

DON'T MISTAKE MEEKNESS FOR WEAKNESS

Commentary on the Book of 2 Corinthians

by Paul G. Apple, Sept. 2004, rev. Sept. 2024

GOD VINDICATES THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTERS BY TRANSFORMING THEIR APPARENT WEAKNESSES INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (12:9)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Preaching Christ ... to center attention on Jesus Christ
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Dr. Daniel Wallace: Good Overview
http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1203

GENERAL:

Scott Hafemann: “Theologically driven passion for the purity of God’s people.” This, in a word, encapsulates the motivation behind the writing we call “**2 Corinthians**.” At the same time, the letter before us is, without a doubt, the most personal of all Paul’s correspondence. As a result, his last letter to the church in Corinth, more than any of his other letters, is “theology in the flesh.” Still under severe attack because of his suffering and weakness, with even his identity as a Christian being called into question (cf. **10:7**), Paul is now forced to defend his apostolic authority and lifestyle with all his might. In doing so, his burden is to make it clear that in his suffering he is the aroma of the crucified Christ (**2:14b–16b**); that in the “*jar of clay*” that was his weakness Paul carried the treasure of God’s glory (**4:6–7**).

Thus, Paul fights for his authority as an apostle not for his own sake, but because the gospel itself, and hence the very life of the Corinthians, are at stake (**12:19**). To reject Paul’s apostolic ministry is to reject Christ (**2:14–16a**); to refuse to see the glory of God in Paul’s suffering is to reveal one’s own blindness (**4:4; 11:1–4**). Here we see, then, in the most autobiographical of terms, that Paul’s message, ministry, and manner of life are one. . .

In [the epistle], Paul strengthens the repentant majority, while at the same time seeking to win back the resistant minority. Moreover, behind the Corinthians stand Paul’s opponents, whom he addresses indirectly throughout his letter as the immediate source of the current problem. His goal in writing is to prepare for his upcoming visit to the Corinthians, at which time he will punish those who persist in rejecting him and his gospel (**6:1; 10:6–8; 13:1–10**). This is their last chance to repent, just as Paul’s letter also provides a concrete opportunity for those who have already repented to demonstrate their faith.

Strachan: The letter is an artless and unconsciously autobiographical description of the ways in which Paul was accustomed to meet slander and calumny, physical danger and bodily suffering, disloyalty and ingratitude, from those for whom he had given of his best, the disillusionment and disappointment that invaded his spirit from time to time.

Ralph Martin: The call of the gospel is “*come . . . and die*” with Christ (**4:10–12**) in expectation of God’s future that, at present veiled from our eyes, is grasped by faith (**5:7**) and awaited with confidence. This two-beat rhythm (death/life; distress/consolation; affliction/glory; weakness/strength) runs through the epistle and finds its heart in the incarnate (**8:9**), atoning (**5:18–21**), and enthroned Lord (4:5) whose “*grace*” and strength meet every human need (**12:10; 13:13**), for he “*died . . . and was raised*” (**5:15**) and lives by God’s power (**13:4**). Yet his present power is seen in the paradox of the suffering apostle (**4:7; 13:4**) who “*acts out*” in his ministry the gospel he proclaims and embodies (**5:20**). As **Dunn** puts it, Paul “experiences Christ as the

Crucified as well as the Exalted; indeed, it is only when he experiences Christ as crucified that it is possible for him to experience Christ as exalted, only when he experiences death as the dying of Christ that it is possible to experience the risen life of Christ.”

Frank Matera: **Second Corinthians** is perhaps the most personal and revealing of Paul’s letters. In terms of content it deals with the nature and exercise of Paul’s apostolic ministry, functioning as a kind of *apologia pro vita sua*. In terms of tone, it is both compassionate and defensive, reconciling and provocative, forgiving and threatening, joyful and complaining, as Paul expresses his love for as well as his disappointment with a community that has misunderstood the nature of his ministry among them.

Written in response to a situation that threatened the relationship between Paul and the community, **2 Corinthians** presupposes a **prior history** between the apostle and his community that has all the makings of a dramatic story: intruding villains, conflict and mistrust, sexual immorality, and suggestions of monetary mismanagement. If the events that transpired between Paul and the community were plotted as a narrative, a contemporary literary critic might suggest a plot of conflict that could be summarized in this way: The father and founder of the Corinthian community, Paul, finds himself alienated from his “children,” who, abetted by intruding apostles, have called into question his integrity. To resolve this conflict, Paul must engage in an extended defense of his ministry in order to show the Corinthians that they, and those who have intruded upon his missionary field, have misunderstood the essential nature of apostolic ministry and, therefore, of the gospel. In this story, Paul and his associates (Timothy and Titus) find themselves in conflict with the Corinthians and a group of intruding apostles (whom Paul sarcastically dubs “super-apostles”) over the very nature of apostolic ministry. At stake in this conflict are nothing less than the nature of ministry and the shape of the gospel that will be preached at Corinth.

Mark Seifrid: As apostle to the Corinthians, Paul teaches them and through them all of us a basic truth of the Christian life. It is fundamentally passive. Contrary to what the Corinthians suspect in his cancellation of his promised visit, Paul has purposes, makes plans, and actively engages in his mission. Yet his purposes, plans, and actions are not final. **In his weaknesses, he is being led by God** in God’s triumph in Christ, so that apart from and beyond his work, God is performing his work in and through him (**2:14-17**). As we have noted, his life is one of difficulty and deliverance. Precisely in the midst of the direst difficulties he speaks, because he has been given the Spirit of faith (**4:13**). This **speaking in the midst of affliction** is the most important ministry of all, because it is intended to reach the Corinthians and to reach us at the point of our misery, where God has deigned to meet us in Christ. Paul’s life is not a purpose-driven life, but a God-driven life. That makes all the difference in the world, to a world that lives under the power of sin and death. It is reported that **Karl Barth**, when asked to summarize his massive theological writings in a word responded, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!” If we were to summarize the whole of Paul’s message in 2 Corinthians in a word, we might take up the second line of that hymn, “**Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong.**” In essence, those are the words of the crucified and risen Lord to his suffering apostle: “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness*” (**12:9**). As the Corinthians both suspected and feared, these words apply not only to the apostle, but to all Christians. They run counter to our imagination and desires. But they are the essence of our life as Christians.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

Charles Swindoll: After sending Timothy off from Ephesus to deliver the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul, in his concern for the church, made a quick visit of his own to Corinth. Afterward, Paul returned to his work in Ephesus, where he wrote a sorrowful letter to the Corinthians that has not been preserved (see **2 Corinthians 2:1–11; 7:8**). Paul then departed for Macedonia. Once there, he received a good report from Titus regarding the Corinthians (**7:13**), which led Paul to write a fourth letter to them, titled “**2 Corinthians**” in the Bible. The apostle composed this letter near the end of AD 56, possibly in the city of Philippi.

John MacArthur: That the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians is uncontested; the lack of any motive for a forger to write this highly personal, biographical epistle has led even the most critical scholars to affirm Paul as its author.

Several considerations establish a feasible date for the writing of this letter. Extrabiblical sources indicate that July, A.D. 51 is the most likely date for the beginning of Gallio’s proconsulship (cf. **Acts 18:12**). Paul’s trial before him at Corinth (**Acts 18:12–17**) probably took place shortly after Gallio assumed office. Leaving Corinth (probably in A.D. 52), Paul sailed for Palestine (**Acts 18:18**), thus concluding his second missionary journey. Returning to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (probably in A.D. 52), Paul ministered there for about 2 1/2 years (**Acts 19:8, 10**). The apostle wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus toward the close of that period (**1 Cor. 16:8**), most likely in A.D. 55. Since Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until the following spring (cf. the reference to Pentecost in **1 Cor. 16:8**), and 2 Corinthians was written after he left, the most likely date for 2 Corinthians is late A.D. 55 or very early A.D. 56.

Raymond Collins: The city was located at the crossroads of two major trade routes, one by sea, the other by land. Located on a narrow isthmus, Corinth controlled the port of Cenchreae to the east and the port of Lechaem to the west. Corinth was therefore a port city with access eastward through the Saronic Gulf to the Aegean Sea and westward through the Gulf of Corinth to the Adriatic Sea. Seafarers departed from the ports of Corinth for such far-off destinations as Rome and Ephesus (cf. **Acts 18:18–19**). A north-south land route, the Peloponnesian Way, provided access between Corinth and the Roman province of Macedonia to the north. Strategically located at the juncture of these two important trade routes, the city of Corinth became a major mercantile and cosmopolitan center. In addition, the city hosted the biennial Isthmian Games, which celebrated the unity of the Greek people.

Kay Arthur: Sin abounded in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth...The Corinthians were intrigued by Greek philosophy and captivated by the disciplined training and athletic events held at the Isthmus. At one time the city was home to at least 12 pagan temples. The people desperately needed to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, the One crucified for sinners. The worship ceremonies carried out by a thousand temple prostitutes connected with the temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love) bred blatant immorality throughout Corinth....Prostitutes openly plied their "wares," and meat markets thrived on sales from the sacrifices offered in the temples. The Corinthians ate well, satisfied their sexual urges without condemnation, flirted with the wisdom

of men, and did all they could to keep their bodies as beautiful as those of the Greek gods. They loved to listen to great orators. For the 250,000 citizens (not slaves) there were almost two slaves per person. What more did Corinth need? Freedom! Freedom from sin and death. God met that need by blocking Paul at every hand on his second missionary journey (cf **Acts 16:6, 7, 8**) until he received the Macedonian call "*Come and help us.*" (**Acts 16:9**) After establishing the Corinthian church, Paul eventually went to Ephesus, where he stayed for three years. From there he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian believers, who so desperately needed help and correction. It was sometime between A.D. 52 and A. D. 56. (*Discover the Bible for Yourself*)

David Garland: For some in Corinth the church may have been attractive as another forum to compete for status according to the norms of society. It may have offered more promise of success in winning influence and honor in the small gathering of Christians. The Corinthian correspondence reveals that Paul had to deal with a church overcome by vanity and rent asunder by an overweening desire for honor and distinction. It created a spiritual and theological problem. Those who already enjoy status and privilege and those who strive for upward mobility to enjoy status and privilege are hardly attracted to the downward path on which Jesus leads them toward weakness and vulnerability, self-giving and humility, and love and benevolence for others.

Scott Hafemann: At the writing of 2 Corinthians, Paul finds himself in a new situation: His own legitimacy as an apostle has been severely called into question and is still being doubted by a significant minority within the church. Under the influence of his opponents, many in the church have come to believe that Paul simply suffers too much personally and that he is too weak and unimpressive in his public manner to be a Spirit-filled apostle. To make matters worse, the apparent shame brought to the church because of Paul's practice of self-support (cf. **11:7–9**), his seemingly fickle change of plans—not once, but three times (cf. **1:12 – 2:4; 2:12–13**)—and the suspicion that he preached for free as part of a scam in which he was using the collection to line his own pockets (cf. **8:16–24; 12:16–18**), all appear to support this conclusion. Consequently, by the time Paul writes 2 Corinthians, his apostolic authority is no longer common ground between him and his church as a whole. The church stands divided over Paul and his legitimacy as an apostle.

Richard Pratt: Letter Profile:

- The letter was probably written about A.D. 54–56 from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
- Paul wrote to the church in the city of Corinth, the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia.
- Paul had planted this church during his second missionary journey only a few years earlier.
- The original audience in Corinth contained members from all levels of society, but consisted mostly of people who were neither rich, wise, nor of noble birth.
- The original audience had sat under the ministry of Paul, Apollos, and Peter.
- Subsequent to the ministries of Paul, Apollos, and Peter, the Corinthian church had begun to place improper value on worldly wisdom, including probably Greek philosophy.

- The letter is occasional, written both in response to reports Paul received about conditions in the Corinthian church, and in response to a letter Paul received from the Corinthian church.
- Paul wrote the letter to correct the problems he saw in the Corinthian church, although he also included praise for certain things the church was doing well.

David Malick: Paul's Interactions with Church at Corinth after Its Founding

A. On Paul's third missionary journey Ephesus became his base of operations for three years (**Acts 18:23; 19:1 - 20:1, 31**).

B. An Unrecorded Visit

1. From Ephesus Paul made a visit which was not recorded in the book of Acts -- The second visit to Corinth recorded in **Acts 20:1-3** is probably the third visit which Paul promises to make in **2 Corinthians 12:14** and **13:1**

a. *"Here for this third time I am ready to come to you"* (**2 Cor. 12:14**)

b. *"This is the third time I am coming to you."* (**2 Cor. 13:1**)

2. Paul's unrecorded visit (his actual second visit) is probably the sorrowful visit mentioned in **2 Corinthians 2:1; 12:21; 13:2** cf. **13:1**)

a. Paul's first visit (recorded in **Acts 18**) was not a sorrowful one.

b. From the point of view of 2 Corinthians the sorrowful visit has already occurred and the third visit has not yet occurred (cf. **2 Cor. 2:1** with **12:14; 13:1**)

c. Paul does say that he does not want to come to the Corinthians in sorrow again (**2 Cor. 2:1; 13:2**) requiring discipline as before (**2 Cor. 12:21**)

C. A "Lost" Epistle

1. Paul wrote an epistle which the church does not now possess (cf. **1 Cor. 5:9**, *"I wrote you in my letter"*)

2. While it is possible that this epistle was written before the unrecorded (sorrowful) visit, it seems more logical to place it after the sorrowful visit:

a. **1 Corinthians 5:9-11** explains some of the contents of the lost epistle: not to associate with immoral people within the body and not with respect to unbelievers

b. If Paul had visited the Corinthians (in the unrecorded/sorrowful visit) after he wrote the "lost" epistle, then he would have probably explained this point in person rather than needing to explain it in another letter (our 1 Corinthians)

D. The Sending of Timothy

1. Paul later sent Timothy to Corinth by way of Macedonia (**1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11; Acts 19:22**)

2. It is doubtful whether Timothy reached Corinth before the writing of 2 Corinthians

a. **Acts 19:22** reports that Timothy went only as far as Macedonia

b. **1 Corinthians 4:17** and **16:10-11** views the coming of Timothy as still future

c. **2 Corinthians 1:1** reports Timothy as being with Paul in Macedonia

E. The Writing of 1 Corinthians

1. After the sending of Timothy, news of conflicts in the Church at Corinth reached Paul through *"Chloe's people"* (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus) (**1 Cor. 1:11-12; 16:17**)

2. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in response to the reports from “*Chloe’s people*” and probably sent it by Titus (cf. 1 Cor. “???” and **2 Cor. 7:12-15**)
3. Either Titus, or whoever delivered 1 Corinthians, probably told the Corinthians of Paul’s intention to visit the Corinthians twice as is reported in **2 Corinthians 1:15 - 2:4**
4. It is possible that 1 Corinthians is the sorrowful/severe letter written by Paul (**2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8**)
 - a. Some identify **2 Corinthians 10-13** as part of the “sorrowful” letter, but this assumes the disunity of 2 Corinthians.
 - b. While 1 Corinthians does not express a sorrowful tone on behalf of Paul. It seems that the term “sorrowful” in 2 Corinthians refers to the response of the Corinthians rather than the mindset of Paul (**2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8**)
 - c. Paul’s affliction (**2 Cor. 2:4**) was probably in having to make so many corrections to those whom he loved in the young church, but who trusted in natural wisdom.

F. The Anxious Concern of Paul

1. Paul seemed to have agreed with Titus to meet him in Troas when Titus returned from delivering the letter of 1 Corinthians to Corinth to report on the response to the Corinthian church to Paul’s severe letter of correction (**2 Cor. 2:13**)
2. Paul could not find Titus and thus went on to Macedonia (**2 Cor. 2:12-13**)

G. The Finding of Titus

1. Paul found Titus in Macedonia (**2 Cor. 7:5-6**)
2. When Paul heard of the response of the church to 1 Corinthians, he wrote **2 Corinthians** from Macedonia (**2 Cor. 7:5-16; 8:1; 9:2-4**)

John Whittaker: Summary of Background of 2 Corinthians

Here is a short summary of 2 Corinthians: 2 Corinthians is actually the fourth letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. There had been a serious breakdown in the relationship between Paul and members of the church, a lot of which was motivated by some traveling preachers who ran down Paul and promoted themselves. Paul had made a difficult visit to Corinth and sent a hard letter to them, calling them to repent. And thankfully most of them did. So he writes 2 Corinthians to restore the relationship and to urge those who still oppose his ministry to mend their ways.

A large part of this is explaining the nature of authentic gospel ministry as demonstrated by himself and his ministry team, showing that the weakness and suffering they endure is part of living out the gospel. Paul also encourages the church to resume collecting funds for the Jerusalem Christians as part of their return to supporting Paul’s ministry.

Backstory to 2 Corinthians

By the time Paul writes the letter we call 2 Corinthians, there has been a lot of back and forth between Paul and the church in Corinth, so much so that it can be hard to sort it all out. Their relationship has gone through a severe rough patch (to put it mildly) and now is beginning to come out the other side. Second Corinthians is written to restore that broken relationship with the majority of the church and to challenge those who still question Paul’s credentials as an apostle by calling them to repentance. The story that lies behind all of that goes something like this.

Paul started the church in Corinth A.D. 51 and stayed there for 18 months (**Acts 18:1-22**). Sometime later, Paul heard about a serious issue of immorality in the church in Corinth and wrote them a letter (which we don't have access to) about how to handle it (**1 Cor. 5:9**).

A little while after that while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul received news from Corinth, both by word of mouth (**1 Cor. 1:11**) and in a letter (**1 Cor. 7:1**), raising questions and reporting some serious problems within the church.

