left handed' mind, which in Jewish thinking was a reference to the "man of the flesh" of the N.T. There are a number of apparent contradictions between passages in 2 Cor. 11,12 which are explicable once it is appreciated that Paul is speaking firstly "in the flesh", and then concerning his spiritual man. Thus he insists that he is not a fool (11:16; 12:6), whilst saying that he is a fool (12:11). He says he will not boast about himself, but then he does just that. He claims to be among the greatest apostles, and in the same breath says he is nothing (12:11). His boasting was "not after the Lord", i.e. the man Christ Jesus within Him was not speaking, but the fool, the man of the flesh, was speaking (11:17). The supreme example of this separation of flesh and spirit in Paul's thinking is shown by 12:2: "I knew a

man in Christ (who heard great revelations)... of such an one will I glory, but of myself will I not glory". But 12:7 clearly defines this "man" as Paul: "lest I should be exalted... through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh". The "man in Christ" of whom Paul spoke was his own spiritual man, who was "in Christ". It is interesting that here Paul defines "myself" as his natural man, whereas in Rom. 7:25 he speaks of "myself" as his spiritual man. The point is made that at different times we identify ourselves either with the man of the flesh, or with the spiritual man within us. In 2 Cor. 11,12, Paul consciously chose to identify himself with the natural man, in order to boast to the Corinthians. It is worth noting that "fourteen years ago" takes us back to the Council at Jerusalem. The revelations given to Paul then were probably confirmation that the Gospel should indeed be preached to the Gentiles. This was the "third Heaven" dispensation. The wonder that Paul would be used to spread the Gospel world-wide so mentally exalted Paul that he needed a thorn in the flesh to bring Him down to earth. Yet, for the most part, we seem to shrug our shoulders at the wonder of our preaching commission.

12:3 *And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I do not know; God knows)-* See on :2 *Whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows.* The word for word repetition is the way Jews emphasized the totality of their truthfulness. Paul is emphasizing the wonder of the things heard; the form in which they were heard was utterly unimportant compared to the content of the message. And that principle remains true to this day.

12:4 *How he was caught up into Paradise-* See on :2 *Such a person was caught up to the third heaven.* Paul appears to equate paradise with "the third heaven", but it's also feasible that he is describing two stages of exaltation; one to the third heaven, i.e. Heaven, and then further into "paradise".

*And heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter-* Alluding to how Moses saw the greatest visions of God of any man in the Old Testament; visions which he could not repeat; he only repeated the words of command which he was given. He did not tell Israel what he saw in Ex. 34. It could be that Paul is saying that what is heard in Paradise cannot be spoken on earth; or at least, cannot be articulated 'lawfully', in the terms of the Mosaic law. In this case, such visions are not really any confirmation of having Divine authority in one's message. Therefore the claims of the Jewish false teachers, and those of Paul, were equal on one level- but were unimportant, because their message was not going to be comprised of what they may or may not have heard in Paradise. Because what is heard there is "unspeakable".

12:5- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*On behalf of such a one will I boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, save in my weaknesses-* This is as stated in 11:30. Paul is inverting all human wisdom and worldviews here by saying that greatness and qualification is in weakness and not human strength. Earlier Paul has reminded them that he first preached the Gospel to them in "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3 s.w.). He seems to have in view physical frailty of health, which would encourage the view that the thorn in the flesh which we will now read of was some physical weakness.

12:6 *For if I wanted to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be speaking the truth. But I will not boast, lest anyone should account me above that which he saw me to be, or hears from me-* This awkward statement would appear to be Paul's way of explaining why he has just written about himself in the third person, and apparently distancing himself from the Paul who really did have things to truthfully boast about. Paul has now twice stated in two verses "I will not boast", whilst he is evidently doing just that. His argument that "This isn't really



me...' has limited value. I would say that this letter is the record of a flow of consciousness, and Paul is baring his heart to them. The very genuine love he has for them and passion for their salvation and the unity of Christ's body has led him to get worked up into a frenzy of trying to persuade them by all means.

12:7 *That I should not be exalted overmuch*- The usage of words with the *huper* prefix is common in this section. The self proclaimed *huper* or super apostles could not be equalled by Paul because a true servant of Christ will be held back from being *huper* exalted. Paul repeats this phrase twice in this verse to emphasize the point.

*A thorn in the flesh*- An impediment of some sort. Whatever or whoever the opposition, there could be no thorn in the Spirit; any retardation of Paul's work was only on a human level. The thorn was Satan's "messenger", and I suggest below that this refers to an individual coordinating the Jewish campaign against Paul's missionary endeavours. But there are other quite feasible suggestions about the thorn in the flesh; and these are not to be excluded. It's quite possible that the repeated beatings Paul suffered from the Satan [the Jews] resulted in various health issues such as poor eyesight which meant that indeed, the human "thorn" resulted in 'thorns' in Paul's physical health.

Here, then, are some other alternatives concerning the thorn:

#### **Poor Eyesight**

Gal. 4:10-13 speaks of an 'infirmity in the flesh' which would have led many to despise Paul's preaching; and yet the Galatians overlooked this when they first heard Paul's preaching. Speaking of the same period of time, Paul reminisces how they would have been willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him (Gal. 4:15). This would seem to make a fairly firm connection between the "thorn in the flesh" of 2 Cor. 12:7 and the "infirmity in the flesh" of poor eyesight. Thus he concludes the Galatian letter with a reference to the large letter he had written with his own hand (Gal. 6:11); not "large" in the sense of long, but perhaps referring to his physically large and unimpressive handwriting. Paul "earnestly beholding the council" employs a Greek medical term for squinting as a result of poor eyesight (Acts 23:1).

#### **Malaria**

The description of Paul being with the Corinthians in "weakness and... trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3) uses a specific medical term describing the malaria shakes. "Weakness" is the same word as here in 2 Cor. 12:5, where the thorn in the flesh is a "weakness" given which actually qualifies Paul as an apostle. This would explain why he was "in peril of waters" (Gk. 'rivers'; 2 Cor. 11:26)- the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Poor eyesight could be associated with malaria; although it is difficult to understand the malaria just beginning in mid-life as suddenly as the 'thorn in the flesh' passage seems to suggest. Paul may well have had malaria, as any such traveller was likely to- quite in addition to any physical 'thorn in the flesh'.