In response to that communication, Paul wrote **1 Corinthians**.

Paul planned to visit Corinth himself in a little while, but before coming he planned on sending Timothy to Corinth. So he urged the Corinthians to treat Timothy with kindness when he comes. Shortly thereafter, Paul sent out Timothy and Erastus (**Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 16:10-11**).

Not long after that, Paul received word that the problems in Corinth had gone from bad to worse. In addition to the Corinthians' own issues, they had welcomed in some traveling preachers who had impressive letters of recommendation. These newcomers ran down Paul, questioning his legitimacy as an apostle and his entire approach to ministry. The church turned on Paul and things were a mess. So Paul decided to deal with the situation in person rather than send another letter.

Paul sailed from Ephesus to Corinth for a brief visit. It didn't go well at all. Paul was publicly shamed and sailed back to Ephesus with a completely broken relationship to the church in Corinth (**2 Cor. 2:1**).

Once back in Ephesus, Paul wrote what he called a "sorrowful" letter, since his visit to Corinth hadn't accomplished all he had hoped it would. This letter apparently was a very direct rebuke and call to repentance. Paul sent Titus to them with this letter (**2 Cor. 2:3, 9**) and resolved not to visit them again until he heard how they responded to this letter.

This was a change of plans on Paul's part. He had originally planned to sail from Ephesus to Corinth, then travel north from Corinth through Macedonia, and then back to Corinth, and from there sail to Judea (**2 Cor. 1:16**). This change of plans was used against Paul by those who opposed him in Corinth.

Titus was supposed to deliver the "sorrowful" letter and urge the Corinthians to return to a good relationship with Paul. After that, he was to meet Paul in Troas to report how the Corinthian church responded (**2 Cor. 2:12-13**).

So at the approximate time they were supposed to meet up, Paul left Ephesus and traveled to Troas. He waited for a while, but Titus never showed. And Paul was deeply concerned. So he left Troas and sailed to Macedonia, hoping to find Titus there (**Acts 20:1, 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5**).

By the grace of God, Titus and Paul connected in Macedonia (**2 Cor. 7:6-7, 13**). Titus brought a mixed report from Corinth: there was a spirit of repentance among the majority (**2 Cor. 2:5ff**;

7:6-16), but some were still ridiculing Paul and holding him in contempt (2 Cor. 10:1-2, 7-18; 11:4ff.).

Paul determined to restore the relationship at least with the majority. So Paul wrote the letter we call **2 Corinthians** (which is actually the fourth letter we know of that he wrote to them but only the second one passed on to us).

Paul sent Titus back to Corinth along with two others to deliver 2 Corinthians and prepare the Corinthians for Paul to visit (2 Cor. 8:18-19; 9:5). In addition to delivering 2 Corinthians, Titus and the others were also supposed to help the Corinthians resume the collection for the Jerusalem Christians that they had started the year before (2 Cor. 9:1-5; Rom. 15:25-32; 1 Cor. 16:1-4).

While they were delivering the letter and working to get things sorted out, Paul himself continued preaching in Macedonia, probably for close to a year, likely going west into Illyricum (Acts 20:2; Rom. 15:19). Finally, Paul traveled south to Corinth, reunited with the church, and spent the three winter months there (Acts 20:2-3).

Trying to keep in mind all of this backstory can make 2 Corinthians hard to understand. We are reading somebody else's mail about a fight they've had and how they are now working to restore the relationship.

Paul writes 2 Corinthians to reaffirm his commitment to the church in Corinth and urge full reconciliation with him by those who have repented. As part of that, Paul has to explain his theology of ministry and why his ministry looks the way it does, even though it is very counter-cultural and looks so weak. He also needs to call out the unrepentant to mend their ways, and to challenge them to reject those who have come into the church (whom Paul pejoratively calls "super-apostles") and who turned them against Paul.

It's this complex web of relationships that makes 2 Corinthians feel a bit erratic. Paul is writing fully aware of his position under God as an apostle. He's thinking of the majority who have pledged their support of him and his ministry. But he's also aware of those who still oppose him. All of those relationships affect what he says and how he says it.

<https://renew.org/summary-of-2-corinthians/>

UNITY OF THE LETTER

Anthony Thiselton: It is understandable that for several centuries scholars have proposed that **2 Corinthians 1–9** is not the same letter as **2 Corinthians 10–13**. Whereas in **chapters 1–7** (or **1–9**), Paul expresses his joy because he and the congregation have made up their quarrel and he can even warn about too strict a punishment of the unrighteous (**2:7–8**), **10:1** begins anew with "*I, Paul, myself*"; he attacks "*some*" (**10:2**), "*such people*" (**10:11**), "*those who would like to claim*" (**11:12**), "*false apostles*" (**11:13**), servants of Satan, "*who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*" (**11:15**), etc. This basic partition theory—that our letter of **2 Corinthians** is composed of two originally separate letters that have been joined—has been held since at least 1776, when it was proposed by **J. S. Semler**. More recently it has been held by **Windisch, Héring,**

T. W. Manson, and many others. Yet it has generated fierce debate. And whatever our views on partition theses, most writers regard the whole of **2 Corinthians** as written by Paul, even if on separate occasions. Thrall writes, “It is certain that it is genuinely Pauline.”

There are other less simple **partition theories**. Thrall and others regard chapters 8 and 9, on the collection for Jerusalem, to be too repetitive plausibly to have been written on the very same occasion. Some also question whether **2:14 - 7:1** was written at the same time as the rest of 2 Corinthians. But against partition theories, **a growing number of moderate scholars support the unity of 2 Corinthians**. These include C. K. Barrett, Frances Young and David Ford, Paul Barnett, George H. Guthrie, and most decisively David R. Hall in his book *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence*. One important factor is that Hall pays attention to **1 Corinthians**, which is one of my main reasons for passionately supporting arguments for the unity of the epistle. . .

On **2 Corinthians**, Hall does not deny the huge psychological difference between **2 Corinthians 1–9** and **chapters 10–13**. He quotes Plummer as saying, Paul “suddenly bursts out into a torrent of reproaches, sarcastic self-vindication, and stern warnings, which must almost have undermined the pacific effect of the first seven chapters.” He also quotes Jerome Murphy-O’Connor to the same effect. His reply to the partitionists, however, makes several points. First, “Paul’s criticisms are mainly directed at the incoming teachers, not at the church.” In addition to the text itself, he also quotes Barrett and Hughes in support. Hughes points out that **10:1** begins not with an outburst but with entreaty “*by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*.” He writes as their father, not as judge. Second, rhetoric in the ancient Greco-Roman world often allowed or encouraged confrontational approaches. Danker illustrates this from the speeches of Demosthenes. Young and Ford support this argument, and Hughes also cites parallels from Cicero. Third, Hall argues that the historical situation demands different responses in **chapters 10–13** from **1–9**. The final three chapters, he observes, concern a personal confrontation with rivals.

Hall also considers arguments about **chapters 8** and **9**. He writes, “A further objection to the unity of two Corinthians is the central place of the appeal for the collection. In opposing the view of Young and Ford, **2 Corinthians** has a style of a forensic defence. Murphy-O’Connor protests that ‘a plea for money, even for others, has no place in an apologia.’” He continues, “But this does not invalidate the view that Paul regarded the letter in broad terms as an apology, but with various other items thrown in.” Hall points out issues relating to Titus as an example. He also quotes R. F. Collins as suggesting that it is not legitimate to expect perfect unity in any letter. He concludes, “The general tone of chapters 8 and 9 is in keeping with 2 Corinthians as a whole.” He returns to consider these arguments further in a later chapter, engaging the work of Hans Dieter Betz. Hall approves of Ben Witherington’s argument that the Corinthian correspondence represents a “mixed” list of topics.

Finally, Hall addresses the question of vocabulary. The change from plural to singular (e.g., “*I myself, Paul*” in **10:1**) is no argument for the partition of the epistle, especially since this change of number is precisely what we should expect when Paul addresses his personal rivals. As far as examples of non-Pauline vocabulary are concerned, Paul could well be borrowing the language of his opponents. He concludes, “None of the arguments commonly used for separating chapters

10–13 from the rest of 2 Corinthians stands up to examination. We should therefore accept the testimony of the manuscripts of the early church that the letter is a unity.” Hall’s arguments are strong, but in the light of other arguments by C. K. Barrett, Young and Ford, George Guthrie, Paul Barnett, and others, they become entirely convincing. They are especially so in the light of his careful exposition of **1 Corinthians**. Thus, in the following commentary, **I shall be reading 2 Corinthians as a single, coherent letter.**

PURPOSE OF WRITING

Jason Meyer: The apostle Paul wrote the letter known as 2 Corinthians in order to defend his ministry. . . Second Corinthians is an intimate look into the inner workings of Paul’s approach to ministry. He answers the question, What should the Christian ministry look like? Paul answers by reminding his readers that Christian ministry puts the death and resurrection of Christ on display in both word and deed. . . Christian ministry always pairs weakness and strength. Weakness shows up in suffering, but strength is also present, as God sustains those who suffer. Weakness is present when Paul’s preaching is rejected because his speech is not impressive or sophisticated. But strength is present when the Spirit creates new life and brings people to Christ through that preaching.

The Corinthians were seeking proof that Christ is really speaking through someone like Paul, who suffers and is thoroughly unimpressive in appearance and speaking ability. He is quite a contrast with false apostles, who are impressive in appearance and who commend themselves with sophisticated speech and boast of all their accomplishments. Paul warns the Corinthians that these are the flashy powers of the flesh, not the power of the Spirit.

Paul Barnett: The letter of **2 Corinthians**, then, was written to prepare the way for Paul’s pending farewell visit to them. In it he attempts to explain why he deferred the third visit and wrote to them instead (**chapters 1–2**), expressing joy, nevertheless, that the moral problem which necessitated the second, painful visit and the (now lost) ‘*sorrowful*’ letter has been resolved (**chapter 7**). Further, in writing to them he urges that the collection of money for the Jerusalem church, which had lapsed, be revived and completed before his arrival (**chapters 8–9**). The major part of the letter, however, is devoted to his answer to these recently arrived ‘*apostles*’ – to their ‘*different gospel*’ (**chapters 3–6**) and to their assault on his character (**chapters 10–13**).

David Garland: The problems Paul deals with in this letter are complex. He is not engaged merely in damage control but must mend a fractured relationship with the church so that he might continue to guide it in spiritual matters. He therefore must do more than refute various charges. How does he prove that he does not make his decisions according to the self-centered wisdom of this world but that he always has their best interests at heart? How does he defend his sufficiency as Christ’s apostle when he appears to be so weak and afflicted? How does he change their attitudes toward his afflictions and suffering as an apostle? How does he convince them to give generously to the collection for Jerusalem and assure them that he has no intention of profiting from it? He must also quash the deleterious influence of the super-apostles. How does he counter their boasts without boasting in the same way they have? He must curb the continued

immorality and association with idolatry. How does he get them to accept his frank criticism so that they will not take offense but will change their ways? If they do not appreciate his sincerity as an apostle and accept his correction, they will not contribute to the important project for Jerusalem and, worse, will fall further away from the true gospel under the toxic influence of false apostles. . .

Paul defends his ministry. More importantly, **he clarifies the implications of the gospel that they have failed to grasp**. He hopes that on reading this letter they not only will become proud of him again (**5:12**) but that they will revive their interest in the ministry for the poor in Jerusalem, contribute generously, and understand the countercultural nature of the gospel. The Corinthians disenchantment with Paul stems from their failure to understand this basic paradox that expresses the heart of the gospel of the cross that he has preached to them. If they cannot understand and appreciate his cross-centered life and ministry as demonstrated by weakness and suffering, how can they understand the cross and the weakness and suffering of Christ and apply it to their own lives? Paul tries to show them that God's power exhibits itself in his ministry "in the same way in which it was expressed in Jesus: in cross-shaped humility." The world, especially the world of first-century Corinth, abominates this humility and ridicules it because it so threatens its own self-seeking outlook. His argument throughout the letter is that "only in cruciform sufferings like his" can the Lord "perform his powerful work, introducing glory into an age of darkness, salvation into a world of despair, a new age with the old life and power to more and more people." Those who cannot see God's glory in the cross of Christ because they are blinded by the wisdom of this world will hardly see it in Christ's suffering apostle. If they do see it, however, they will see how exceedingly glorious Paul's ministry is. This letter is not just a personal defense; it is a restatement of the basic doctrine of the cross that Paul preached to them (**1 Cor 2:2**).

David Malick: The Occasion and Purposes of 2 Corinthians

A. Titus reported about the brother who had been living in immorality with his step mother and Paul responded (**1 Cor. 5:1-6; 2 Cor. 2:5-11**)

B. Titus reported that Paul's change of plans had upset the Corinthians, so, Paul responded (**2 Cor. 1:15 - 2:4**)

C. Titus reported that there continued to be divisions (by "Judaizers" and legalists) in Corinth about Paul's authority as an Apostle, so, Paul responded (**2 Cor. 10:10-12**).

D. Paul desired to encourage the Corinthians concerning his genuine love for them in response to their good reception of the "severe" letter (**2 Cor. 7:3-16**)

E. Paul desired to make final arrangements for the collection from the Gentile churches to go with him to the church in Jerusalem (**2 Cor. 8--9**)

F. Paul desired to encourage the church to continue in obedience to his words because God is speaking through him

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

Scott Hafemann: The central theological theme of 2 Corinthians is **the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul's apostolic experience**. Paul's point concerning this theme is as simple as it is profound. Rather than calling his sufficiency into question, Paul's suffering is the revelatory vehicle through which the knowledge of God manifest in the cross of Christ and in the power of the Spirit is being disclosed. The clearest direct statements of this point are found in the thesis-like affirmations of **1:3–11, 4:7–12, 6:3–10, 11:23b–33, 12:9–10, 13:4**, and, by way of metaphor, **2:14–17**. In these passages Paul's suffering, as the embodiment of the crucified Christ, is the very instrument God uses to display his resurrection power (cf. also **1 Cor. 2:2–5; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:5**).

George Shillington: Some of the grandest theology of the Christian faith appears in **2 Corinthians**: loving forgiveness (**2:5–11**), transformation of human existence (**3:7 - 5:10**), reconciliation and new creation (**5:11 - 6:13**), Christian stewardship (**8:1 - 9:15**), divine strength in human weakness (**11:1 - 12:13**). Yet these great Christian themes are not set out abstractly after quiet reflection, as in systematic theology, but are conceived and written in the missionary crucible of opposition and affliction.

John MacArthur: Although an intensely personal letter, written by the apostle in the heat of battle against those attacking his credibility, 2 Corinthians contains several important theological themes. It portrays God the Father as a merciful comforter (**1:3; 7:6**), the Creator (**4:6**), the One who raised Jesus from the dead (**4:14; cf. 13:4**), and who will raise believers as well (**1:9**). Jesus Christ is the One who suffered (**1:5**), who fulfilled God's promises (**1:20**), who was the proclaimed Lord (**4:5**), who manifested God's glory (**4:6**), and the One who in His incarnation became poor for believers (**8:9; cf. Phil. 2:5–8**). The letter portrays the Holy Spirit as God (**3:17, 18**) and the guarantee of believers' salvation (**1:22; 5:5**). Satan is identified as the "*god of this age*" (**4:4; cf. 1 John 5:19**), a deceiver (**11:14**), and the leader of human and angelic deceivers (**11:15**). The end times include both the believer's glorification (**4:16 – 5:8**) and his judgment (**5:10**). The glorious truth of God's sovereignty in salvation is the theme of **5:14–21**, while **7:9, 10** sets forth man's response to God's offer of salvation-genuine repentance. Second Corinthians also presents the clearest, most concise summary of the substitutionary atonement of Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture (**5:21; cf. Is. 53**) and defines the mission of the church to proclaim reconciliation (**5:18–20**). Finally, the nature of the New Covenant receives its fullest exposition outside the book of Hebrews (**3:6–16**).

Paul Barnett: Despite the structural unevenness of the letter and its emotional extremes, 2 Corinthians makes a magnificent and abiding contribution to our understanding of Christianity, in the following teachings.

- a. God has proved faithful in keeping his ancient promises by his recently inaugurated new covenant of Christ and the Spirit (**1:18–20; 3:3–6, 14–18**). Moreover, God faithfully delivers and holds on to those who belong to Christ (**1:3–11, 22; 4:7–9; 7:6**).
- b. The new covenant, based as it is on the graciousness of God (**6:1**), has now surpassed and replaced the old covenant (**3:7–11**). It powerfully meets men and women's needs at their points

of greatest weakness – in their ageing and death (4:16 – 5:10) and in their alienation from God due to sin (5:14–21).

c. Christ is the pre-existent Son of God (1:19; 8:9), the image of God (4:4), the Lord (4:5), the judge of all (5:10), the sinless one who died as substitute and representative for all people, God reconciling the world to himself through him (5:14–21). The letter of 2 Corinthians contains Paul's most comprehensive statement about the death of Christ (5:14–21).

d. Genuineness of New Testament ministry is not established by 'letters of recommendation' or by a would-be minister's mystical or miraculous powers, but by his faithfulness in persuading and his effectiveness in converting people to the Christian faith (5:11–12; 3:2–3; 10:10–17). The very existence of the Corinthian congregation was Christ's living letter of recommendation of Paul's ministry (3:2–3). The pattern and measure of the minister's lifestyle is the sacrifice of Christ (4:10–15; 6:1–10; 11:21–33). Establishing true criteria for genuine Christian ministry is one of the major contributions of this letter.

e. The '*word of God*', the gospel, has a definable, limited content which neither ministers nor anybody else may add to or subtract from (4:2; 11:4). This gospel is exceedingly powerful in bringing rebellious humans under the rule of God (4:6; 10:4–5).

f. Paul was, both in person and through his writings, the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. The risen Lord gave Paul this '*authority*' in his historic commissioning of him on the road to Damascus (10:8; 13:10), and it is still exercised to subsequent generations through his letters, which now form part of the canon of Scripture. This letter is very important because it is Paul's major defence of his apostleship to his detractors – both ancient and modern. In it Paul answers the perennial question of why he should be regarded as having authority over churches and Christians.

g. Christian giving and serving arise out of and are in response to the graciousness of God displayed towards and in us. Cheerful and generous giving, in all its forms, brings a harvest of great enrichment to the givers (**chapters 8–9**).