#### **A Spiritual Struggle**

However, there are reasons to think that whilst Paul may have had a physical ailment, the "thorn in the flesh" may have referred to a spiritual affliction. One would expect to read about a thorn in the *body* if Paul was only speaking of a physical weakness. But in Paul's thinking, "the flesh" so evidently refers to the more abstract things of human nature. The context of the "thorn in the flesh" passage would suggest that it was a spiritual weakness. Paul says that he will not boast of himself, "except in my infirmities" (2 Cor. 12:5). One of his "infirmities" was therefore his "thorn in the flesh". He is saying that he will not boast of his physical

sufferings (which might include his weak eyesight) and achievements, rather he will exult in the fact that he, a man riddled with spiritual infirmity, especially one particular thorn in the flesh, had been used by God, and God's grace was sufficient to overcome all his spiritual weakness. Now this would fit in with the quintessence of Paul's belief: that by grace alone, not human achievement, God works through human weakness to bring about His purpose. Paul isn't adding to his list of physical glorying by saying 'And you know, on top of all this, I've had to struggle all my life with physical weakness'. This would only be continuing his boasting of 2 Cor. 11. But now he changes, and says that he wants to glory in his spiritual weakness, and how God has worked with him despite that.

Paul asked for the thorn to be taken away; but the answer was that God's *grace* was sufficient. Grace tends to be associated with forgiveness and justification, rather than with the ability to keep on living with a physical ailment. Likewise Moses, Paul's hero and prototype, asked a similar three times for entry to the land, and was basically given the same answer: that God's gracious forgiveness was sufficient for him.

### **Women?**

When Paul talks about being buffeted by a thorn in the flesh, he is in fact almost quoting passages from the LXX of Num. 33:55 and Josh. 23:13, where "thorns" which would buffet the *eyes* of Israel were the Canaanite tribes (cp. Ez. 28:24); and especially, in the context, their women. If they intermarried, those women and what they brought with them would be made by God as thorns in Israel's flesh. The implication could be that Paul had not driven out his Canaanites earlier, and therefore God gave them to Him as a thorn in the flesh, just as He had done to Israel earlier. There is fair reason to think that Paul had been married; he could not have been a member of the Sanhedrin and thus had the power to vote for the murder of the early martyrs unless he had been married and had children (Acts 26:10). His comment that he wished all men to be in his marital position (1 Cor. 7:8) has another slant in this case: he wished them to have had the marriage experience, but be in the single state. As a leading Pharisee, his wife would have been from an appropriate background. "...for whom I have suffered the loss of all things" would then have been written with a sideways glance back at his wife, children he never saw... all that might have been. In gripping autobiography, Paul relates the innocent days when (as a child) he lived without the knowledge of law and therefore sin. But then, the concept of commandments registered with him; and this "wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. 7:8). "Concupiscence" is a conveniently archaic word for lust; and in the thinking and writing of Paul, the Greek *epithumia* is invariably used in a sexual context.

As an ardent Pharisee, with all the charisma of the unashamed extremist and evidently rising leader, it is almost certain that the inevitable interplay of sexuality and spirituality, of flesh and spirit, would have played itself out. And after conversion, the inevitable attraction of the committed missionary would have been evident; not least in the charismatic preaching of a new and ultimately true religion which was largely comprised of young / middle aged females (according to contemporary historians). No wonder Paul's slanderers made him out to be immoral; it was the easiest slur to cast. At Thessalonica he was even accused of preaching solely in order to get the praise and financial support of women (so 1 Thess. 2:3-12 implies). And as a man, with the commandments of God producing in him all manner of concupiscence, he would not have lightly shrugged off all these temptations. If this "thorn in the flesh" became particularly strong at a certain time, this could be seen as reference to the beginning of some illicit relationship.

And yet it cannot be overlooked that as outlined above, there does seem to be an evident link

between the thorn in the flesh and literal blindness (Gal. 4:10-13 = 2 Cor. 12:7). The explanation may be that because of Paul's wandering eyes and mind, his sight was severely impaired. He likens his ailment to a man plucking out his eyes with his own hands (Gal. 4:15), using language unmistakably recalling the Lord's command to pluck out, with ones' own hands, the eyes that offend, that we might enter the Kingdom. The command of Mt. 5:28,29 is in the very context of lustful thinking and looking. In His desire to save us, God has His way. Paul saw that his weakness for women would have cost him the Kingdom, and that therefore the Lord had plucked out his eyes. He had been given a thorn in his flesh spiritually; and so the Lord had given him a thorn in the flesh physically, that he might conquer that spiritual weakness. The other reference to plucking out the offending eye is in Mt. 18:9, in a context regarding the paramount need not to offend the little ones. Could it be that Paul's limitation was to protect some of his converts from stumbling? And so with us, the offending eye or limb must be plucked out or cut off; and if we will not do it, the Lord will: either now, by grace, or in the final destruction of condemnation. We either fall on the stone of the Lord and are broken now, or that stone will fall upon us, and grind us to powder. We either chose the baptism of fire now, or we will be consumed anyway by the fire of judgment. The logic of devotion, self-control and self-sacrifice is powerfully appealing.

God *gave* Paul his thorn in the flesh. Whilst God tempts no man- for temptation is a process internal to human nature- He may still have a hand in controlling the situations which lead to temptation. Hence the Lord bid us pray that the Father lead us not into temptation. Each of us has his own specific human weaknesses. When the apostle wrote of shedding *the* sin which doth so easily beset us (Heb. 12:1), he may have been suggesting that we each have our own specific weakness to overcome. This is certainly a comfort to us in our spiritual struggles. We aren't alone in them. They were given to us. We aren't alone with our nature. The purpose and plan of God for us is articulated even through the darkest nooks of our very essential being. Understanding this should make us the more patient with our brethren, whose evident areas of weakness are not ours.