Frank Matera: Second Corinthians, then, is an intensely personal writing in which the apostle speaks more extensively and intimately than in any of his other letters. The casual reader might dismiss this letter as self-centered and accuse Paul of protesting too much, but a closer reading reveals a theology no less profound than that in Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians.

- Here the careful reader will discover an insightful understanding of the relationship between apostolic suffering and divine consolation.
- Here the attentive reader will encounter a theology of reconciliation rooted in the salvific work of Christ that effects a new creation.
- Here the patient reader will uncover a deeper understanding of the resurrection and the resurrection body that awaits believers.
- Here the observant reader will find an extensive theology of the God who raises the dead.

Within this letter, the apostle provides his audience with a vision of Christ as the image of God into whose glorious image believers are being transformed daily. Within this letter is the most

penetrating and extensive discussion of apostolic ministry found in the New Testament. Those who persevere in the reading of this letter will come to a new appreciation of Paul as a self-sacrificing apostle who endures apostolic suffering for the sake of the church.

- Here they will encounter the meek and gentle apostle who patterns himself after the gentleness and meekness of Christ.
- Here they will find an apostle of perfect integrity who continually lives in God's presence, deeply aware that he must stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

In a word, they will discover an apostle whose very life so embodies the gospel he preaches that to imitate him is to imitate Christ.

Richard Pratt:

Doctrinal themes:

- the nature of the church, and its implications,
- the nature of believers' union with Christ, and its implications,
- God's wisdom,
- proper worship,
- the Lord's Supper,
- spiritual gifts, and
- resurrection of the dead.

Practical themes:

- the importance of unity in the church,
- proper valuations and roles of church leaders,
- the importance of church discipline,
- lawsuits,
- prostitution,
- marriage and divorce in light of farnines,
- Christian freedom and responsibility,
- interaction with the secular world,
- proper roles and honor in worship,
- love, and
- ministering to the physical needs of others.

STRUCTURE

Jason Meyer: Most scholars divide 2 Corinthians into three key sections: **chapters 1-7**, **chapters 8-9**, and **chapters 10-13**.

- I. The first section (**chs. 1-7**) focuses on Paul addressing misinformation and correcting a faulty understanding of his life and ministry. He corrects this flawed understanding by laying a gospel-centered foundation for assessing his apostolic ministry and its connection to the death and resurrection of Christ. There are a few notes of concern

under the surface, but overall the tone is upbeat as Paul stresses his joy and encouragement in the Corinthians.

- II. The note of concern grows slightly in the second section (**chs. 8-9**). Paul fears that the Corinthians' failure to revive the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem could be evidence that they have not truly received God's grace. Generous giving is evidence that one has received the generous gift of God's grace in the sacrifice of Christ.
- III. The note of concern builds to a climax in the third section (**chs. 10-13**). Paul sounds the alarm that their souls are in danger. The letter takes on a much harsher tone, complete with cutting sarcasm and irony. Have they been seduced by Satan to accept a different gospel and another Jesus (**11:1-4**)? The Corinthians are asking for proof that Christ speaks through Paul. They will get more than they are asking for if they do not repent, because Christ will provide the proof of His power in judgment (**13:3**). They are to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith (**13:5**).

Robert Hughes: Paul's strategy is to state the problem and then provide the solution. That strategy is present in each of the letter's three sections. Paul also gives the major purpose behind his attempts to correct their problems.

Key Verses: Chapters 1-7

The Problem:

You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. [6:12]

The Solution:

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. [5:17] Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. [7:1]

The Purpose:

We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart. [5:12]

Chapters 1-7 carefully point out the Corinthians' root problem: worldly affections that had closed their hearts toward God and Paul. Paul's solution encourages the readers to make room for him in their hearts (**6:13; 7:2**). Though Paul claims a great glory for his ministry (**chap. 3**), the treasure is in earthen vessels (**chap. 4**). True glory is easily missed if one focuses on the container rather than its contents. That is why Paul only relates to a person's heart realities in Christ (**5:12, 16**). As Paul drives his point home, he exposes the core of the problem. It is of the heart (**6:12**) and could only be remedied by "*perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (**7:1**). The entire discussion concerning Paul's ministry in weakness and glory must not be seen as a defensive reaction but as a loving correction.

Key Verses: Chapters 8-9

The Problem:

But now finish doing it also; that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. [8:11]

The Solution:

As it is written, “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.” [8:15] As it is written, “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever.” [9:9]

The Purpose:

I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. [8:8]

In **chapters 8-9** Paul commends those who would deliver the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Charges of greed and thievery against Paul had blocked the progress of the collection (**1:17; 2:17; 4:2; 10:2; 11:7; 12:13-18**). Paul tries to correct two problems:

- (1) the question of equality (**8:13-15**) and
- (2) the question of giving freely from the heart (**9:7-9**). He wants the offering to issue from sincere love (**8:8**).

Key Verses: Chapters 10-13

The Problem:

I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. [10:2]

The Solution:

And He has said to me, “My Grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. [12:9]

The Purpose:

All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. [12:19] In this section Paul commends himself as an eminent apostle. However, his boasting in weakness is quite different from that of his opponents. He corrects their assertion that he walked in the flesh (**10:2**). Also, he points out that his free service of ministry should not have branded him as inferior or as cunningly designed to cheat them. The Corinthians need their appearance-oriented evaluation of Paul turned around (**12:11**). They can only follow the correct pattern of godliness when they understand what makes for a commendable man of God (**11:3**).

John MacArthur: Outline

I. Paul’s Greeting (1:1–11)

II. Paul’s Ministry (1:12 – 7:16)

A. Paul’s Plans (1:12 – 2:4)

- B. The Offender's Punishment (2:5–11)
- C. Titus' Absence (2:12, 13)
- D. The Ministry's Nature (2:14 – 6:10)
 - 1. The triumph of the ministry (2:14–17)
 - 2. The commendation of the ministry (3:1–5)
 - 3. The basis of the ministry (3:6–18)
 - 4. The theme of the ministry (4:1–7)
 - 5. The trials of the ministry (4:8–18)
 - 6. The motivation of the ministry (5:1–10)
 - 7. The message of the ministry (5:11–21)
 - 8. The conduct of the ministry (6:1–10)
- E. The Corinthians Exhorted (6:11 – 7:16)
 - 1. To open their hearts to Paul (6:11–13)
 - 2. To separate themselves from unbelievers (6:14 – 7:1)
 - 3. To be assured of Paul's love (7:2–16)

III. Paul's Collection (8:1 – 9:15)

- A. The Patterns of Giving (8:1–9)
 - 1. The Macedonians (8:1–7)
 - 2. Jesus Christ (8:8, 9)
- B. The Purpose of Giving (8:10–15)
- C. The Procedures of Giving (8:16 – 9:5)
- D. The Promise of Giving (9:6–15)

IV. Paul's Apostleship (10:1 – 12:13)

- A. Apostolic Authority (10:1–18)
- B. Apostolic Conduct (11:1–15)
- C. Apostolic Suffering (11:16–33)
- D. Apostolic Credentials (12:1–13)

V. Paul's Visit (12:14 – 13:14)

- A. Paul's Unselfishness (12:14–18)
- B. Paul's Warnings (12:19 – 13:10)
- C. Paul's Benediction (13:11–14)

Charles Swindoll:

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Introduction — Greeting (1:1–2)	Crucial Concerns Suffering and God's comfort <hr/> New covenant ministry <hr/> Persevering in godliness	Grace Giving Example of Macedonians <hr/> Command to Corinthians	Apostolic Authority Reply to critics <hr/> Justification of ministry <hr/> False teachers <hr/> Visions, revelations, credentials, warnings <hr/> God's power perfected in weakness	Conclusion — Farewell (13:11–14)
	CHAPTERS 1:3–7:16	CHAPTERS 8–9	CHAPTERS 10:1–13:10	
Scope	Past	Present	Future	
Issue	Misunderstandings, concerns, explanations	Financial project	Vindication of Paul's ministry	
Tone	Forgiving, grateful, bold	Confident	Defensive and strong	
Theme	Paul's defense of his apostleship and message			
Key Verses	4:5	9:7	10:8	
Christ in 2 Corinthians	Jesus is the One who comforts us in our suffering, reconciles us to God, and gives strength in our weaknesses (1:5; 5:17–21; 12:9).			

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The Book of 2 Corinthians			
Focus	Testimonial	Practical	Apologetic
Divisions	The Gospel: It's Minister & Ministry	The Gospel: It's Motivation & Model	The Minister: His Might & Message
	1	5 6	9 10
Topics	Principles	Practice	Personal Detail
	Paul's Commitment	Paul's Conduct	Paul's Credentials
Place	Written in Macedonia		
Time	About A.D. 56		
Author	The Apostle Paul		

2 CORINTHIANS

The Defense of a New Covenant Ministry

<i>A Greeting of Grace and Peace (1:1-2)</i>	Correcting Misunderstandings •About trouble •About changed plans •About my letter 1:3-2:11	Explaining the New Covenant Ministry •Triumph in Christ •Sufficiency in Christ •Freedom in Christ •Transformation in Christ •Hope in Christ •Reconciliation in Christ 2:12-6:10	Admonishing the Repentant •"Widen your hearts" •"Do not be unequally yoked" •"Excel in this act of grace" (of giving) 6:11-9:15	Answering the Criticisms •About his "weak" presence •About his ministering without charge •About His "qualifications" as an Apostle of Christ "BOAST" (20x) → 10:1-12:21	<i>A Blessing of Grace, Love & Fellowship (13:14)</i>
Paul answers his critics' charges:		1) "He is mean, fickle, unimpressive and unqualified as an apostle" 2) "His obsession with giving is intended to line his own pockets"			
TO THE REPENTANT MAJORITY			TO THE REBELLIOUS MINORITY	TO ALL	
Explanations of the Past		Encouragements in the Present	Warnings regarding the Future		
<i>Satan Unmasked: 2:11; 4:4; 10:4-5; 11:3, 12-15</i>					
KEY WORDS:	•Boast (29x) •Spirit (15x)	•Glory (13x) •Grace (13x)	•Affliction (11x) •Suffering (7x)		
Written in the region of Macedonia (2:13) ca. AD 56, a year after 1 Corinthians					
<i>"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (4:5)</i>					

Jensen and Wilkinson: Overview of Second Corinthians

2Co 1:1-7:16 Character of Paul	2Co 8:1-9:15 Collection for the Saints	2Co 10:1-12:21 Credentials of Paul
Testimonial & Didactic	Practical	Apologetic
Past: Misunderstanding & Explanation	Present: Practical Project	Future: Anxieties
Apostle's Conciliation, Ministry & Exhortations	Apostle's Solicitation for Judean Saints	Apostle's Vindication of Himself
Forgiveness, Reconciliation Gratitude	Confidence	Vindication
Ephesus to Macedonia: Change of Itinerary Explained	Macedonia: Preparation for Visit to Corinth	To Corinth: Certainty and Imminence of the Visit
2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21
2Corinthians written ~ 56-57AD - see Chronological Table of Paul's Life and Ministry		
Adapted & modified from Jensen's Survey of the New Testament (Highly Recommended Resource) & Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible		

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

DON'T MISTAKE MEEKNESS FOR WEAKNESS

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (12:9)

GOD VINDICATES THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTERS BY TRANSFORMING THEIR APPARENT WEAKNESSES INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER

LOOK AT 4 AREAS WHERE GOD TRANSFORMS APPARENT WEAKNESS INTO A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS GRACE AND POWER

I. (1:1-11) INTRODUCTION: SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT

PHYSICAL SUFFERING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD'S GRACE AND POWER TO BE DISPLAYED IN COMFORT AND DELIVERANCE

(INSIGHT INTO PAUL'S APOSTOLIC CALLING AND PASTORAL HEART)

“that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (1:9)

A. (1:1-2) Greeting: Apostolic Calling

B. (1:3-11) Pastoral Heart: The Sufficiency of God's Comfort in Our Own Desperate Trials Equips Us to Comfort Others in Their Trials

1. (1:3-7) Universal Principle: The Sufficiency of God's Comfort in our Trials Equips Us to Comfort Others in Their Trials

2. (1:8-11) Personal Testimony: The Severity of Our Trials Makes Us Desperate for God's Deliverance

II. (1:12 – 7:13) THE WEAKNESS OF PERSONAL INADEQUACY –

PERSONAL INADEQUACY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY TO BE DISPLAYED IN MINISTRY

INTEGRITY AND RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS

(PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IN HIS MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND HIS COMMITMENT TO RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS)

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (4:7)

- A. (1:12 – 2:13) Ministry Integrity for the Apostle Paul Means that He Has the Best Interests of the Corinthian Believers at Heart
 - 1. (1:12-14) Integrity in Ministry Leads to the Testimony of a Clear Conscience
 - a. (1:12) Confidence of Integrity --
 - b. (1:13-14) Transparency of Integrity --
 - 2. (1:15 – 2:4) A Change of Plans Does Not Necessarily Compromise One's Sincerity and Commitment
 - a. (1:15-16) Paul Made Plans to Visit Corinth
 - b. (1:17-22) He Made These Plans with Full Integrity of Commitment
 - c. (1:23 – 2:4) He Chose to Change His Plans – to Spare Them Apostolic Discipline
 - 3. (2:5-13) The Goal of Church Discipline is Forgiveness and Restoration – Not Excessive Punishment
 - a. (2:5-6) Enough is Enough – Warning Against Over-Punishing
 - b. (2:7-9) Forgive and Restore – Instruction Regarding How to Forgive and Reaffirm Love
 - c. (2:10-11) Forgiveness Protects Against Bitterness – The Example of the Apostle Paul
 - d. (2:12-13) Reconciliation Takes Priority Over Ministry Opportunity – The Pastoral Heart of the Apostle Paul
- B. (2:14 – 3:18) New Covenant Ministry Is Victorious, Life-Changing and Glorious
 - 1. (2:14-17) God Guarantees Victory in Proclaiming Christ
 - a. (2:14-16a) The Consequences (Outcome) of the Gospel Ministry – Victory in Proclaiming Christ Does Not Depend on Positive Responses
 - b. (2:16b-17) The Confidence (Sufficiency) of the Gospel Ministry – Victory in Proclaiming Christ Does Depend on Personal Faithfulness
 - 2. (3:1-3) The Commendation for Effective Ministry is Changed Lives
 - a. (3:1) Unnecessary Types of Commendation
 - b. (3:2-3) The Only Valid Commendation for Effective Ministry = Changed Lives
 - 3. (3:4-18) The Ministry of the Spirit (New Covenant) Far Surpasses the Glory of the Ministry of the Law (Old Covenant)

- a. (3:4-6) Source of New Covenant Ministry Confidence and Competence
 - b. (3:7-11) Superior Glory of New Covenant Ministry
 - c. (3:12-18) Spiritual Transformation Accomplished by New Covenant Ministry
- C. (4:1 – 5:10) Ministers of the New Covenant Should Never Lose Heart
- 1. (4:1-6) The Gospel Ministry (Proclaiming the Glory of Christ) is Too Precious to Give in to Discouragement
 - a. (4:1-2) Ministry Integrity Protects Against Discouragement
 - b. (4:3-4) Lack of Results Do Not Detract from the Preciousness or the Effectiveness of the Gospel
 - c. (4:5) It is Not About Us – The Focus of Gospel Ministry is the Proclamation of the Glory of Christ
 - d. (4:6) God Can Make Things Happen in a Big Way Any Time He Wants – The Precious Stewardship of the Gospel Depends on Sovereign Enlightenment
 - 2. (4:7-18) The Prospect of the Ministry – Future Resurrection and Reward Enable Us to Endure Present Physical Suffering in the Ministry Without Losing Heart
 - a. (4:7-12) Showcasing Jesus Instead of Ourselves Requires Dying So Others May Live
 - b. (4:13-15) Spreading Grace to the Glory of God Requires Proclaiming the Power of the Resurrection
 - c. (4:16-18) Suffering Affliction With Perseverance Requires Focusing on the Eternal Weight of Glory
 - 3. (5:1-10) The Longing For the Resurrection Body Motivates us to Focus on Spiritual Ministry Even at the Expense of Physical Suffering – Future Glory Inspires Courage and Commitment in Living to Please our Lord
 - a. (5:1-5) Present Suffering Should Intensify the Longing for Future Glory (The Resurrection Body)
 - b. (5:6-10) Two Results of This Longing for Future Glory – Courage and Commitment
- D. (5:11 – 6:13) Reconciled Relationships and Ministry Integrity Are the Keys to Intimate Partnership in the Gospel
- 1. (5:11 – 6:2) God’s Work of Reconciliation in Christ Motivates Us to Pursue a Ministry of Reconciliation with Integrity
 - 5 Motivations to Pursue Reconciliation:
 - a. (5:11-13) Constrained by the Fear of God – Accountability Drives Our Ministry Urgency and Integrity
 - b. (5:14-15) Constrained by the Love of Christ – Christ’s Love Makes Us Minister Unselfishly
 - c. (5:16-17) Constrained by a Radically New Perspective – We Evaluate