*A messenger of Satan-* The Satan in view is the Jewish opposition to Paul's missionary work. An envoy / messenger / representative of that Satan had been allowed by God to operate in order to stop Paul being over exalted. And yet the work of this "thorn" was a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. It is quite possible that the Lord's work suffers because He has to work in such a way so as not to allow our pride to arise to such a point that we are turned out of the way to salvation. If we had developed to the point that we were not so prone to pride or other weaknesses, His work would prosper the more. There is the implication that one particular "messenger" of the Jewish Satan organized the persecution of Paul – Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14–15; 1 Tim. 1:20). The link between the messenger of Satan in 2 Corinthians 12:7 and those of 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 indicates that this person was a member of the ecclesia also. A primary application of the "man of sin" passage in 2 Thess. 2 may well be to this individual being in the temple (i.e. the church – 1 Tim. 3:15) of God, "whose coming is after the working of (the Jewish) Satan" (2 Thess. 2:9). This person could apparently do miracles – as could the Jewish Christians in the early church (Heb. 6:4–6). This man of sin is "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3), a phrase used to describe Judas (Jn. 17:12). This suggests an allusion back to Judas, and indicates that the man of sin might also be a Jew, who was within the ecclesia, as Judas was, but who betrayed Christ because he wanted the aims of Judaism to be fulfilled rather than those of Christ. The "day of Christ" referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3, before which time the man of sin must be developed, was primarily the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 – which again indicates a primary Jewish fulfilment of the "man of sin". Notice that organized Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching was very intense at

Thessalonica – Acts 17:5–13. The Lord Jesus could have returned in AD70 and therefore passages like 2 Thess. 2 had a possible fulfilment in the first century. His coming was delayed because the various preconditions were not met- so that such prophecies will be fulfilled in spirit but perhaps not to the letter in our last days.

The work of this messenger of Satan resulted in Paul developing the spiritual characteristic of humility. The Satan stopped Paul from being proud. Pride is produced by the Devil – 1 Timothy 3:6,7. So we have the situation where Satan stops the work of Satan. Again, this does not make sense under the traditional interpretation of Satan. Mark 7:20–23 says that pride is a result of our evil heart. Thus the trial brought on Paul by a person acting as a Satan to him stopped his evil desires – another use of the word “Satan” – from leading him into the sin of pride. “Satan” can be used to describe a man (e.g. Mt. 16:23) and the Greek word for messenger / angel can also apply to men (e.g. Mt. 11:10; Lk. 7:24; James 2:25). “Satan” may also refer to the adversarial Jewish system, and thus the messenger of Satan is most likely a man acting on behalf of the Jews.

Everywhere in Paul’s writings, as well as in Revelation, ‘Satan’ always has the definite article – apart from here. Likewise, this is the only time Paul uses the form *Satan* rather than his usual *satanas*. One reason for that could be that Paul is alluding to or quoting from known Jewish literature or ideas which mentioned a “messenger of Satan”. Another possibility is that he refers here to an Angel–Satan – for the Greek word translated “messenger” is also that for Angel. In this case, he saw himself as Job, suffering affliction from an Angel–adversary, in order to bring about his spiritual perfection. I have noted the similarities between Job and Paul elsewhere (See my *Bible Lives* Section 3-3-8).

*To harass me, that I should not be exalted too much-* Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor. 4:11 concerning how Paul right then was being harassed. The reference was to Jewish instigated opposition to his mission. “The messenger of Satan” is probably the same as the ministers of Satan referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, which we have interpreted as the Judaizers in the early church who were discrediting Paul and seeking to undermine Christianity. The buffeting done by this “messenger of Satan” is defined in v. 10: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions...” (i.e. in my thorn in the flesh which God will not take away). Note the parallel between the thorn and those things it caused. The reproaches refer to the Jewish ministers of Satan saying things like, “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10), as previously explained. The necessities and persecutions quite clearly refer to the constant waves of persecutions he received by the Jews which the book of Acts describe. This would fit the language of “buffeting” – implying physical discomfort that he experienced periodically. The infirmities would refer to the ill health which his persecutions by the Jews no doubt resulted in – being beaten until he appeared dead (Acts 14:19) must have done permanent damage, as would receiving “forty stripes save one” five times and thrice being “beaten with rods” because of the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24–25). Thus the passage probably refers to an organized program of persecution of Paul by the Jews which began after the vision of 2 Corinthians 12:1–4, from which time he dates his experience of the thorn in the flesh. It was from this time that Paul’s zealous preaching to the Gentiles no doubt stimulated the Jews to more violent opposition to him. Their complaint against him was often that he was adulterating the Jewish religion by allowing Gentiles the chance of salvation by what he preached.

12:8- see on Mt. 26:39.

*Concerning this thing-* The Greek could as well be translated 'this person', reinforcing the possibility that one particular envoy from the Jewish satan is in view. This singular "thing" is paralleled with the string of afflictions listed in :10 which were all brought upon Paul due to

the Jewish opposition to his ministry: "weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses...". They were all orchestrated not simply by the "satan", the Jewish system, but by a specific envoy of it. It would not be going too far to think that the man of sin envisaged in 2 Thess. 2 refers to this same individual. He was envisaged as taking power in the temple and being destroyed at the Lord's return. I would say that this was one of the possible scenarios which could have been fulfilled if there had been enough spiritual fruit to have enabled the Lord's return in AD70. There was not and therefore His return has been delayed until our last days, and the "man of sin" will have a slightly different fulfilment.

*I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me-* The Greek word for "thorn" can mean a "stake" – as was used for crucifying. This was to buffet Paul, as Christ was buffeted at the crucifixion (Mt. 26:67). Like Christ in His last hours, Paul prayed for the buffeting of Satan to be removed (2 Cor. 12:8 cp. Lk. 22:42). Paul "besought the Lord thrice" for this and so did Jesus in the Garden (Mt. 26:39, 42, 44). Also like Christ, Paul's prayer for release was not granted, ultimately for his spiritual good. Thus it is implied that because of Paul's sufferings at the hands of the Jewish Satan throughout his life, his whole life was "crucified with Christ" in that he experienced constantly the sufferings Christ had in His last few hours. This is exactly what we see in Acts 26:18.

12:9 *And he said to me-* We are left to speculate as to whether this was the answer Paul perceived in the lack of answer to his prayer, or whether the Lord actually spoke this to Paul in a vision. We can interpret God's silence as His word to us.

*My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness-* This is an allusion to the LXX of Gen. 33:11, where Jacob has been made weak with his thigh dislocated, in order to learn that God's grace is sufficient for him, and he needs literally nothing else. Paul would be saying that he has been taught (and learned) the same lesson as Jacob. Strength being perfected through human weakness is the whole lesson of the cross (13:4). It could be that the example of the Lord was the answer Paul received- perhaps there was no vision or statement from the Lord to Paul, but he deduced the Lord's word to him from the cross of his Lord. "My power" is interpreted in the next sentence as "the power of Christ". This would confirm such a line of interpretation. By sharing in the weakness of Christ, in His sufferings, then God's resurrection power shall be manifested in us. Paul has used the same word for "weakness" in saying earlier that human weakness shall finally be changed by experiencing a resurrection after the pattern of Christ's (1 Cor. 15:43).

*Therefore most gladly will I rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me-* As suggested above, connection with the weakness / suffering of Christ means that His power shall be manifest in us (13:4 "For he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in him; but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you").

Paul earnestly asked three times for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed (:9). The wonder is that he only asked three times. He knew it was for his spiritual good, and he believed this. Moses asked at least twice (maybe three times?) for him to be allowed to enter the land (Dt. 3:25; Ps. 90); but the answer was basically the same as to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee". The fact Moses had been forgiven and was at one with his God was so great that his physical entering the land was irrelevant. And for Paul likewise, temporal blessings in this life are nothing compared to the grace of forgiveness which we have received (Ex. 34:9).

12:10 *Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong-* It is in our very

weakness, the weakness of the man made to realize the weight of his own mediocrity and failure to achieve, that *the power of God breaks forth*. Reading through his letters, it is apparent that Paul saw himself as two people: a natural man, a Jew from Tarsus, a Roman citizen living in the Mediterranean world... and also, a man in Christ. He speaks of how “I bruise myself”, as if the one Paul was boxing against the other Paul (1 Cor. 9:27 RVmg.). This is why in this autobiographical passage in 2 Cor. 12, he says of himself: “I knew a man in Christ”, who had great visions 14 years previously (at the council of Jerusalem of Acts 15), and who was subsequently given a “thorn in the flesh”. “Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory”, he writes (2 Cor. 12:5), as if separating himself from this more spiritually exalted man who saw these visions. Paul is surely telling us that he sees himself as two people. He makes the point clearly: “I will not be a fool... I am become a fool” (:6,11). He was the greatest apostle; although he was nothing (:11). This language comes to a crisis in 12:10: “When I [i.e. the natural Paul] am weak, then am I [the spiritual Paul] strong”.

12:11- see on 2 Cor. 11:5.

*I have become foolish. You compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you. For in nothing was I behind the super apostles, though I am nothing-* Paul has written that it is inappropriate to commend ourselves or get involved in comparisons amongst ourselves. But carried away in a desperate desire to prove himself to them in their terms, which was surely rooted in love for them, he has done just that. But he now blames them for his lack of self control. And yet even in 1 Corinthians, Paul clearly had a tendency to boast: "For it is better for me to die, than that anyone should make my boasting void" (1 Cor. 9:15). Perhaps he would have been better to just admit his weakness here rather than blaming it on others. And we can take a lesson from that in many other aspects of life apart from a tendency to boast.

12:12 *Truly the signs of an apostle were done among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works-* Paul rightly considers his patience with the Corinthians as a sign even greater than all the miracles he had worked amongst them. We recall that the Acts record doesn't mention all these miracles performed by Paul in his 18 months in Corinth- reflective of the inspired record's lack of emphasis upon the miraculous element. The message was and is all important. All these miracles were done, but the Corinthians now doubted Paul's credentials as a Divinely approved apostle. Likewise Israel saw miracles daily in the wilderness through the provision of manna and water- but like the Corinthians, they did not believe. And so the role of miracles in eliciting real faith is demonstrated to be minimal. Not only does Pentecostalism need to consider this fact; but we too need not wish that God would miraculously intervene in human life in order to strengthen our faith. In the long run, even in the medium term, that is not what is achieved by the miraculous. The message, the Spirit within the heart, real relationship with the living, risen Lord Jesus- this is of the essence.

12:13 *For in what way were you made inferior to the other churches, except that I was not a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong-* Paul's sarcasm here will hardly win him the desired result- the return of the Corinthians both to him and to the truth of the Lord Jesus. We have here an example of his emotionally charged state shining through in the letter, especially when we recall how he began this section by writing that he would now appeal to them in the meek and gentle spirit of the Lord Jesus (10:1). The "burden" in view appears to be financial- he had not asked them for material support, although he had been in need of it, and this was now misinterpreted as meaning that he had treated them as inferior to the other churches, especially those in Macedonia, who had supported him whilst he had lived in Corinth. Whichever way Paul turned, no matter how he argued, the Corinthians were falling out of love with him. And his desperation shows. The whole record here is a worked example of

how relationships amongst baptized believers can go sour, and even if one party is innocent, the psychological processes will continue until there is a permanent rift.

12:14 *Behold, this is the third time I have been ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you-* The "burden" appears to be of asking for money, according to the second part of the verse. We could even read this statement as Paul saying 'Forget about all I wrote previously about your giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. I don't seek even that now'. This retreat from a previously held and strongly argued position is typical of the lover who is losing the beloved being willing to make any compromise. The "third time" doesn't have to mean that he was planning his third visit to them; rather does he mean that twice before he has planned a visit, but changed his plan because he realized that if he came, they would not be spiritually ready for him, and the Spirit would lead him to judge them. And now a third time he was contemplating making a visit to them, aware of the same possible negative outcome.