Men from a Spiritual Perspective

- d. (5:18-21) Constrained by a Heart for Reconciliation – Our Changed Relationship with God is the Basis for Our Reconciliation with Fellow Christians
 - e. (6:1-2) Constrained by Urgency – Profitable Christian Service Depends Upon Immediate Reconciliation
2. (6:1-13) Transparent Integrity of Ministry Removes All Obstacles to Partnership in the Gospel
- a. (6:1-2) Call for Partnership in the Gospel
 - b. (6:3-10) Commendable Conduct in the Ministry Paves the Way for Partnership in the Gospel
 - c. (6:11-13) Communication that Is Open and Affectionate Solicits Reciprocation that Facilitates Partnership in the Gospel
- E. (6:14 – 7:16) Intimate Partnership in the Gospel Requires Avoiding Contamination and Repenting
1. (6:14 – 7:1) Avoid Intimate Partnerships with Unbelievers that Would Hinder You From Growing Closer to Your Heavenly Father and Manifesting Your Christian Distinctiveness
- a. (6:14-16a) Separation is a No-Brainer
 - b. (6:16b-18) Cleanliness is Next to Godliness
 - c. (7:1) Holiness is Not Outdated
2. (7:2-16) Spiritual Leaders Rejoice with Comfort and Confidence Over Genuine Repentance
- a. (7:2-4) Introduction: The Anticipation of Genuine Repentance (Leading to Full Reconciliation) Evokes Deep Emotions of Confidence, Comfort and Joy
 - b. (7:5-7) Divine Comfort Relieves Intense Ministry Pressure
 - c. (7:8-10) Godly Sorrow Produces Genuine Repentance
 - d. (7:11-12) Genuine Repentance Can Be Recognized By Others
 - e. (7:13-16) Conclusion: Genuine Repentance Evokes Deep Emotions of Confidence, Comfort and Joy

III. (8:1 – 9:15) THE WEAKNESS OF POVERTY THRESHOLD – GENEROUS SACRIFICIAL GIVING –

POVERTY OF FELLOW BELIEVERS PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD’S GRACE AND SUFFICIENCY TO BE DISPLAYED IN GENEROUS CHRISTIAN GIVING (OFFERED FREELY FROM THE HEART AND ADMINISTERED WITH INTEGRITY)

(PAUL’S PLEA FOR PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF FELLOWSHIP IN GOD’S GRACIOUS WORK OF GENEROUS GIVING)

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”
(9:8)

- A. (8:1-15) Good Intentions in Giving Must Be Consummated According to Your Ability – Or Ideally Beyond Your Ability
1. (8:1-6) It is Commendable to Give Beyond Your Ability – Example of the Macedonians – Their Strong Desire to Give
 2. (8:7-11a) It is Commendable to Excel in This Gracious Work of Giving – Call to the Corinthians – Their Duty to Consummate Their Good Intentions
 3. (8:11b-15) The Rationale for Giving According to One’s Ability is the Principle of Equality (Not Shifting the Burden to Yourself) – Factors to Consider in Giving
- B. (8:16 – 9:5) Christian Giving Must Be Administered with Financial Integrity and Offered from Prepared Hearts
1. (8:16-24) Christian Giving Must Be Administered with Financial Integrity
 2. (9:1-5) Christian Giving Must Be Offered From Prepared Hearts
- C. (9:6-15) God Guarantees a Return on Spiritual Investments – The Promises of God Promote Generous Giving Which Binds Believers Together in Glorifying God
1. (9:6-11a) 5 Promises of God that Promote Generous Giving
 2. (9:11b-14) There are Immediate Returns on Spiritual Investments – Generous Giving Binds Believers Together in Glorifying God
- (9:15) Benediction: *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.”*

IV. (10:1 – 13:10) THE WEAKNESS OF PAINFUL PERSONAL ATTACKS –

PAINFUL PERSONAL ATTACKS AGAINST SPIRITUAL LEADERS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY TO EASILY BE DISTINGUISHED FROM COUNTERFEIT AUTHORITY

(PAUL’S AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF HIS LEGITIMATE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY)

“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.”
(13:10)

- A. (10:1-18) The Reality of Paul’s Authority – When Necessary, Spiritual Leaders Must Defend Their Legitimate Authority Against

Misrepresentations by False Leaders

1. (10:1-6) His Readiness (and Reluctance) to Exercise His Authority –
Spiritual Leaders Carry a Big Stick --
Reply to Charge of Weakness

2. (10:7-11) His Powerful Personal Presence –
Consistent with His Strong Letters –
Spiritual Leaders Should Never be Underestimated –
Reply to Charge of Insincerity

3. (10:12-18) His Legitimate Sphere of Authority –
Reply to Charge of Pride

B. (11:1-15) Marks of Apostleship #1: Humility in Ministry -- Humility in Ministry (Demonstrated Here by Preaching the Truth Without Charge) Differentiates the True from the False Apostle

1. (11:1-4) Reality Check –
Discernment Should Anchor Believers in Their Devotion to Christ

2. (11:5-12) Counterfeit Test –
Humility in Ministry (Demonstrated Here by Preaching the Truth Without
Charge) Cannot be Counterfeited

3. (11:13-15) Deceitful Disguise –
False Apostles Make Every Effort to Look Like the Real Thing

C. (11:16 – 12:13) Marks of Apostleship #2: Weakness Fortified by Grace -- Severe Pressures in the Ministry Make Weakness the Platform for Exalting Christ's Grace and Power

(11:16-21a) Prelude: Boasting in the Lord's Grace and Power Can Look
Like Weakness and Foolishness to Others

1. (11:21b-29) Weakness Due to Severe Pressures in the Ministry

2. (11:30-33) Weakness Magnifies Divine Deliverance

3. (12:1-10) Weakness Keeps One Dependent on Christ's Grace and Power
Despite the Mountaintop Privilege of Visions and Revelations

(12:11-13) Epilogue -- The Marks of Genuine Apostleship Should Have
Made Such Boasting Unnecessary

D. (12:14 – 13:10) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority for the Purpose of Loving Edification (Including Discipline When Necessary)

1. (12:14-18) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority from Pure
Motives – Motive of Love vs. Exploitation

2. (12:19-21) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority for Pastoral Purposes – Purpose of Edification and Correction vs. Promoting Self

3. (13:1-10) Spiritual Leaders Exercise Their God-Given Authority Through Severe Discipline When Necessary

(13:11-14) FINAL CHARGE / GREETING / BENEDICTION

A. (13:11) Final Charge

How can I embrace Weakness and Boast in it to Showcase God's Power and Grace?

- 1) **Physical Suffering** for the cause of Christ – *Rejoice!*
“*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*”
We know Him as our **Deliverer** and our **Comforter**
- 2) **Personal Inadequacy** – *be made complete*
We know Him as our **Sufficiency**; He makes up whatever we lack
Makes us sufficient to be ministers of the New Covenant
- 3) **Poverty Threshold** – Generous Sacrificial Giving – *be like-minded*
Share with your brothers and sisters in Christ as they have need
- 4) **Painful Attacks** – *live in peace*
Or those in spiritual authority will be forced to exercise severe judgment

Precious Promise: “*and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*”

B. (13:12-13) Final Greeting

C. (13:14) Final Benediction

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” (13:14)

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1: 1-11

TITLE: SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT

BIG IDEA:

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S COMFORT IN OUR OWN DESPERATE TRIALS EQUIPS US TO COMFORT OTHERS IN THEIR TRIALS

PHYSICAL SUFFERING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD'S GRACE AND POWER TO BE DISPLAYED IN COMFORT AND DELIVERANCE (PAUL'S APOSTOLIC CALLING AND PASTORAL HEART)

"that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (1:9)

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Trouble is an inescapable reality in this fallen, evil world. Eliphaz, one of Job's would-be counselors, declared, "*Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward*" (**Job 5:7**). With that sentiment Job, certainly no stranger to trouble, agreed: "*Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil*" (**Job 14:1**). Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, lamented, "*Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow, so that my days have been spent in shame?*" (**Jer. 20:18**). That life is filled with trouble, sorrow, pain, disappointment, disillusionment, and despair is the testimony of the rest of Scripture.

Adding to the pain of trouble is the disturbing reality that **God sometimes seems distant and unconcerned**. Job cried out despondently, "*Why do You hide Your face and consider me Your enemy?*" (**Job 13:24**). The psalmist asked pensively, "*Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?*" (**Ps. 10:1**). Speaking for Israel, the sons of Korah asked God, "*Why do You hide Your face and forget our affliction and our oppression?*" (**Ps. 44:24**). The prophet Isaiah affirmed, "*Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!*" (**Isa. 45:15**). Even David, "*a man after [God's] own heart*" (**1 Sam. 13:14**; cf. **Acts 13:22**) and "*the sweet psalmist of Israel*" (2 Sam. 23:1), had moments of doubt and discouragement. In **Psalm 13:1** he asked despairingly, "*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?*" while in **Psalm 22:1** he expressed his anguish in words echoed by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross: "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*" (cf. **Matt. 27:46**).

Paul Barnett: Events of deep distress to Paul form the **immediate background** to the second letter to the Corinthians. Corinth and Ephesus, centres to which important missionary labour had been devoted, had become focal points of profound personal difficulty for him. At Corinth he, their father in the faith, had been rebuffed and criticized. In Ephesus a city-wide riot had occurred over his ministry so that it was no longer safe to remain there. Unwelcome in the one and endangered in the other, he went to Macedonia where he began to write his letter. First he greeted his readers and praised

God for comforting him in his recent sufferings. Then he proceeded to tell them what had happened since his ‘painful’ visit to Corinth and to explain why he was writing instead of returning immediately. As in his other letters, Paul introduced near the beginning what would be a major theme throughout, in this case his experience of suffering. . .

Power and weakness, which together represent the unifying theme of this letter, are hinted at in this opening paragraph. All believers, like Paul and the Corinthians, suffer the weakness of troubles through their Christian service. Nevertheless the power of God in his mercies and comfort meets us at our point of need. Great though our sense of weakness may be, the power of God is always greater. Some ministers today unhelpfully raise the hopes of their people by promising them immediate health and prosperity, as their due portion from God. These promises appear to be tailor-made for a society whose need for instant gratification is unprecedented in history. Paul, by contrast, soberly refers to his readers’ sufferings, and he promises, not immediate healing and success, but God’s comfort which they will experience as they patiently endure (6).

Homer Kent: How does one begin a letter when relations between the parties have been strained? What does one say when mistreatment has occurred, and previous overtures at reconciliation have been brushed aside? This was Paul’s situation as he undertook the writing of II Corinthians, for his love for them was deep, his investment in their spiritual lives was great, and the issues involved had far-reaching implications for them and their church.

Anthony Thiselton: Paul follows the address with **thanksgiving**, as is his normal practice. Many Greco-Roman letters include expressions of thanksgiving. This thanksgiving is in two parts:

1. thanksgiving for God’s comfort (vv. 3–7) and
2. thanksgiving for God’s deliverance (vv. 8–11).

George Shellington: The apostle Paul makes the claim in this **Letter of Reconciliation** that Christian ministry is a matter of a person’s right relationship on two indivisible fronts:

- (1) a right relationship to Jesus Christ, and
- (2) a right relationship of Christians to each other in an ordered community of life and faith.

The focus is on Paul’s own ministry, particularly in relation to the Corinthians, although not exclusively so. His discourse persistently aims at expounding more broadly a theology of ministry in the age of Jesus Christ that has recently dawned upon the world. One can infer from his expose that Paul has an inkling of an opposing view that has crossed the threshold of the Corinthian community at the time of writing this letter. Proponents of that view see ministry as competitive and self-commending. Paul does not. They seek letters of recommendation from one community to another to authorize their mission and their right to subsistence from the community they serve. To authorize

his mission and to sustain him in it, Paul relies entirely on his relationship to God. The others may appeal to Moses as their guiding light in ministry. Paul thinks of Moses merely as a type of present Christian ministry, with Paul and his like-minded comrades as fulfillment of the type (**2:16 - 3:18**).

Paul's primary reason for sending this **Letter of Reconciliation (2 Cor. 1-9)** is to persuade the Corinthians of a view of ministry consistent with the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Paul is principally concerned that his converts know exactly who is reconciling the world. God does this through Jesus Christ. Paul as apostle does not. Instead, Paul's gift of ministry from God in Christ acts as the agency of the grace that human beings need to bring them home again to God. In short, Paul views his ministry in the context of right relationships (**5:11- 6:10; 1:8 - 2:4**).

Richard Pratt: Main Idea: Speculations had grown about why Paul had not come to Corinth sooner. Paul explained what had been happening in his life, how he had treated the Corinthians with integrity, why his plans had changed, and what his current plans were.

Scott Hafemann: Paul's **tone** in 2 Corinthians is, therefore, at once not only apologetic, but also confrontational. The motivation for his appeals is clear: On the horizon stands God's judgment in Christ (**5:10-11**), to be exacted in advance when Paul makes his third and decisive visit to Corinth (**13:1-10**). The only hope for those still in rebellion against him is to repent, even as the majority has done already (cf. **2:5-11; 7:2-16**). As for that majority, they must demonstrate the validity of their repentance by continuing to support Paul, by separating from those who will not repent, and by participating in the collection as part of the fruits of righteousness characteristic of the people of God (cf. **2:5-11; 3:18; 5:17; 6:1; 6:14 - 7:1; 8:1 - 9:15**).

Eric Mason: Main Idea: God does allow on you more than you can bear so that you can learn that you need him.

- I. We Are Blessed in Christ (**1:3**).
- II. We Receive Mercy and Comfort (**1:3**).
 - A. God is the Father of mercies.
 - B. God is the God of all comfort.
- III. We Comfort Others (**1:4**).
- IV. God Holds on to Us (**1:4-7**).
- V. We Are Overwhelmed (**1:8**).
- VI. We Learn that We Need Him (**1:9-11**).

George Guthrie: As Paul writes the prologue for 2 Corinthians, he introduces rich reflection on God's **redemption of suffering**, a key theme for the book. The apostle

and his coworkers have been deeply bruised by recent experiences, with fresh emotional and spiritual wounds still stinging. Yet instead of bitterness and regret, the apostle offers one of the most beautiful and beloved passages in the NT, turning his suffering into a song of thanks to God and an appeal for continued partnership with the Corinthian church. The prologue divides nicely into two main movements. In the first (1:3–7) we find a beautiful, encouraging benediction. In this benediction Paul blesses God for his encouragement in the midst of affliction (1:3). Then he points to the purposefulness of the affliction (1:4–6) and notes the special fellowship the experience of suffering forges between his mission and the Corinthians (1:7).

In the second movement of the prologue (1:8–11), Paul shares overtly about his recent brush with death. The apostle doesn't want the Corinthians to take lightly the affliction he has endured in Asia (1:8), and he points to how God redeemed his suffering by causing Paul and his mission team to abandon trust in themselves and to trust only in God, "*who raises the dead*" (1:9). He also expresses hope about God's continued deliverance (1:10) and the Corinthians' help through prayer (1:11). Notice how the prologue begins and ends with God being celebrated (1:3, 11). Also, both halves of the prologue trumpet God's redemption of afflictions (1:4, 6, 9), and both halves end with a focus on Paul's partnership with the Corinthians (1:7, 11). Thus through both praise (1:3–7) and appeal (1:8, 11), the apostle strategically opens his heart to the Corinthians, sharing out of his pain and laying a foundation for the relational rebuilding he hopes to accomplish with the Achaian church through this letter.

(:1-2) GREETING

A. God-Appointed Authors

1. Apostolic Leadership: Paul

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"

Charles Swindoll: They knew him quite well; so why would Paul need to remind them that he had been "*called (klētos [2822]) as an apostle*"? The occasion of this letter would necessitate a series of severe criticisms, rebukes, words of strong admonition, and detailed instructions. By reminding the Corinthians that he was not only their founding pastor of yesteryear but also an apostle of the universal church, he would firm up his authority at a time when it most likely would be resisted.

Mark Seifrid: He is not apostle by virtue of his own abilities, powers, or self-assertion. The Corinthians were looking for a genius. God sent them an apostle, who was theirs in weakness and suffering.

George Guthrie: Paul writes as a man of great "desire," great commitment to the ministry God has assigned to him. Thus he lives under the highest possible commission, a commission from the Lord of the universe, Jesus, by virtue of the very will of God. God's will gives the impetus for Paul communicating to God's church, and he communicates "*grace and peace*" that originate with God, divine gifts of which we all stand in need. So the letter opening communicates a thorough God-centeredness for

Paul—he understands himself to be part of God’s plan, writing to God’s people on the basis of God’s work of grace and peace. Therefore, he also writes as a person of profound relationships, his unique relationship with God through Christ Jesus forming the basis for his relationship with Timothy as his partner in ministry and the Achaians as a part of God’s church.

2. Brotherly Teamwork: Timothy
“and Timothy our brother”

Scott Hafemann: There can be no compromise between Paul’s claim here and the claims of those whom Paul will unmask as “pseudo-apostles,” “deceitful workmen,” and “servants” of Satan (cf. **11:13–15**). This affirmation of Paul’s own authority as an apostle is most likely the reason why he also mentions Timothy, his “*brother*,” as a cosender of the letter. By associating Timothy with himself in this way, Paul reaffirms the legitimacy of Timothy’s ministry among them, both in his helping Paul to establish the church (cf. **Acts 18:5**) and in his recent visits on Paul’s behalf (cf. **1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10**). This too underscores the validity of the gospel the Corinthians have received through Paul’s coworkers (cf. **2 Cor. 1:19**).