*For I do not seek your things, but you. For the children ought not to save up for the parents, but the parents for the children-* Paul was seeking 'them', their salvation, their relationship with him. He had earlier advised them to "save up" for his coming by putting aside something each week, so that they could present it to him as an offering for his Jerusalem Poor Fund (1 Cor. 16:2). But he appears to now be saying that they needn't do even that. They could forget all he had written about the Fund. He wanted by all means to preserve his relationship with them as his children. He even takes some false guilt over the matter by saying that it wasn't right of a father to ask his children to save up for him- it ought to be the other way around. Yet such passionate love comes just a verse after the bitter sarcasm of :13. Indeed this is a flow of consciousness being written and recorded under inspiration, giving us a unique insight into Paul's thought and feelings, and enabling us to thereby fully enter into the tragic falling out of love which happened between Paul and Corinth.

12:15- see on Lk. 15:24; Rom. 9:3.

*And I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less by you because of this?-* Paul's spending and being spent was for "you" (:14), "your souls", i.e. yourselves. He refers to their salvation; not because he believed in an immortal soul, but in the sense that he understood that salvation is personal. They themselves, as persons or selves / souls, could be saved and he was prepared to sacrifice all for this end. He did so inspired by the Lord, who for our sakes became a pauper in his death on the cross (8:9). Confronted with spiritual weakness we can so easily just turn away, considering it 'their problem'. But Paul physically and mentally expended himself for them, motivated by the Lord's love on the cross. He sets us a huge challenge. And the more abundantly he poured out his love, the less they loved him. This is really the classic, tragic final stage of the falling out of love process, all recorded in great detail for our learning. They were guilty, in the bigger picture; but the situation was made the more painful for everyone by Paul's way of seeing them as he wished them to be, rather than more realistically facing up to the fact that his hopes and expectations of them were not going to be realized.

Paul had enough self-knowledge to say that his love for Corinth was growing more and more (although this was expressed in an ever-increasing concern for their doctrinal soundness); he told the Thessalonians likewise that his love for them was increasing and abounding (2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 3:12). And Paul could therefore exhort the Philippian and Thessalonians to also increase and abound in their love for each other, after Paul's example (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:12). Paul's love for his brethren grew and grew, *even though they didn't notice this*. The 'you don't know just how much I love you' syndrome is surely one of the cruellest in human

experience. A growth in true love, true concern, isn't always apparent to our brethren. But if our growth is after Paul's pattern then this will be our experience too.

12:16 *But granting that I myself did not burden you, you say I was crafty, and got the better of you by deceit-* Throughout Corinthians Paul is quoting phrases from their allegations and questions, but it is not always exactly apparent. Perhaps using quotation marks we could translate: "Nevertheless, "being crafty", I "caught you with guile"". The New Testament so often seems to mix interpretation with Old Testament quotation; here especially we need to imagine the use of quotation marks. Given these feelings about Paul by "you", the church at Corinth (for there is no hint that only a small subgroup is being addressed), we conclude that his earlier joy at their love for him, and his confidence in them in all things (7:4) was written on the cusp of emotion, making them be in his own mind what he hoped they could be. The imagery of craft and deceit recall the serpent in Eden; this would explain why Paul has earlier claimed that it is the Jewish false teachers who were like this, and not him (11:3). Paul's lack of demand for material support from them was being read by them now as an example of craft- because he wanted to only get money out of them in the longer term. When relationships deteriorate to this extent, every act or word past or present, no matter how sincere and loving, is going to be misinterpreted. Perhaps this whole miserable account is recorded for us as comfort- that when these things happen to us in our relationships, it's not a sign of failure on our part. For Paul went through the same.

12:17 *But did I really take advantage of you by any one of them whom I have sent to you?-* The fact Paul had not asked them to materially support him was being twisted by some conspiracy theory to mean that when Titus was sent to them, he was really working for Paul in order to get cash out of them for Paul personally. Yet in chapter 7, Paul has claimed that Titus was much encouraged by their attitude, and he himself was 'over the moon' with confidence in them because of the good news brought by Titus. But the visit of Titus was clearly interpreted as Paul craftily taking advantage of them; and we conclude again that his statements about the Titus visit in chapter 7 were his own wild over interpretation of a few ambiguous words. If Paul was capable of that, even with Spirit guidance, we are too.

12:18 *I urged Titus to go and I sent the brother with him. Did Titus take any advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?-* The accusation was apparently that Titus was Paul's instrument and part of his crafty plan to extract money from them for his own benefit. Paul agrees that Titus had visited Corinth as a result of his 'urging', perhaps implying that Titus himself had doubted the wisdom of the visit. And Paul agrees that Titus shared Paul's spirit to the extent that effectively, his visit was Paul's visit. They 'took the same steps'. But he goes on to say that his spirit was solely to upbuild them (:19). Paul has elsewhere explained that he had changed his plans to personally visit them because he feared that the Spirit would lead him to severely judge the Corinthians if he visited them. But here he says that the visit of Titus was effectively Paul's visit, because they took "the same steps". Both Titus and Paul were motivated by the same Spirit and therefore their steps were identical. This same association of the Spirit with "steps" is found in Gal. 5:25: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in step with the Spirit". His refusal to personally visit Corinth was therefore surely playing some kind of game with God's Spirit, a form of brinkmanship. He and Titus were led by the same Spirit and therefore the visit of Titus was as it were the visit of Paul. They took the same steps as they were in step with the same Spirit- for "the same spirit... steps" refers to the Spirit and steps of the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21 "That you should follow His steps"). But Paul did not go personally because he feared the Spirit would lead him to judge and condemn the Corinthians for their unspirituality. Perhaps Paul would have done better to follow the Spirit's lead and recognize Corinth for who they were,



and judge them as the Spirit led him to- rather than wilfully misinterpret the reception of Titus by the Corinthians (see on 2 Cor. 7) and hold on to his own obsessively positive view of them against all evidence.

12:19 *You think all this time that we are excusing ourselves to you. But in the sight of God we speak in Christ-* "All this time" is a significant phrase, in that it means that Paul's exuberant rejoicing at the Corinthians' loyalty and warm reception of Titus (2 Cor. 7) was him believing these things in his own mind, having the love which turned hope and fantasy into reality in his own imaginations. As often demonstrated, this letter is a flow of consciousness piece of writing, recorded under inspiration, allowing us a unique insight into the feelings of Paul- a man who so loved the weakest of his converts and lived out in psychological reality the truths expressed in his great love poem of 1 Cor. 13. All along, "all this time", they had been sceptical, and Paul knew it; but he had the love that hoped and believed all things.

*All things, beloved, are for your upbuilding-* Paul had earlier written exactly this to the Corinthians, when urging that "all things be done unto upbuilding" (1 Cor. 14:26). The recurring theme of 1 Corinthians was that the upbuilding of others should be paramount in the Christian life; and it was "upbuilding" which the way of the Spirit was all about. And Paul can say that it was this Spirit which motivated both Titus and himself (:18). It was God who was upbuilding the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:9 s.w.), but He operates in this work through human agents- every willing member of the body of Christ. All and every effort to upbuild others will have His blessing and we will sense that we are His vehicle in the work. But as with the case at Corinth, this is not to say that those we work with will necessarily respond.

12:20 *For I fear, lest by any means, when I come, I should find you not as I would wish, and should myself be found by you such as you would not wish. Lest by any means there should be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder-* The issues Paul had raised in 1 Corinthians had not really been dealt with; the extreme sexual immorality and use of church prostitutes had not been addressed. And yet he still places issue like gossip, belligerent attitudes and division as of primary concern, even before the sexual issues he will raise in :21. We noted on 1 Corinthians that he had done the same there. The presence of these things would mean that he would act towards them in an unpleasant way- through the direct judgment of the Spirit. The sober warning to us all is that the wrong attitudes listed here, so commonly encountered in church life, warrant direct Divine judgment just as much as the sexual immorality of the next verse. The list of wrong behaviours listed here corresponds with the list of works of the flesh in Gal. 5:20. We noted on :18 that Paul feels that he and Titus are walking according to the Spirit, not the flesh, and there is a connection made with Gal. 5:25. Paul is therefore continuing his great theme to the Corinthians- that their problems with the flesh all arose from a refusal to allow the Spirit to operate.

12:21 *I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you-* Paul has in view that the Spirit may well lead him to severely judge them. But to be used in that way would be a very humbling experience for Paul. Any disciplining of others should likewise be a humbling for us, rather than any expression of pride or superiority (as in Gal. 6:1). The idea of being humbled is exactly that used by Paul regarding the Lord's death (Phil. 2:8 s.w.). Paul had earlier been humbled in Corinth, when he was left destitute and yet never asked the Corinthians for material help (2 Cor. 11:7). For Paul to meet the Corinthians and have to judge them as unspiritual would be humbling for Paul, as he had boasted about their strengths to others and inflated them in his own mind. To have to judge them for not being like that would be humbling for Paul.

*And I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality and sensuality that they have practiced-* Paul had earlier urged them to mourn over those they had to discipline for sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:2). All such discipline should be done in genuine mourning. The sexual issues raised with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians are not raised by Paul in 2 Corinthians until this point. He has been giving them exaggerated praise for separating from the immoral man of 1 Cor. 5, and trying to get them to donate to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. And he has written in very inflated terms about their devotion to him and the Lord in chapters 7-9. Through all that, he has not raised with them the obvious issue as to why they had not dealt with their issues of sexual immorality. Now he has apparently given up any hope of getting any donations out of them (see on :14) and is realizing the reality of things with them, he returns to these more obvious concerns. Paul knew they were impenitent of these sexual issues- and yet speaks so glowingly of them in chapter 7 and elsewhere. Yet again I have to make the point that he was so in love with them that he wrote on the cusp of emotion, and the inspired record has preserved his feelings and flow of consciousness- for our learning.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *This is the third time I am coming to you-* Paul connects this "third time" with the need for two or three witnesses. Is he trying to argue that the three witnesses against Corinth equate with his three visits to them? For each time the Spirit would have witnessed against them. Here we have an example of the liberal interpretation of Old Testament passages; for the requirement of two or three witnesses obviously refers to two or three separate witnesses, and not one person witnessing the same behaviour two or three times. Such out of context allusion is common in the Bible and in rabbinic interpretations. This doesn't justify us in treating the text likewise (seeing we are not inspired), but it should also serve as a foil to the claim that context and logical corollary are all important in Biblical interpretation.

*At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established-* The quotation from Dt. 19:15 suggests that the consequences of the trial would be serious, perhaps involving death or being cut off from the Lord's people. Such severe punishments could be executed by the apostles in the first century; we think of Ananias and Sapphira. The same words are used as in Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences; but they are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6).

13:2- see on 1 Cor. 15:10.

*I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them-* The enumeration of the visits is because Paul is viewing his two or three visits as the two or three witnesses against Corinth (see on :1). This threat of judgment for unrepented of moral sin had therefore hung over the Corinthians ever since the time of 1 Corinthians. This makes Paul's expression of confidence in them "in all things" in chapter 7 rather questionable. He appears to have written that on the cusp of emotion, obsessed with the possibility of their giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund to the extent that he overlooked their unresolved gross moral failings. "I will not spare" calls for comparison with how Paul had earlier aborted a planned visit to Corinth in order to "spare" them judgment (2 Cor. 1:23). There is no record however that Paul ever made the threatened visit. The silence of the record is intentional, as we are left to struggle with the issues of whether patience with apostasy is to be limitless, or whether we are at times to act; and with the obvious question as to how far we can take precedent from an apostle who had the Spirit gifts of discernment and judgment.

13:3 *Seeing you seek proof that Christ speaks in me (who toward you is not weak but is powerful in you)-* Gk. "of the Christ that speaks in me". "Toward you" could as well be rendered 'among / within you'. His threatened judgment of them would be the final proof that indeed, he is of Christ. His words were those of Christ. And yet 2 Corinthians is a flow of consciousness letter, recording the emotions and gut reactions of Paul with all the contradictions and paradoxes which there are within human emotions. His final judgment of them, however, would be the word of Christ toward them. Again Paul returns to his favourite theme with the Corinthians- that Christ is indeed potentially within them through the gift of His Spirit / presence in their hearts (1:22; 5:5). They had not actualized it, they acted as if He was "weak" within them; but if only they would, they would perceive a perfect congruence between the Spirit in them and them and that within Paul. For Christ at least potentially is all and within all those baptized into Him.