B. God-Sanctified Recipients

1. “*church*” = “assembly” = called out ones
“to the church of God which is at Corinth”

George Shillington: This designation of the readers ties in with Paul’s concern in this letter for communion in the Spirit. The various groups have but one identity and one allegiance: they are a people called out of the old order of society to belong to God through Christ. Implicit in Paul’s designation is a call for the Corinthians’ singular loyalty to the God who rescued them from the peril of the world through the apostolic ministry of Paul. Paul will show that these two, God’s grace and Paul’s ministry, are correlatives. They go together.

R. Kent Hughes: The apostle’s authority, even his apostleship, was called into question. If Paul was for real, why was there so much suffering in his life? they asked. Also, why was his ministry so lackluster when compared with the ministry of others? Why was his preaching so dull? And why did he change his travel plans if God was actually directing his life? Moreover, what lay behind his refusal to accept payment for his services, as most preachers did? Was he really collecting money for the poor? Why didn’t Paul have letters of recommendation like the others? Why didn’t he regale them with stories about God’s power in his ministry? Was it because there were none? Tragically, this attack on Paul’s ministry and person had led many of his Corinthian converts to reject him and his preaching for “*a different gospel*” (cf. **11:4**). . .

The majority came back to Paul and his gospel, but some still rejected his authority. Thus it was that Paul wrote the magnificent letter of Second Corinthians in A.D. 55 as he began to make plans to return for a third visit (cf. **2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1**).

So today we can read and study this letter, the most **emotional** of all the apostle's writings. Nowhere is Paul's heart so torn and exposed as in this letter. Second Corinthians bears a fierce tone of **injured love**, of paradoxically wounded, relentless affection. Toward the letter's end Paul will say, "*And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*" (11:28, 29).

2. "saints" = "set apart" unto God
"with all the saints who are throughout Achaia"

Anthony Thiselton: Paul calls them "saints" because God has consecrated or made holy all those whom he has redeemed. Every Christian can experience the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, whatever inconsistencies and failures may also occur in everyday life. No Christian should forget their privileged status, nor that of other Christians. Similarly, all Christians belong to God, who is a caring and providing Father in a special sense towards those who share the Sonship of Jesus Christ. To sin against a fellow Christian is in this sense like committing sacrilege against God's temple.

Charles Swindoll: He may have extended its scope because the positive exhortations and negative corrections applied broadly to issues and problems throughout the region. Or he may have feared that the party of apostolic pretenders meddling in Corinth would spread their cancer throughout the region. Perhaps some already had done so. When it comes to false teaching, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Scott Hafemann: These twin designations, "*apostle ... by the will of God*" and "*church of God*," connote a **continuity** with the people of God and her leaders under the old covenant. At the same time, they also underscore the reality of the new covenant, since Paul is an apostle "*of Christ [i.e., Messiah] Jesus*," and they are the church of God, not the synagogue (cf. 3:14–18). Moreover, the Corinthians are part of a larger gathering of "*all the saints*" (*hagioi*; i.e., "*holy ones*") scattered throughout the Roman province of Achaia, an area roughly equivalent with modern-day Greece. Corinth was the capital of Achaia and the home of the first of the interrelated churches in the region (cf. Acts 18:1–11; 1 Cor. 16:15).

David Garland: Why does Paul refer to the Achaeans since 1 Corinthians is addressed only to the Corinthians? This letter is not intended as a circular letter as is Galatians, which is addressed to the churches of Galatia (Gal 1:2). Possibly Paul mentions the Achaeans in anticipation of his instructions on the collection that will be taken up throughout Achaia (9:2). Another possibility is that Paul intends to let the Corinthians know that "they are not the whole church even in Achaia." The Corinthians are given to arrogance and self-sufficiency and may think that the spiritual world revolves around them. An unholy grandiosity may have caused them to look down on neighboring churches in the outlying region. Such an attitude would have been reinforced by the economic and social disparity between the two. Betz writes:

While Achaia as a whole suffered poverty and neglect, Corinth enjoyed prosperity; while Achaia led a quiet life remote from the noise and the press of the city and its politics, Corinth teemed with commerce and intrigue. While the Greeks tried as best they could to preserve their traditional culture, the Corinthians indulged new attitudes and ways of life fueled by the new wealth and unbridled by ancestral tradition. Thus, the province and its capital were in many respects worlds apart.

Possibly, Paul seeks to bridge that gap, reminding the Corinthians that he does not see them apart from but together with the saints of Achaia.

C. God-Enabled Resources / Salutation

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Mark Seifrid: The apostle’s **pronouncement of grace** presupposes that, although God’s undeserved and unmerited favor has been granted fully and finally in Christ, it nevertheless must be granted ever again to believers. We, likewise, are to grasp and receive this grace again and again, in the midst of our tasks, trials, and temptations. That is to say, Paul speaks of “*grace*” as it is concretely experienced in the varying circumstances of life.

Scott Hafemann: Accordingly, Paul’s desire that they experience “*peace*” is not primarily a wish for untroubled circumstances. Rather, he wishes them that comprehensive shalom or well-being that characterizes the lives of believers, individually and corporately, when all is right with God, a possibility also granted by the grace of God through Christ. Paul’s two wishes are therefore inextricably interrelated.

I. (:3-7) UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE: THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S COMFORT IN OUR OWN TRIALS EQUIPS US TO COMFORT OTHERS IN THEIR TRIALS

George Shillington: Paul lays out his liturgical eulogy to God in **verses 3-7** in a sequence of three movements, each having two complementary parts. The three movements of thought come together in one dominant paradox that pervades the ensuing discussion of **chapters 1-9** (Letter of Reconciliation). The structure may be outlined as follows.

- a. God is the source and giver of all consolation (**1:3**).
- a’. Paul and company (we) benefit purposefully (**1:4**).

- b. God’s Agent, Christ, suffered abundantly (**1:5a**).
- b’. Paul and company are consoled abundantly (**1:5b**).

- c. Paul’s agency (ministry) of consolation is borne in affliction (**1:6a**).
- c’. The Corinthians (you) are consoled as they join in Paul’s ministry (**1:6b-c**).

d. Hope unshaken: Corinthian partners in the paradox of consolation through affliction (1:7).

Mark Seifrid: As we have noted, in his letter openings the apostle instructs his churches in the Gospel in the face of the challenges, questions, and problems among them. This is clearly the case in Paul's benediction. We find here the theology of the entire letter in a nutshell: God's fatherly comfort is given ever only to those in weakness and affliction, a comfort that is salvation itself. Such is the nature of apostolic ministry and Christian life, which the Corinthians have refused to accept. Paul thus reminds the Corinthians that the final gift of comfort is not given apart from the reality of suffering. The apostle first must trouble the comfortable in order to later comfort the troubled. . .

The apostle is the vehicle of divine comfort to the Corinthians; God comforts them through him. Just as he has received and handed on the Gospel, so through Christ, he receives and hands on comfort. This comfort, which extends into the present hour, has been received and handed on in a long chain of tradition stretching back to the apostle, and beyond him to Christ: the God whom Paul blesses is none other than "*the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*" The psalmists' experience of trouble, deliverance, their proclamation, and their giving forth of comfort culminates in Christ, who was thrust into the ultimate affliction and granted decisive and final comfort. Even here and now, we are the recipients of that comfort, given by Christ, through the apostle. The mere instrumental role of the apostle notwithstanding, it makes all the difference in the world that the words spoken and written here came through him. Paul is able to speak true comfort because he, like the psalmists, is one who received true comfort in the midst of all his hardships: "*My soul boasts in the Lord. The poor hear it and rejoice*" (Ps 34:2). Like all biblical pronouncements of blessing on God, the apostle's benediction of God here is neither remote nor abstract. It is a response to the goodness of God, which Paul experiences concretely as God's work of comfort and salvation in Christ.

**A. (:3) The Source of All Comfort –
The Comfort is Sufficient Because of Who God Is**

(Chiastic structure – A B B A)

1. Thanksgiving to God for Who He Is

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

Anthony Thiselton: Paul describes Jesus by what is rightly called his favorite title, namely "*Lord*" (cf. **Rom 1:9** and **1 Cor 12:3**). In the ancient Greco-Roman world, "*the lord*" (*ho kyrios*) was the one to whom a slave belonged, but who was also responsible for their care. It was thus a term signifying not only loyalty, obedience, and commitment on the part of the slave, but security and freedom if one had a good lord. Because God or Christ has the care of him, this provides a sense of freedom from self-concern. This freedom arises from the fact that in the event of illness or death, a good lord would care for the slave and his or her family. **Rudolf Bultmann** writes, "Freedom arises from the very fact that the believer, as one 'ransomed' no longer 'belongs to

himself' (**1 Cor 6:19**). He no longer bears the care for himself, for his own life, but lets this care go, yielding himself entirely to the grace of God; he recognizes himself to be the property of God (or the Lord) and lives for Him."

John MacArthur: Some may wonder why, since they are fully equal, the Father is referred to as *the God ... of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. **Mark 15:34; John 20:17**). In His deity Jesus is fully equal to the Father, but in His humanity He submitted to Him. Paul's statement reflects Jesus' submission to the Father during the Incarnation (cf. **John 14:28**), when He voluntarily gave up the independent use of His divine attributes (**Phil. 2:6-7**; cf. **Matt. 24:36**).

The title *Lord Jesus Christ* summarizes all of His redemptive work. *Lord* describes His sovereign deity; *Jesus* (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Yeshua; "*God saves*") describes His saving death and resurrection; *Christ* ("anointed one") describes Him as the King who will defeat God's enemies and rule over the redeemed earth and the eternal state.

2. Description of Who God Is

a. Merciful by Nature

"the Father of Mercies"

Homer Kent: This concept was rooted in Old Testament revelation, and found frequent expression among those who trusted God (**II Sam. 24:14; I Chron. 21:13; Neh. 9:31; Ps. 51:1; 103:4; Isa. 54:7; Dan. 9:9**).

b. Unlimited Capacity for Comfort

"and God of all Comfort"

Conclusion: Our Trials can never exceed the Ability of God to Comfort

Warren Wiersbe: The words *comfort* or *consolation* (same root word in the Greek) are repeated ten times in **2 Corinthians 1:1-11**. We must not think of comfort in terms of "sympathy," because sympathy can weaken us instead of strengthen us. God does not pat us on the head and give us a piece of candy or a toy to distract our attention from our troubles. No, He puts strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them. Our English word *comfort* comes from two Latin words meaning "*with strength*." The Greek word means "*to come alongside and help*." It is the same word used for the Holy Spirit ("*the Comforter*") in **John 14-16**.

Charles Swindoll: How does the Holy Spirit comfort the suffering? Many of us imagine that He does so mystically, immediately, and directly—and occasionally this happens. At times in the midst of a tragedy, crisis, or catastrophe, a sudden, inexplicable peace passes over us. From that moment on, we know, we believe, and we even feel that God is in control and we can rest in Him regardless of what comes (**Phil. 4:7**). More frequently, however, the Spirit works through Spirit-indwelled believers and the Spirit-filled community to minister to those who suffer. Through an encouraging word, a

heart-felt embrace, a kind note, a loving presence, a side-by-side walk through death's valley —the Spirit works through His people to comfort those downtrodden by the pain and turmoil of life.

Mark Seifrid: In naming God “*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*” Paul identifies God as the Creator and source of all human experience of mercy and comfort, who is present and active in the world. Mercy and comfort have their single and final source in God, the Giver of all good. Paul’s language is a warning against the Corinthian idolatry that seeks comfort in creaturely things that in themselves can bring no comfort — even if human words and earthly gifts (such as the deliverance in Asia and the report of Titus) themselves serve as the vehicles and messengers of divine comfort. Paul’s language thus may be regarded as an appropriation of the Shema (**Deut 6:4**). The apostolic description of God is therefore not diffuse or undefined. It is only in God’s identity as the Father of Jesus Christ, in whom he has fulfilled all the promises of Scripture, that we know his mercy and comfort. Otherwise, God’s mercy is not experienced and known as such but is misinterpreted as happenstance or luck, attributed to skill, cleverness, works, or piety, or perhaps regarded as the benefit of another god, whose kindness must be coaxed or otherwise obtained by human efforts.

Colin Kruse: The word *παράκλησις* is used by Luke in his Gospel when describing those who, like the aged Simeon, were “*looking forward to Israel’s consolation*” (**Luke 2:25**). The **consolation** expected was the deliverance which God would provide through the coming of the Messiah. For Paul, the messianic age had already begun, albeit while the present age was still running its course, and it is the overlapping of the ages that accounts for the surprising coincidence of affliction and consolation of which he speaks in the present passage. The final consolation of the children of God awaits the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ in glory. But because the messianic age has been inaugurated by Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, at his first coming, **believers experience comfort in the present time as a foretaste of that final consolation.**

B. (:4) The Benefit of All Trials

1. God’s Comfort is Fully Known Through Trials

“who comforts us in all our affliction”

Steve Zeisler: Affliction, however, has to do with pain or difficulty that is threatening-suffering in which no good outcome can be predicted. The root idea of the word before us is pressure; unrelenting pressure that, like a bulldozer, threatens to crush and sweep aside everything in its path.

2. God’s Comfort Equips Us to Minister to Others

“so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

C. (:5) The Sufficiency of Comfort in Connection with Christ

1. Sufferings in Connection with Christ May Be Abundant

“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance”

David Garland: Paul says he carries about in his body “*the dying of Jesus.*” He “continually and physically experiences the sufferings of the cross,” and he interprets it as the continuation of Jesus’s suffering in the flesh. Therefore he believes that his apostolic ministry extends Christ’s earthly ministry, which included suffering and hardship. His vocation as an apostle of Christ demands suffering if he is to confront the same evil forces that sentenced Christ to the cross so that in his suffering he joins in the suffering and death of Christ. He not only preaches Christ crucified; he lives it. And his suffering brings him joy because he recognizes it to be an irrefutable confirmation of his close tie to his Lord. **Hanson**’s comments are on target:

[B]ecause Christians do not merely imitate, follow or feel inspired by Christ, but actually live in him, are part of him, dwell supernaturally in a new world where the air they breathe is his Spirit, then for them henceforward suffering accepted in Christ must bring comfort, death accepted in Christ must bring life, weakness accepted in Christ must bring strength, foolishness accepted in Christ must bring wisdom.

The opposites are transformed from one to the other by the divine power.

2. But Comfort in Connection with Christ Will Always Be Sufficient
“so also our comfort is abundant through Christ”

R. Kent Hughes: For those who are afflicted and suffer for following Christ, this passage promises surpassing comfort. The truth is that God’s comfort always exceeds our afflictions. “*For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too*” (v. 5). Those who follow Christ know the greatest affliction — and the greatest comfort, a flood of comfort. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort*” (v. 3).

D. (:6) The Perspective of Encouraging Others to Persevere Under Affliction

1. This Perspective Applies to Our Affliction

“But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation”

2. This Perspective Applies to Our Comfort

“or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort”

3. This Perspective Applies Because of the Commonality of All of Our Sufferings

“which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer”

E. (:7) Confidence in the Certainty of Sufferings and the Sufficiency of God’s Comfort

“and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings,

so also you are sharers of our comfort.”

Robert Gromacki: Paul believed that what God had done for him He would do for others. He had a steadfast “hope,” a firm conviction that the Corinthians would have victory through their sufferings. He knew that they would be “partakers” of suffering in the will of God along with Christ and Paul. With equal confidence, he knew that they would also share in the “consolation.” Biblical consolation involves more than just feeling sorry for someone who is in difficulty; it connotes active encouragement and help to see the person through his trouble. God never promised to keep us out of the furnace of trials. Rather, He has pledged to be with us in the fire and lead us out of the oppressive flames. . . No believer is alone in hard times; God is there beside him.

George Shillington: Paul’s hope is unshaken on behalf of the Corinthians. His confidence is not in them as Corinthians, but in the grace of God that rescued them from sin through faith in the suffering Christ. On that premise Paul knows that they are partners in his sufferings in the ministry of Christ. They are consoled. The paradox stands thus: redemptive consolation comes through suffering, not apart from it. This apparent contradiction will become a recurring refrain in the variations of speech that follow.

II. (:8-11) PERSONAL TESTIMONY: PERILOUS ASIAN MINISTRY -- THE SEVERITY OF OUR TRIALS MAKES US DESPERATE FOR GOD’S DELIVERANCE

Colin Kruse: Vv. 8–9a describe the intensity of this suffering and its effect on Paul; v. **9b** indicates the purpose/result of the sufferings—that he should not trust in himself, but in God, who raises the dead. **V. 10** further describes God as the one who delivered Paul from so terrible a death, and as the one whom he trusts will deliver him again. **V. 11** connects the prayers of his readers for him with an expected future deliverance by God, deliverance that, in answer to their prayers, will result in many giving thanks to God.

Raymond Collins: We would like to know what happened in Asia, but ultimately all the textual clues lead up a blind alley. It may well be that Paul is referring to a serious physical ailment that he thought would prove fatal, but of this we cannot be sure. What we can be sure of is that it was a terrifying experience, one that led Paul to think that he was about to die, an experience that the apostle likens to a death sentence. His obvious emotion in recalling that experience is reflected in **1:8–11**, a run-on sentence that is almost a hundred words in length.

A. (:8-10) Peril of Impending Death

1. (:8) Situation Seemed Hopeless

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life”

Paul is such a positive person; for him to “despair even of life” the situation must have been pretty bad.

Philip Hughes: . . . it is very much of a piece with the major theme of the opening portion of this epistle, namely, Paul’s vindication of his own integrity. . . . An incapacitating experience of this kind explained much, and called for sympathy rather than censure.