13:4 *For he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in him; but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you-* Paul's much mocked "weakness" in the flesh was on account of his identification with the crucified

but glorified Christ. Because we are in Christ, His death was not an isolated historical event. We also are weak *with* Him, on account of having been baptized into Him (2 Cor. 13:4 RV), such is the identity between us and Him. When Paul reflected upon his own sickness [which the RVmg. calls his stake / cross in the flesh], he could say in all sober truth that he gloried in his weakness, because his identity with the weakness of Christ crucified also thereby identified him with the strength and power of the risen Lord (2 Cor. 11:9). The same spirit of Christ which is within us now is the basis upon which we shall be immortalized in a bodily form at the last day. Rom. 8:11 says this explicitly: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you [now], He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall [then, at the last day] give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you [now]". This is why if we do not have the Spirit of Christ transforming us now, we are none of His both now and eternally. That same "power of God" was as equally available to the Corinthians as it was to Paul; he would live eternally with Christ on account of God's power "toward [within] you". All accusation and answers to them would unnecessary if they would only perceive that the same Spirit worked within Paul as was within them. It was Judaism which did not know "the power of God" (Mt. 22:29) and their influence led the Corinthians to likewise not recognize that power which was potentially within them by the Spirit.

13:5- see on 2 Tim. 4:6.

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*- The Greek grammar suggests an emphasis upon "yourselves". They were to test themselves, rather than putting Christ and Paul to the test. As explained on :4, if they were in touch with the Spirit of Christ within them, then they would perceive that it was the same Spirit within Paul. All examination of his legitimacy as a brother and apostle would therefore be unnecessary, because the answer would be found within them, in their own hearts and consciences where the Spirit ought to have been active (see on 5:11). This is why Paul urges them to realize that Christ was within them. And if they did not know that, then they had failed the test.

If we cannot examine ourselves and know that Christ is really in us, then we are reprobate; we "have failed" (2 Cor. 13:5 G.N.B.). Self-examination is therefore one of those barriers across our path in life which makes us turn to the Kingdom or to the flesh. If we can't examine ourselves and see that Christ is in us and that we have therefore that great salvation in Him; we've failed. I wouldn't be so bold as to throw down this challenge to any of us in exhortation. But Paul does. It's a powerful, even terrible, logic.

The NT speaks of "the faith in Christ" or "the doctrine of Christ". "The faith", the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel, is all epitomized in a real person. To know we are "in the faith" is to know that Christ is in us (2 Cor. 13:5). "The faith", the set of doctrines we must continue believing, is paralleled with the man Christ Jesus. Jesus was "the word made flesh", and "the word" very often refers to the word of the Gospel rather than the whole Bible. The life which the corpus of doctrine brings forth is essentially the life and living of the man Christ Jesus. He was and is the supreme and living example of the living out of all the doctrines. It has been well said by Frank Birch that "Faith is not simply the intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrine. Faith is ultimately shown in a person, the man, Christ Jesus".

There is a question which cuts right to the bone of each of us; right through the debates and semantics which increasingly shroud our Christian lives. 'Can we be completely certain that should Christ return now, we will be in the Kingdom?'. Posing this question provokes widely different response- from 'Of course not! How presumptuous!', to that of the present writer: 'By God's grace- yes!'. We can't say ultimately because we may fall away in the future- but we should be able to assess the spiritual state we are in at this present point in time. If we cannot do this, then our salvation is very much at risk; as Paul bluntly told Corinth: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). They sought proof that Christ was in Paul (2 Cor. 13:3), yet he challenges them to know whether Christ is in them personally. The implication was that if they could not judge that, they were in no position to ask whether Christ was in Paul- or any other. This is vintage Paul; the logic is irresistible.

13:6- see on Mt. 3:11.

*But I hope you shall know that we have not failed the test-* Paul's hope as ever is for their repentance, through recognizing the Spirit of Christ within them and walking according to the Spirit. If they did that, as explained on :4 and :5, they would perceive that the same Spirit was within Paul, and he too had not failed the test but was legitimate.

13:7 *Now we pray to God that you do no evil. Not so we may appear to have met the test, but so you may do what is right-* This prayer raises the question as to whether our prayers can influence the moral behaviour of others. And surely we can have such influence, otherwise such prayer would be unnecessary and pointless. In the final unenterable algorithm of salvation, there is a role played by the prayers and faith of third parties. when the Lord saw the faith of the friends, he forgave the sins of the paralyzed man (Mk. 2:5). In His wisdom, God has set up the whole algorithm to include these factors. This is why we like Paul should continually be in prayer and concern for our erring brethren, and why we should invite their prayers for our salvation and forgiveness. This is one reason why we need fellowship with each other- real fellowship, sharing our real spiritual situations with each other, and not simply spending a few hours each week in the same hall going through well established rituals which salve our religious consciences.

David's requests in areas apart from forgiveness and salvation largely centred around his desire for God to grant spiritual help to others. There are many examples of praying for God to help others spiritually: 2 Kings 19:4; 2 Chron. 30:18; Job 42:10; Rom. 10:1; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 1:9,19; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Jn. 5:16. Surely this was also the spirit behind Abraham's intercession for Lot to be saved out of Sodom. Granted a certain modicum of spirituality in those being prayed for, Noah, Daniel and Job all delivered the souls of others by their prayerful righteousness (Ez. 14:14). When we pray for others, God sees it as them praying (if they have a modicum of spirituality), in the same way as when the Lord Jesus prays for us, He interprets what He knows to be our spirit to God, recognizing that we don't know how to pray in words as we should (Jer. 11:14). The Lord Jesus prayed for us concerning spiritual issues which at the time we did not understand (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 17:9,15,20), and Paul especially seems to have grasped this example.