Frank Matera: Having explained in a general way how God consoled him in his afflictions, Paul now brings forth a specific example that deeply affected his understanding of God and of his ministry.

2. (:9) Desperation Focuses Our Faith in the God of Resurrection Power
*“indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves
in order that we should not trust in ourselves,
but in God who raises the dead”*

John MacArthur: God had a purpose for allowing Paul’s suffering: to teach him not to trust in himself. God took him to the extremity from which no human resources could deliver him because, as He said to Paul later in this epistle, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness*” (2 Cor. 12:9). Only the God who raises the dead had the power to deliver Paul from his ordeal; man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. Thus, God’s power alone comforted Paul and delivered him from his great peril of death.

R. Kent Hughes: Affliction — death — resurrection is the central law of life and ministry as afflictions draw you down to the end of yourself (“death”) and then you look to Christ, finding yourself thrust upward in resurrection for further ministry.

3. (:10) Deliverance is God’s Specialty
a. Testimony of Deliverance in the Past
“who delivered us from so great a peril of death”
b. Hope of Deliverance in the Present
“and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope.”

Robert Hughes: Another description of God follows in 1:10. He “*delivered*” and “*will deliver.*” That last remark especially needed clarification. How could Paul have known that God would deliver him? **Verses 10b-11** explain his confidence. God would deliver him in order that a multitude might give thanks to God (1:11).

c. Confidence of Deliverance in the Future
“And He will yet deliver us.”

Anthony Thiselton: In vv. 10–11, Paul turns to the present: God “*will continue to rescue us.*” The Greek for “*rescue*” is *rhyomai*, as if to deliver out of a pit. The term “*rescue*”

often features in apocalyptic literature. The verb occurs here in the past and the future with the Greek particle *eti*, “*will still deliver.*” Having shown that there is every good ground for hope, Paul asks for the prayers of the church in Corinth (v. 11). Plummer observes: “These intercessions are part of the machinery which God has provided for preserving His apostle from deadly peril.”

B. (:11) Power of Intercessory Prayer

*“you also joining in helping us through your prayers,
that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf
for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.”*

Mark Seifrid: His defense of his apostolic ministry is not abstract and distant but living and personal. He wants to show the Corinthians not only that he is an apostle but that he is their apostle and that his experience with them is part of his life as an apostle of Christ. Through Christ he loves them deeply, and just as deeply he hopes that they will return his love. This deeply personal relationship is not secondary or accidental to the Gospel but integral and essential to it. Paul’s opening account of his trial in Asia is of fundamental significance to this relationship. His weakness, trials, and suffering represent an offense to the Corinthians, who mark the presence of the Spirit by outward success and visible power. They must now accept the suffering apostle of Christ, or they will not accept the crucified Christ whom the apostle proclaims.

Richard Pratt: Finally, Paul acknowledged the purpose behind his sufferings and deliverances: **God's glory**. Paul drew the Corinthians into his perspective by acknowledging that they would surely help him in the future by offering their prayers to God. As a result, many would give thanks to God for God's response to their prayers. Many believers would be grateful for the gracious favor God would grant when he answered the prayers of many. The Corinthians were to have a right attitude toward Paul's absence by remembering that their sympathetic prayers helped him in his suffering and glorified God.

Ralph Martin: In retelling this account—even if with some tantalizing obscurities—of his ordeal in Asia, Paul makes it plain that he was saved from the jaws of death by God’s signal mercy and favor in answer to his prayer. Yet God worked through the prayers of his people (v 11), and Paul does not forget this side of the story as well. Those who prayed for him (and Paul’s verb in v 11 is remarkably expressive to remind us that prayer is both a work, as in **Col 4:12–13**, and a privilege to be in partnership with those in need) are invited to share his gladness. There is no finer stimulus to our prayers than when we hear from some friend at home or abroad that he or she is rejoicing in an answer to our praying on his or her behalf.

Scott Hafemann: In returning to the praise of God, Paul has fulfilled the three purposes of his opening thanksgiving.

- (1) In fulfillment of his epistolary purpose, Paul has made it clear that the comfort of God in the midst of adversity is the main theme of the letter.
- (2) By way of instruction, Paul has stated his corresponding thesis, namely, that his

suffering, rather than calling his legitimacy into question, is the very means by which God's comfort is mediated to others.

(3) In mounting his consequent appeal, Paul invites the Corinthians to join him in thanking God for his suffering and deliverance, thus fulfilling Paul's initial call to praise God in **verse 3**. If the Corinthians should spurn this invitation, their very refusal becomes an indictment of their rebellion against the gospel (cf. **12:19–21; 13:1–10**).

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

1) Christ's relationship with His Heavenly Father secures for us a similar relationship with "*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.*"

2) Both our sufferings and our comfort are experienced in abundance in association with Christ (**vs.5**).

3) Christ is our pattern in bearing suffering and affliction for the purpose of ministering to others and securing our salvation and comfort (**vs. 6**).

4) The God who raised Christ from the dead is the same God working with the same power who personally functions as our Deliverer so that "*we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.*"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What severe trials or afflictions have you experienced and how have these equipped you to minister to others? Have any of these painful experiences had a special connection to your testimony to Christ?

2) Do we demonstrate mercy in our dealings with others that corresponds to how God has demonstrated His mercy towards us?

3) Why does God place us in situations that are beyond our natural ability to cope? Why does He make us so desperate?

4) Is our hope and confidence firmly anchored in the *Father of mercies and God of all comfort*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: The most extraordinary thing about this passage is that we have no information at all about this terrible experience which Paul went through at Ephesus. Something happened to him which was almost beyond bearing. . . But Paul saw that the terrifying experience he had gone through had had one tremendous use – it had driven him back to God. It had demonstrated to him his utter dependence on God. The Arabs have a proverb, “All sunshine makes a desert.” The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence. It makes us think that we are well able to handle life alone. For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity ten thousand rise to Him in days of adversity. . . The outcome of this was that Paul had an unshakable confidence in God. He knew now beyond all argument what God could do for him.

Philip Hughes: Though the Apostle’s hope is firmly fixed on God, yet he also relies on the prayers of fellow-believers on his behalf, especially of those to whom, like the Corinthians, his ministry of the Gospel has closely linked him. Their supplications play an important role in his expectation of deliverance. Prayer is indeed a mystery, but it is stressed over and over again in the New Testament as a vital prerequisite for the release and experience of God’s power. It is true that it is *God* who delivers, and that God stands in no need of human prayers before He can act on behalf of His afflicted servants. Yet there is the manward as well as the Godward aspect of such deliverance, and the manward side is summed up in the duty of Christians to intercede in prayer for their fellow-believers who are enduring affliction. But prayer is not a second “force,” in competition with or supplementary to divine grace, for its function and very attitude is precisely to emphasize the utter dependence and resourcelessness of man and the absolute sovereignty of the Father of mercies. In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. Thus the duty of prayer is not a modification of God’s power, but a glorification of it.

Ray Stedman: 4 Reasons why believers experience sufferings:

1) First, it hurts because that is the way you discover what God can do. How are you ever going to find the comfort of God, the strengthening of God, if you are not under any pressure or stress? It takes that to discover what God can do, and God will keep on sending it until you begin to understand that, and begin to count on him, and find the release from within that he provides. Do not try to run from it -- like everybody else is doing. Face up to it, and do as Paul does, by seeing these as opportunities to understand and experience anew the strengthening of God. . .

2) Your sufferings are not sent for you so much as they are for someone who is watching you, and seeing how you handle the pressure that you are going through. . .

3) One of the major reasons God sends us suffering is to break the stubborn spirit of self-will within us that insists on trying to work it all out by our own resources, or run to some other human resource, or in some way refuse to acknowledge that we need divine help. . .

4) Once again, suffering is sent to us to show us that we are not individuals living all alone in life. We are members of a family, we are members of a Body, and we need each other. When you have a difficulty or a trial, share it with others so that they can pray with you, for many prayers will bring great deliverance.

Steve Zeisler: The outcome of this, says Paul, is "*patient endurance*" (v.6) of the same sufferings we suffer. The result of comforting is that one is made capable of enduring when the pressure increases, when the weight descends with all of its threatening qualities. That is what the word "*comfort*" means, by the way. When we think of being comforted, we think of being patted on the head, being given a cheerful word, etc. But this is not what Paul means by that word. The word "*fortify*" conveys a much clearer idea of what he is referring to. He is talking about being fortified, strengthened, given power to endure our afflictions. When you go hiking in the mountains, you will notice that your bag of potato chips (essential trail food), which has been packed at a lower altitude will bulge out almost to bursting point because there is less air pressure at the higher elevation. The reverse would also be true. If the bag was packed at altitude, it would collapse at sea level because the pressures are unequal. In spiritual terms, fortification, comforting, makes us equal to the pressure of affliction. God is supplying us with the strength to bear up under it.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Those who experience the sufficiency of God in times of suffering do not resent their affliction but treasure it as God's appointed means of drawing men close to Him, the "*Father of mercies.*" Asaph learned this lesson, as did Job. Peter, who bristled at the mere mention of suffering by our Lord, wrote his first epistle on the subject, telling his readers that those who suffered for Christ's sake were blessed (1 **Peter 4**). Paul finds his former status and success as an unbelieving Jewish leader are "*dung,*" but his sufferings in Christ are a precious treasure (**Philippians 3:1-16**). James instructs us to "*Consider it all joy ... when you encounter various trials*" (**James 1:2**). Suffering is intended to draw us near to the heart of God. And so it is with Paul, who in the midst of unbelievable suffering, writes these introductory words to his epistle praising God for His mercies and comfort in the midst of his trials and tribulations. . .

Suffering for the sake of Christ is not a curse but a blessing, if we respond as Paul does and as many other saints of old have done. Suffering is a stewardship, which we may misuse and misappropriate, or which we may utilize for our good and God's glory. Suffering draws us closer to God and closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Suffering always comes with the promise of divine comfort and thus provides us with the fuel for worship and praise. . .

What a difference our Lord brings about regarding our perspective on suffering. The world abhors the thought of suffering and cannot imagine how a loving God can allow it. God uses suffering to teach us how evil sin is and how devastating its consequences. He used the suffering of our Savior to forgive our sins. He continues to employ suffering to draw us closer to Him and to one another. Suffering for Christ's sake is not an enemy but a friend. Suffering is not something we need to seek, but it is something

we should accept, knowing it comes from our Heavenly Father, who is the “*Father of mercies*,” and the “*God of all comfort*.”

Charles Swindoll: Three simple principles shed light on the mystery of suffering:

1. Suffering prepares us to comfort others.
2. Suffering keeps us from trusting ourselves.
3. Suffering teaches us to give thanks in everything.

Easy to understand. A cinch to remember. Simple to teach.

But easy to embrace in the midst of a trial? Not so fast! Some of the simplest truths are almost impossible to recall and apply to the realities of everyday life. In the same way, some of the simplest commandments in Scripture are the most difficult to obey —love your neighbor as yourself; love the Lord your God with all that you are. So, how do we live out the principles in **2 Corinthians 1:1-11**? I understand Paul’s statements, but how do we put these into action? Let me share a few thoughts.

First, when suffering hits you and doesn’t seem to let up, let me suggest something unnatural that might even offend your sensibilities: Instead of focusing on your present situation, think of how you can help others later. This will sound a note of hope. Consider the compassion you will gain and the comfort you can give to others who will face the same kind of trial. Broken people understand other people who are being broken. By pondering how your current pain might be able to minister to others in the future, you will gain both a perspective on the present and hope for the future. With this hope, offer your experience of suffering to God to use in His kingdom as He sees fit.

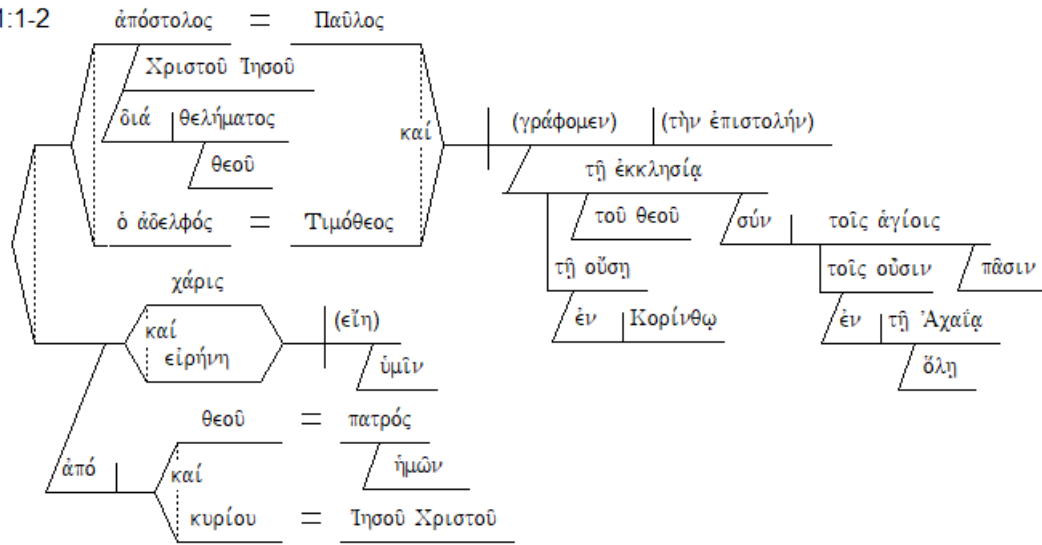
Second, rather than fighting, surrender; rather than resisting, release. This will increase your faith. Remember, life is bigger than you can handle. Give it to God. Stop trying to overcome your physical or emotional pain on your own. As you open yourself up to the Lord’s comforting touch, He will flow into the dry, barren crevices of your life with the cool, sustaining, refreshing water of life. With faith, surrender your self-sufficiency to God so that you may experience His supernatural comfort and concern.

Third, although becoming bitter and depressed will come most naturally, give thanks instead. This will bring a note of peace. Even though getting angry makes better sense, promoting a spirit of thanksgiving will bring healing to your soul. By focusing on the blessings you have rather than the hardships you must endure, your attitude of thankfulness will become infectious, providing a tremendous testimony for those who want to experience the same kind of divine peace you enjoy.

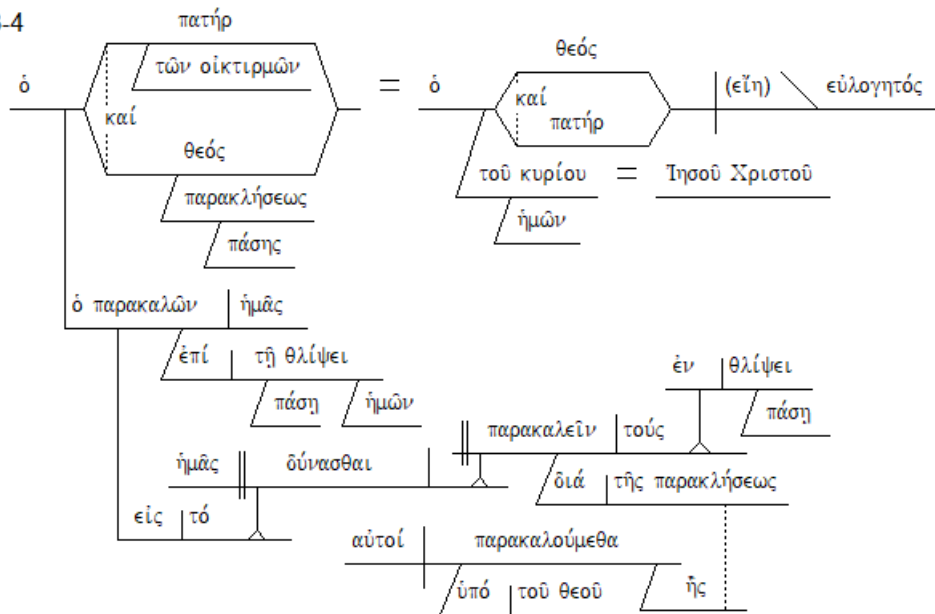
Hope, faith, and peace: These three notes turn the otherwise discordant sounds of suffering into a harmonious chord. They may not answer all of the problems or unravel the mystery of pain in every respect, but they equip us with a new perspective from which to handle the perplexities of suffering.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

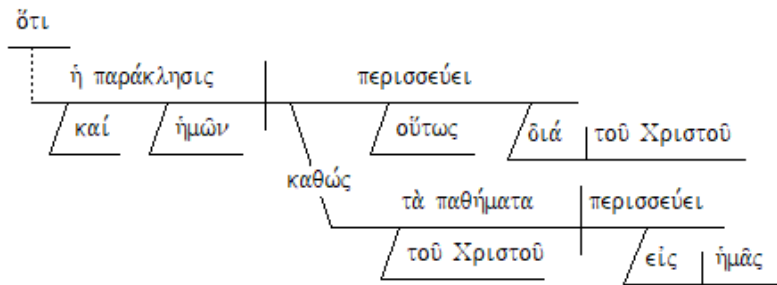
2Co 1:1-2



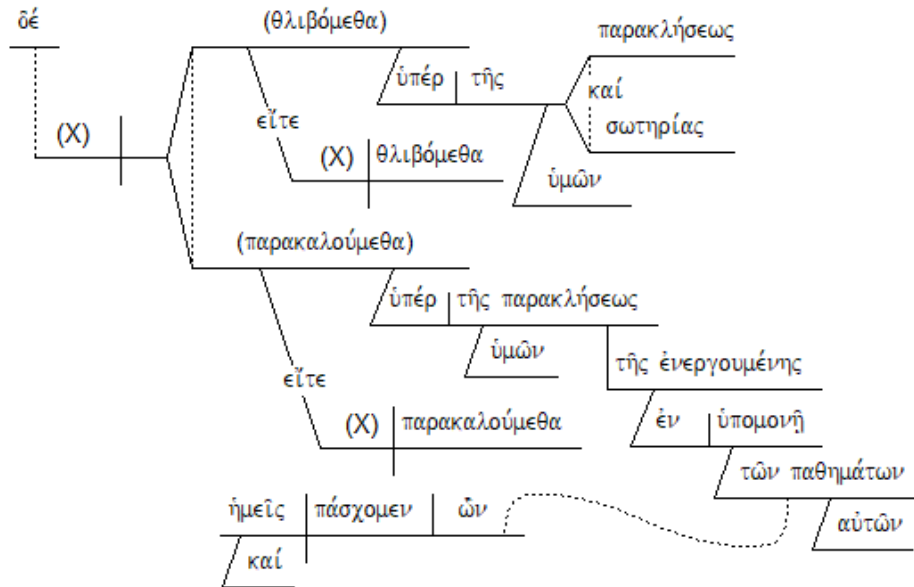
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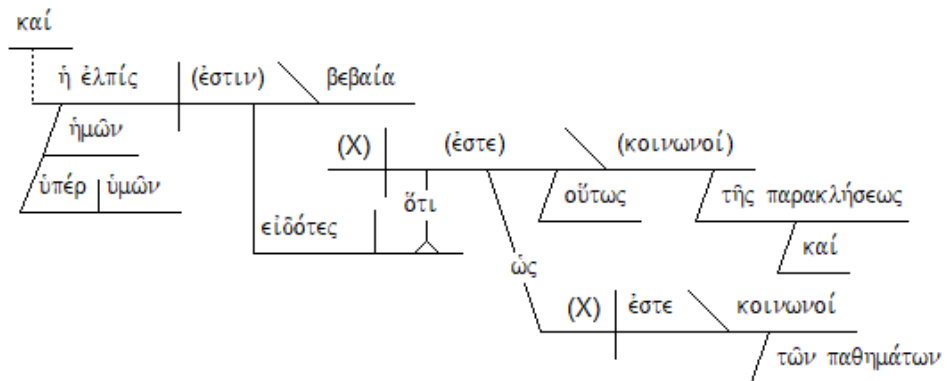
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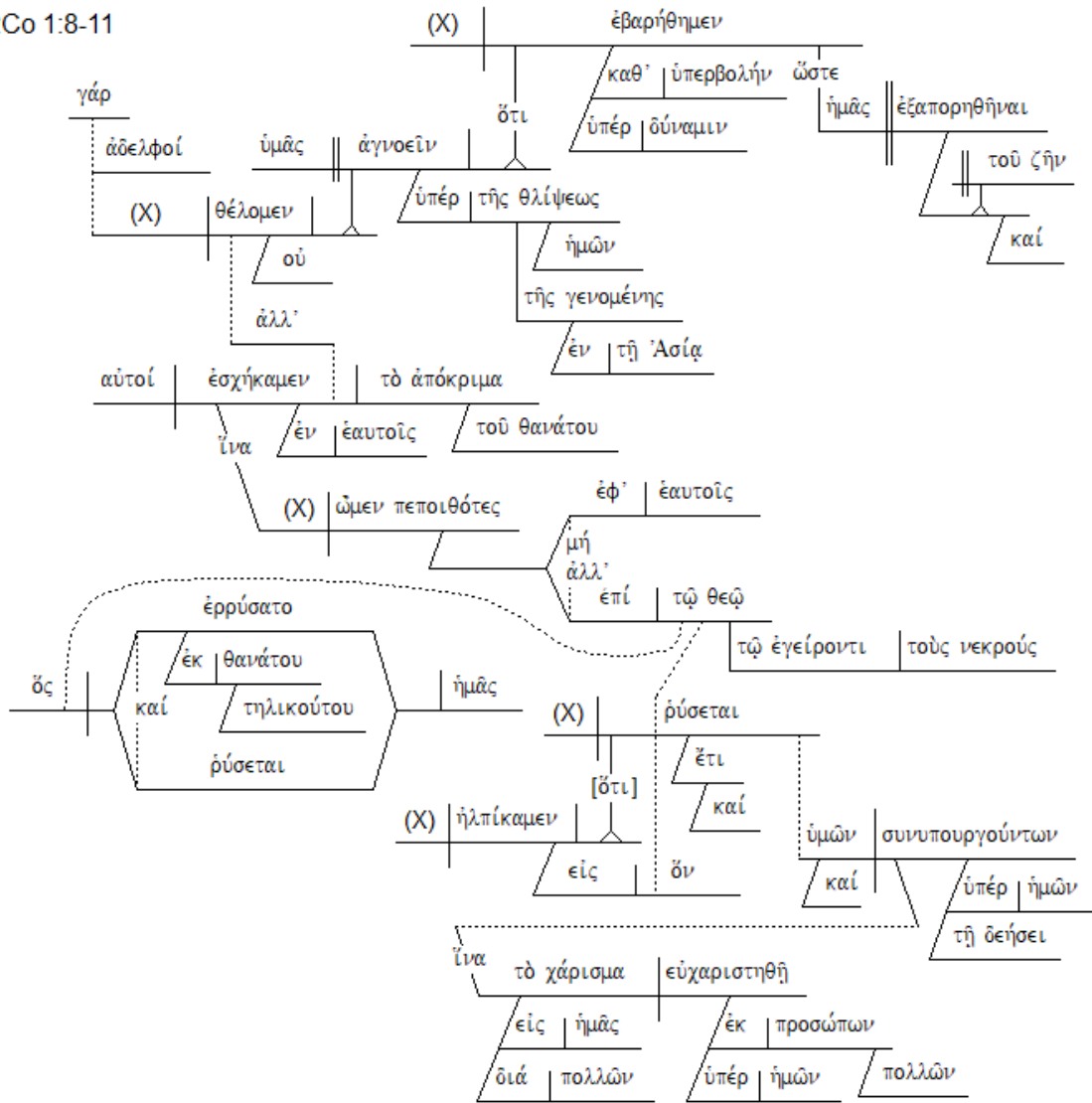
2Co 1:6



2Co 1:7



2Co 1:8-11



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1: 12-14

TITLE: INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY – THE WITNESS OF CONSCIENCE

I. (1:12 – 7:13) PERSONAL INADEQUACY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY TO BE DISPLAYED IN MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS (PAUL’S CONFIDENCE IN HIS MINISTRY INTEGRITY AND HIS COMMITMENT TO RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS)

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (4:7)

BIG IDEA:

INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY LEADS TO THE TESTIMONY OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Key passage in Paul’s defense against attacks on his integrity as a minister of the Gospel.

John MacArthur: Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend himself against the assaults of the false apostles at Corinth (**2 Cor. 11:13**). Those lying deceivers sought to discredit him, undermine his authority, and then replace the truth of God with their satanic lies. They attacked his integrity, falsely accusing him of not being honest and sincere in his dealings with the Corinthians. The false apostles also portrayed Paul as a manipulator, scheming to defraud the Corinthians and to promote his personal agenda. In short, according to the false apostles, Paul’s motives were corrupt, his words untrustworthy, and his actions devious. . .

In proving his integrity, Paul’s clear conscience was a source of peace, comfort, and joy to him. Others might falsely accuse him of heinous sins, but Paul’s conscience did not accuse him. It exonerated him of their charges and protected him from false guilt.

The false apostles had launched a three-pronged attack on Paul’s credibility. On the moral level, they accused him of secretly being a wicked sinner, justly suffering all the time because of the chastening of God. On the relational level, they accused him of being insincere, deceptive, and manipulative. They charged that he was not what he appeared to be on the surface; that in reality, he was using the Corinthians for his own selfish purposes. On the theological level, they charged that Paul misrepresented God’s Word and was a liar and a false teacher. What hurt Paul more than those baseless, slanderous lies was the sad fact that many in the Corinthian congregation believed them.

In this passage Paul appealed to the supreme human court, his fully informed conscience, to overturn the false verdicts of Satan's messengers. His conscience exonerated him of moral, relational, and theological wrongdoing.

Paul Barnett: Paul's reply, when reduced to basics, is that he has interrogated his conscience (12) in prospect of the day of the Lord Jesus (14), when, as he states elsewhere, "*the Lord . . . will expose the motives of the heart*" (1 Cor. 4:5). The testimony of his conscience is that, on that day, Paul will be shown to have behaved both in the world at large and towards the Corinthians with holiness and godly sincerity (12). These motives have been operative, his conscience tells him, both in the former (lost) letter and in the present one. He had written so as to be understood, which in part he was; he now writes with the intention that the Corinthians will come to understand fully (14). Their questioning of his motives is ill based. When the great and coming day arrives and everything is revealed he is confident that they will boast of him.

David Garland: This passage contains the letter's theme statement (see Rom 1:16–17). Paul hopes the Corinthians will understand that he is their boast in the Lord and will see that they can and should be proud of him instead of denigrating him. This theme is restated in 5:11–12: "*What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in outward appearance rather than in the heart.*" He aims to get them to evaluate him properly so that they will speak of him with pride, in spite of his afflictions, and will defend him against those who denigrate his ministry. He hopes they will pray for him in his sufferings and give thanks for his deliverance rather than belittle him (1:11), embrace him as their boast (1:13–14), and come to acknowledge his complete straightforwardness and sincerity in carrying out his apostolic commission (1:13). . .

This theme statement makes clear that Paul will be writing about himself in this letter, and we have already discussed in the introduction how these verses point to the unity of the letter. The subject of boasting is a central theme in the letter (see 5:12; 10:8, 13, 15–16, 18; 11:10, 12, 16–18, 30; 12:1, 5–6, 9), and his boast about them is also prominent (7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2–3). His sincerity and uprightness as an apostle recurs throughout (1:17; 2:17; 4:2; 6:3–10; 7:2; 10:2; 12:16–18). Paul does not use the phrase "*fleshly wisdom*" again in the letter, but he does mention again about making his plans or acting "*according to the flesh*" (*kata sarka*; 1:17; 4:2; 5:16; 10:2–4; 12:16). Paul asserts that the grace of God is the controlling factor in his life (2:14; 3:5; 4:7–11; 11:23–33; 12:9). Paul mentions writing his letters throughout (2:3–4, 9; 7:8, 12; 10:1, 9–11; 13:10). The problem of only knowing him in part resurfaces in 2:5; 4:2, 16–18; 5:11–12 and throughout chaps. 10–13. He makes clear that God knows what he is (5:11) even if he is not fully known to the Corinthians. Being known by God also implies being judged by God at the day of the Lord Jesus, and this idea recurs in 5:10; 7:1; 13:5–10.

Frank Matera: The account begins with a unit (1:12–14) that announces the letter's theme; namely, Paul's apostolic integrity provides the Corinthians with a reason to

boast in him just as he boasts in them. In defense of his apostolic integrity and reliability, he will explain that his altered travel plans are not to be interpreted as duplicity or vacillation on his part, since his reliability is rooted in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, the Son of the faithful God (1:15–22). Rather, he postponed his promised visit in order to spare the community further sadness, and he wrote a severe letter so that the Corinthians might know his love for them (1:23 – 2:4). Now that they have punished the offender who caused sorrow to all of them, it is time to forgive the offender lest Satan outwit them (2:5–11). For his part, Paul was so concerned for their welfare that he left a fruitful mission in Troas and went to Macedonia in search of Titus so that he could learn of their welfare (2:12–13). Could there be any greater indication of his integrity and love for them? . . .

This unit (1:12–14) consists of three parts.

- In the first (v. 12) Paul calls upon his conscience as a witness to his integrity.
- In the second (vv. 13–14a) he indicates that he is writing so that the community will completely understand him.
- In the third (14b) he provides a supporting reason for his hope that they will fully understand him: they are his boast, and he wants them to view him as their boast.

Thus two references to **boasting** enclose this unit: Paul’s affirmation that his “*boast*” (*kauchēsis*) is the testimony of his conscience (v. 12a) and his statement that he is, or should be, a cause of “*boasting*” (*kauchēma*) for the Corinthians, just as they will be his boast at the Lord’s parousia (v. 14b). Although Paul employs the plural (“we,” “our”) throughout this section, it is probably to be construed as a literary plural, that is, a reference to Paul, since it is his behavior that is in view as the following sections show.

Scott Hafemann: Paul makes the transition to this next section by indicating another reason he is so confident in calling the Corinthians to praise God for his life of faith in the midst of adversity (cf. 1:3–11). In 1:8–11, his confidence derived from God’s work of rescuing Paul in order to sustain his hope personally. In 1:12–14, it now derives from God’s work of establishing Paul’s ground for boasting publicly. Specifically, Paul’s conscience is clean concerning his behavior in the world in general and toward the Corinthians in particular since in both regards he has acted “*in the uprightness and sincerity that are from God*” (v. 12a). “*Uprightness*” (*haplotes*) and “*sincerity*” (*eilikrineia*) are concepts that carry the connotation of moral purity. From their use elsewhere in Paul’s writings it is clear that, given humanity’s bankrupt nature and the dominance of sin in the lives of those outside of Christ (see, e.g., Rom. 6:16–20; 8:5–8), the presence of such uprightness and sincerity cannot be attributed to Paul’s own moral ability (for *haplotes*, see esp. 2 Cor. 11:3 as well as Rom. 12:8; Eph. 6:5; for *eilikrineia*, 1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:17). Where such attributes exist, they are “*from God*,” the result of the transforming work of God’s Spirit in the lives of his “*new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. 3:18).

I. (:12) CONFIDENCE OF INTEGRITY -- HE HAS BEEN SINCERE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH THEM

A. The Value of a Good Conscience

“For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience”

David Guzik: In this section, Paul defends himself against the accusation that he is fickle and unreliable. Here, he simply states that he has a clear conscience before God, and trusts that the Corinthian Christians will understand.

Eric Mason: God has given every human being a conscience. Conscience is the alarm system God has placed in everyone; it involves our values and mindset. So when we go against our conscience or move in tandem with it, our conscience signals that something’s wrong or sends a thumbs-up. Think about a relationship or friendship with someone that went awry. God is sending you in a different direction, but you don’t have closure. You know there’s something there that you need to work through with that person because you sense inside of you that something isn’t complete. That’s God using your conscience as a mechanism to communicate to you about that situation. The relationship feels unsettling, so you are stirred to address the unfinished business. But your conscience also affirms when there’s nothing unresolved in the relationship and you’re in the clear.

Robert Hughes: Human conscience was the proving ground for Paul’s adequacy and the target of his arguments: *“by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (4:2)*. That explains the “for” of **verse 12**. Paul was certain that the Corinthians would pray for him because they knew his behavior and conscience were clean.

R. Kent Hughes: In Paul’s thought, **conscience** — a clear conscience, a good conscience — is **foundational to ministry**. Three times in his Pastoral Letters he referenced conscience, urging *“love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5)*. He said that church leaders *“must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9)*. Substantiating his own ministry he said, *“I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience” (2 Timothy 1:3)*. The rest of the New Testament testifies to Paul’s empowerment through *“a good conscience.”* He courageously took his stand before the Sanhedrin, looked them straight in the eye, and declared, *“Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1)*. And standing before Governor Felix he confidently declared, *“So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man” (Acts 24:16)*. To the Romans Paul voiced his amazing affirmation of love for his people as true because it was spoken with a clear conscience: *“I am speaking the truth in Christ —I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1)*.

To the Corinthians, Paul audaciously boasts in his conscience. Paul has begun with an in-your-face repudiation of their charges.

Colin Kruse: The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law, rather it is a human faculty which adjudicates upon human action by the

light of the highest standard a person perceives.

Seeing that all of human nature has been affected by sin, both a person's perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself (as a constituent part of human nature) are also affected by sin. For this reason conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of one's behavior. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows. The final judgment therefore belongs only to God (cf. **1 Cor. 4:2–5**). Nevertheless, to reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster (cf. **1 Tim. 1:19**). We cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, but we can modify the highest standard to which it relates by gaining for ourselves a greater understanding of the truth.

Mark Seifrid: As its appearance in the opening report of the letter signals, the topic of **boasting** is fundamental to Paul's argument. He is responding to the Corinthian attraction to those who based their claim to apostolic status on the visible display of their powers, and thus boasted in themselves. In the body of the letter (**3:1 – 7:16**), Paul sets forth his proper boast. He himself will engage in improper boasting in its closing (**11:16 – 12:10**). The vocabulary varies in the development of the argument in the body, but the theme is consistent. Despite all outward circumstances and his own human weakness, Paul boasts, acts in boldness and remains confident, because — and only because — he is the object of divine grace and mercy, which makes him new and carries him along with the Corinthians to the end of the good purposes of the Creator. As he indicates to the Corinthians, he is giving them reason for boasting about him — or again, more properly, about God's work in him — in the face of boasting "*in appearance*" (**5:12**). Only after he has laid this foundation does he counter the boasting of his opponents with a form of boasting in himself, and that only with reserve and irony.

Paul boasts here in "*the witness of his conscience,*" that he has acted in "*simplicity and purity.*" His boast stands in striking contrast to his own statement to the Corinthians that, even though he knows of nothing against himself, he is not thereby justified (**1 Cor 4:4**). This judgment belongs solely to the Lord, who at the last day will "*make manifest the purposes of human hearts*" (**1 Cor 4:5**). For Paul, the conscience can be only an imperfect anticipation of being manifest before Christ (**5:10**). It performs only a limited function in the life of the human being. It can be "weak" and prohibit conduct that is legitimate, or conversely condone behavior that is wrong. As we have just noted, according to Paul, the conscience does not possess exhaustive self-knowledge. To have a good conscience does not necessarily mean that one is free from guilt. Our own hearts and motives remain finally hidden from us. Paul's claim here to the "*witness of his conscience*" is limited to his dealings in the world coram hominis. It is not an assertion of absolute purity coram Deo — and therefore not a claim to absolute authority. Paul appeals to the witness of his conscience with respect to the Corinthians. Limited though its function may be, a good conscience is essential to Paul's mission as apostle: by his good conscience, and therefore the transparency of his life, he commends himself to the conscience of the Corinthians, and, in fact, that of every human being (**4:2; 5:11**).