*Though we may seem to have failed-* The idea may be as Vine suggests: "We pray God that you do no evil, not in order that your good conduct may attest the excellence of our teaching and example, so that we shall be approved; but in order that you may do what is good, thus rendering it impossible for us to prove our apostolic authority by administering discipline. In

that case we shall be as men unapproved". We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. And thus Paul can say that "we be as reprobates" (2 Cor. 13:7), using a Greek word elsewhere translated "castaway", "rejected", in the context of being rejected at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 9:27; Heb. 6:8). Yet he says in the preceding verse that he is most definitely *not* reprobate (2 Cor. 13:6). Here we have the paradox: knowing that we are not and by grace will not be rejected, and yet feeling and reasoning as if we are.

13:8 *For we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth*- If our motivation is for the salvation of others to God's glory, whatever choices we make in exercising that conscience cannot be ultimately against that final truth of eternal salvation. The Paul-Corinth had focused upon specifics- whether he was correct to ask them to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund, right or wrong in his attitude to taking material support from them, justified or not in considering himself their spiritual father etc. But these questions are merely cosmetic. The essence comes down to our motivation, and if that is pure, then we cannot be legitimately accused of doing anything "against the truth". The tension between *kata* ["against"] and *huper* ["for"] is to be found in Mk. 9:40, to which Paul surely alludes: "He that is not against us is for us". God likewise is "for" us and therefore nothing and nobody can be "against" us (Rom. 8:31); and that same positive spirit is found in His ultimate usage of all we seek to do towards the salvation of others to His glory.

13:9 *For we rejoice, when we are weak and you are strong*- The 'weakness' could mean that if they were truly strong in the Lord, then Paul would be 'weak' to administer discipline. *We* are weak and *you* are strong connects to the paradox established in 12:10, the only place where these words for "weak" and "strong" occur. Paul had learned that when *he* was weak, then *he* was strong. But now he speaks of how he wishes *his* weakness to be *their* strength. He wished the strength he experienced from his weakness to be shared with and experienced by them. The strength he gained through weakness was the strength of Christ; and he wished that same strength to be experienced by them. And he believed that his sufferings for them in his weakness could actually lead to their spiritual strengthening (see on :7). The same ideas are expressed in :4, where Paul says that the power of God which shall energize him is the same "power of God toward you".

*This we also pray for, even your perfecting*- Their perfecting was perhaps the outcome Paul wished to arise out of his visit to them; for he uses the same word in 1 Thess. 3:10 of how he longed to visit the Thessalonians and "perfect that which is lacking in your faith". He would far rather that be the outcome to his visit than judgment unto condemnation. Again we see that the efforts of a third party, in this case through visiting weaker believers, could result in their spiritual strengthening towards salvation (see on :7). God is able to "perfect" the faith and spirituality of His children (Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 5:10); and this surely is done by the work of the Spirit on the hearts of believers. This is why Paul concludes by wishing that this process of perfecting [s.w. "mending"] would be permitted by them in their hearts (:11); and connected with this wish is his final desire that the *koinonia*, the participation ["fellowship"] of the Holy Spirit would be experienced by them.

13:10 *For this cause I write these things while absent, that I may not when present with you deal sharply with you, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down*- "Deal sharply" may be a technical term for a rebuke from the Holy Spirit; it is only elsewhere used in Tit. 1:13 "rebuke them sharply". If they did not change, then Paul's Spirit power would have to be used to 'cast them down'. But the Spirit was given for their building up [more than] their casting down. We are surely correct to read in this ellipsis. 'Not A but B' doesn't have to mean 'not at all B'; but rather 'More for B than for

A'. Paul was desperately hoping that they would change so that his visit would not result in judgment for them.

13:11- see on 1 Cor. 11:18.

*Finally, brothers, farewell. Be perfected-* Being perfected by the Lord's ongoing work with us is in view in Lk. 6:40 and 1 Pet. 5:10. He is indeed active in human hearts by the Spirit. See on :9 *Your perfecting*. There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. "Be you therefore perfect" has always been hard to understand (Mt. 5:48). Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message.

*Be comforted. Be of the same mind. Live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you-* The *parakleo* or comfort in view was that of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. This is Paul's final appeal for them to allow the Spirit given in their hearts at baptism to work and transform them (1:22; 5:5). The "same mind" appealed for is not asking them to have identical positions on everything. Rather it is an appeal to accept the mind of Christ, the Spirit. As demonstrated in notes :4 and :9, this was the real basis for unity between the Corinthians and Paul; and between them and the Lord Jesus. Allowing the work of the Spirit in their hearts would empower them to live in peace with each other, as they were seeking to emulate the same one mind [that of the Spirit, of the Lord Jesus]. And through this they would experience the presence of the God of love and peace.

13:12- see on Rom. 16:16.

*Greet one another with a holy kiss-* According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the early church kissed each other at the breaking of bread meeting. This would have been the one time in the week that the church gathered together, as typically many would have been at work, as a fair proportion of the converts were apparently slaves. This was the time when the letters from Paul would be read.

13:13 *All the saints greet you-* Paul was writing from Macedonia, where he claimed the brethren would be disappointed if Corinth didn't come through on the promise to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund. All the same, they sent their greetings to these weaker brethren.

13:14 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all-* Paul's parting statement is an appeal for them to allow the gift of the Spirit to be with them. "Grace" is *charis*, 'gift'. The gift of the Lord Jesus is the Comforter, the Spirit given to every baptized believer in Him- including the Corinthians (1:22; 5:5). Despite having received it, they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). There is a fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14) in the sense that all who live the same spiritually-centred life will thereby be bound together in a powerful and inevitable fellowship. When, for example, two Christian mothers strike up conversation about the difficulty of raising children in this present evil world, when two brethren talk about the difficulties of living as Christ would in today's business world... there is, right there, in those almost casual conversations, the fellowship of the spirit. It isn't just a social connection because we belong to the same denomination.

Paul's farewell is no standard wish for their general wellbeing; it is a desire that they allow this gift to be with them. This is the fellowship or participation of the Holy Spirit in their lives which was and is the key to all spiritual progress. The "all" in "be with you all" is the last word, but is significant- for there were some without the knowledge of God, deeply in sin and now ignorant of the basic Gospel they had once espoused. But still Paul wished the activity of the Spirit in their hearts; he was not writing to some subgroup of more committed believers at Corinth. It was and is the only hope for transformation towards salvation.