Paul's boast in the witness of his conscience is bound up with his call to boast "*in the heart*," where God has performed his saving work, rather than in appearance (5:12).

B. The Vital Components of Integrity of Ministry

1. Looked at Positively

- a. "*in holiness*"
- b. "*and godly sincerity*"

David Garland: He always acted with sincerity and integrity. Integrity prompts one to act on what is right even if it is risky, unpopular, or unpleasant and to do so steadfastly when the hail of criticism falls. Paul could not control his circumstances, but his integrity meant that he did everything he could to keep promises.

The root meaning of the word translated "*sincerity*" (*eilikrineia*) refers to something "examined by the light of the sun and found pure." Paul is truthful, honest, and transparent (in contrast to the peddlers of the word, 2:17). Spicq contends that the word does not connote "so much an absence of duplicity or hypocrisy as a fundamental integrity and transparency; it can be compared to innocence." Paul knows, however, that he will be judged by the light of the Son of God and will be found pure because he is being transformed into his likeness (3:18).

2. Looked at in Contrast

- a. "*not in fleshly wisdom*"
- b. "*but in the grace of God*"

Scott Hafemann: Paul's point in **verse 12** is that his outward behavior, rather than calling his ministry into question, actually confirms the grace of God's call in his life. In his "*boast*" about a clean conscience, Paul is therefore not engaging in the self-glorification and self-dependence that he himself so strongly condemns (cf. **Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:12; 11:12, 16, 18; 12:1–5; Eph. 2:9**). To boast in one's honesty and sincerity, or in any other evidence of God's grace, is to boast or glory properly in what God has done in and through one's life, that is, to "*boast in the Lord*" (**1 Cor. 1:31; 15:9; 2 Cor. 10:17; cf. 10:8; 11:10; Rom. 5:2; 15:17; 1 Cor. 9:15; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 3:3**). The content of one's boast, not the act of boasting as such, determines whether it is legitimate or not.

C. The Fishbowl of Spiritual Ministry

1. On Display Before the World

"*we have conducted ourselves in the world*"

2. Critically Examined by the Church
"*and especially toward you*"

II. (:13-14) TRANSPARENCY OF INTEGRITY -- THE MORE THEY KNOW HIM, THE MORE THEY WILL SEE HIS SINCERITY

Charles Swindoll: Paul hoped that the words of this latest letter (**2 Corinthians**) would pierce through the misconceptions or deceptions that had been clouding their understanding, so that they would see things clearly (**1:13**). He hoped his words would dispel the seeds of distrust that had been planted by his opponents and that one day they would take as much pride in him and his ministry as he took in them and their conversion (**1:14**).

A. (:13) Open Book

“For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end.”

David Garland: The Corinthians have a penchant for misreading his letters (see **1 Cor 5:9–11**), hence Paul’s anxiety over how they would receive the letter of tears. Therefore he “begs them to pay attention to what he actually says and not to impose their own interpretation on his words.” No discrepancy between his letters and his conduct exists. Let them have a “fair hearing.” If they criticize him for saying one thing in his letters and doing another, Paul affirms the straightforward character of his letters. His letters are not veiled, equivocal, or mercurial. Neither are his actions. He has no hidden agenda. He is transparent in all he does and writes. If they comprehend his letters, they will also understand his purposes and will not impugn his motives.

Robert Hughes: Verses **13-14** explain “*especially toward you*” (**1:12**). Verse **13** gives one specific example of Paul’s good conscience; the **honesty of his letters**, which was part of the honesty of his life. His earlier letters had been criticized (**10:9-11**), but in **1:13** he refers to what he has written in the previous twelve verses.

Richard Pratt: Paul's message was clear, compared to the sophistry and obscurity of human wisdom. Paul sought to make his teachings plain. His refusal to use pretentious, worldly wisdom demonstrated his integrity.

B. (:14) Mutual Appreciation / Boasting

“just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.”

Robert Hughes: The interpretive key to Paul’s whole understanding of **mutuality** lies in **1:14**, with reference to what the Corinthians had at least partially understood. That verse presents a world view that undergirded Paul’s entire concept of what bound him to the Corinthians; when the day of the Lord arrives, they will be each others’ reasons for pride. He hoped they would fully understand that (**1:13**). Their future mutual joy before the Lord had to pervade their present attitudes toward each other. They were bound together in an eternal calling of life and redemption in Christ. How could they

even think about being less than open and warm with each other and with Paul? How could they have split up into arrogant factions and turned a cold heart to the one who labored so sacrificially to bring them the great message of salvation?

Ralph Martin: At present the Corinthians know only part of Paul's story; he hopes they will bear with him as he tells it in detail. Then they will see why he acted as he did. The upshot will be a restored relationship of mutual trust, based on a reciprocal confidence. He already has firm faith in their integrity as Christian believers; he trusts that such a confidence will now come from them to him as they express their acceptance of his honesty.

David Garland: Paul wants the Corinthians to understand him better, to understand his ministry — how a minister of the glorious gospel must withstand such dishonor and indignity — to esteem his motives behind his actions — how he had done all things without guile and with their best interests at heart. They have renewed their zeal for Paul (7:7, 11), but the statement in 1:14a implies that they still have only a partial understanding of him, something he may have concluded from his discussion with Titus after his visit (7:6–7). He knows himself and wants them to know him fully. What may still confound them about Paul is how one so weak, so humble, so impoverished, and so afflicted can “rightly claim to be a minister of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.”

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Carrying out ministry (as well as living our whole life) “*in the grace of God*” requires that we repudiate any confidence in the flesh (in our own wisdom and strength and righteousness) and fall completely at the foot of the cross where we see the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.
- 2) The integrity of Christ during His earthly ministry is the best example of what Paul is testifying to here: look at His holiness, His godly sincerity, His avoidance of fleshly wisdom as He wrestled with Satan in the desert, the testimony of His conscience when unjustly accused, the consistency and transparency of His life lived out in truly a fishbowl environment.
- 3) The goal of Christian ministry is to disciple others ... to grow them up into Christlikeness so that both the discipler and the disciple end up looking more like the Master. As this is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit there will be cause *to be proud* when we stand together before our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly we do not want there to be any unresolved problems of reconciliation between our Christian brothers.
- 4) The “*day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” is not here yet, but is fast approaching. Any suffering or affliction on account of the gospel is very brief. There is an urgency to conduct our ministry in a manner that will be applauded by Jesus Christ Himself. At

that day everything (including our motives in ministry) will be made manifest before Him who knows us all intimately right now.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When we are misunderstood, do we immediately react defensively or do we allow God to search our conscience to see if there is any area where we have indeed acted improperly? Is seeking a clear conscience before God our first step in dealing with the situation?
- 2) In what way is “*fleshly wisdom*” contrasted with “*the grace of God*”? How can we tell which one we are relying on as we minister for Christ?
- 3) What about our life is not consistent with who we profess to be before others? How can we become more transparent before others and prove to be authentic in our Christianity?
- 4) In what sense can we boast in one another in the Lord?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: He sees no deviation from his normal pattern of behavior. He consistently seeks to be an open, out-front person who is not trying to hide anything, who is not trying to resort to guile or what he calls "fleshly wisdom," manipulating, here. He has done something that has, apparently, offended some of these Corinthians, but he wants them to know that, as far as his standing before God is concerned, his conscience is clear. Then, he hopes to make them understand.

Bob Deffinbaugh: False teachers, especially those who pride themselves for their fleshly wisdom, always have a camouflaged message. They never really mean what they say. They speak of the deity of Christ, but it is not a fully divine Christ of which they speak. It may well be a Christ who is as god-like as we can become. They speak of resurrection, but not a physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. They speak of angels and salvation and eternal life, but they mean something far different from what the Bible teaches. They not only deceive with their own words, they also twist the very words of Scripture (see **2 Peter 3:16**). Paul’s letters are meant to be taken at face value. Paul obviously lays a foundation here for arguments yet to be given. Some seem to accuse Paul of saying one thing and meaning another, in particular as it pertains to his coming to Corinth.

Paul's boasting has a present dimension, which is the result of his clear conscience regarding his conduct in the world and among the saints. But he also speaks of a boasting that is future. Paul speaks clearly and simply, and many of the Corinthians understand him. He hopes they continue to understand in this way until the end (**verse 13**). If they do, they will understand that in the "day of our Lord Jesus," the day of judgment when He returns to establish His kingdom, Paul's boasting will be in them, just as their boasting will be in him.

This sends a strong message to those who are ashamed of Paul and those with him, those who take pride in leaders who operate only in accordance with fleshly wisdom. Do some pride themselves (boast) because of such leaders? They will not boast in the "*day of the Lord!*" Do some proudly identify with Paul and the gospel he preaches? They will most certainly boast in him in the "day of the Lord." And he will boast in them. Here, as elsewhere, Paul's reward is people, those whose spiritual life and growth he has had a hand in bringing to pass.

Willmouth: Misunderstandings among Christians are often very difficult to untangle. They often start out as a small snowball that begins to roll down hill, and the longer it rolls the bigger it gets. What starts out as something that was clean and white, ends up large, uneven and full of dirt by the time it stops. Most misunderstandings, if handled properly by both the accused and those doing the accusing, never need to amount to anything if we would take the time to talk to one another. The Corinthians were allowing themselves to be caught up into lies and misunderstandings about Paul that were distracting them from serving the Lord as they should. In our passage today, we see how we should answer criticism that comes our way in ministry.

Geoff Thomas: This is the great lesson the apostle wants the Corinthian congregation to learn, and our own church must have a teachable spirit and learn it too. Paul's critics had bad-mouthed him to the Corinthian church. He had not returned to Greece - as his plans had been, and because of that absence they were condemning him as a vacillator, saying one thing and doing another. It was so terribly obvious for them - such a simple matter. He was absent when he said he would be present, and because of that they attack the whole man. They condemn him for that, and Paul is warning the Corinthians about making superficial judgments.

Philip Hughes: No man can be called upright unless his uprightness embraces every aspect of his activity. Honour and sincerity relate to the whole of life, not to a part of it. And so it is with Paul: the integrity of his character informs his conduct in its entirety. It extends therefore to his letter-writing; and it has become necessary for him to refer to this because his detractors in Corinth had been alleging that his letters were documents of insincerity, that he wrote one thing and meant another, that the man who was so impressive in his letters showed up very differently when present in person ... If the Corinthians are honest with themselves, they must acknowledge from first-hand observance that his conduct in their city was marked by transparent genuineness: well, so it is also with his letters; they can trust the plain meaning of what they read; there is

no *double entendre*, no subtle misdirection. What they read from him is not incompatible with what they know with certainty about him.

Robert Gromacki: Paul had a clear conscience. He could testify to the truthfulness of the claims that he was going to make about himself. First, his life was marked by “*simplicity*.” This word (*aploteti*) indicates single-minded purpose. Paul lived for the glory of God and for the service of others. Second, he manifested “*godly sincerity*.” The word for “*sincerity*” (*eilikrineia*) literally means “judged by the sun.” Ancient jars and vases were examined for disguised cracks by holding them up against the rays of the sun. Paul knew that God could not detect flaws in his spiritual motivation. Men can fool other men, but they cannot fool God.

Homer Kent: When we stand before Christ and give account of our deeds at His tribunal (**5:10**) all issues will be made plain. At that time Paul expects the presence of the Corinthian believers to provide him with abundant cause for glorying, for they were the fruit of his labors. Likewise the loyal Corinthians who had come to know him fully had found him to be a real cause for glorying, for he had labored faithfully among them and even now was deeply involved in promoting their welfare.

John MacArthur: How can believers enjoy a clear conscience like Paul did?

First, by learning God’s word. In **Psalm 37:30–31** David wrote, “*The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.*”

Second, by meditating on God’s Word. In **Psalm 119:11** the psalmist wrote, “*Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.*”

Third, by continual watchfulness and prayer. In **Matthew 26:41** Jesus warned, “*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*”

Fourth, by avoiding spiritual pride. Paul cautioned the Corinthians, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*” (**1 Cor. 10:12**).

Fifth, by recognizing the seriousness of sin. It was sin that caused the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (**Rom. 4:25**).

Sixth, by purposing not to sin. In **Psalm 119:106** the psalmist resolved, “*I have sworn and I will confirm it, that I will keep Your righteous ordinances.*”

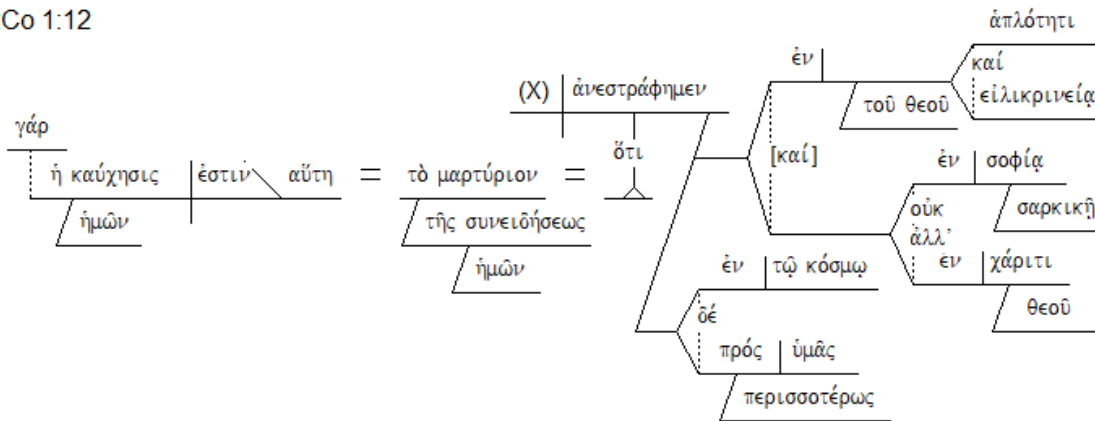
Seventh, by resisting the first hint of temptation. **James 1:14–15** graphically shows the rapid progression from temptation to sinful act: “*Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*”

Finally, by instantly confessing and repenting of sin. “If we confess our sins,” John wrote, “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

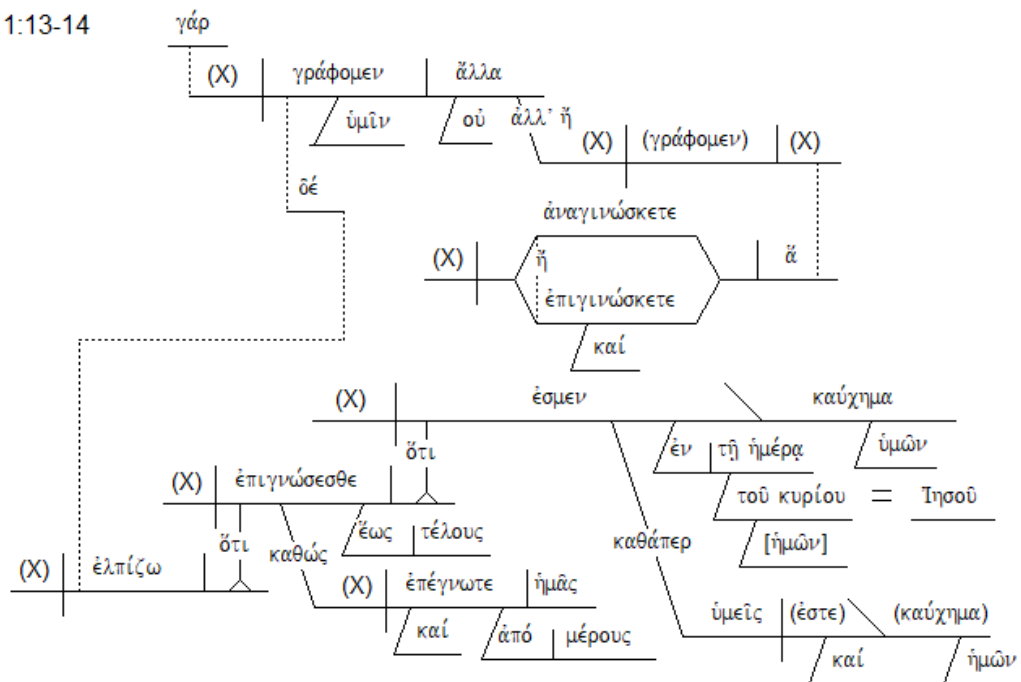
Those who heed Solomon’s charge, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23) will, as did Paul, enjoy the encouraging blessedness of a clear conscience.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

2Co 1:12



2Co 1:13-14



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1:15 – 2:4

TITLE: *MINISTRY INTEGRITY -- WHEN IS IT OK TO CHANGE YOUR MIND?*

BIG IDEA:

A CHANGE OF PLANS DOES NOT NECESSARILY COMPROMISE ONE'S SINCERITY AND COMMITMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Because of the turmoil in Corinth caused by the schisms, insubordination, and tolerance of immorality, Paul had written 1 Corinthians. Their response to that letter had been partly positive, but not completely. Pockets of resistance still remained. After receiving news that the church still had not fully repented of their disorder and disobedience, Paul had written an additional letter (2:4)—a blistering one, probably following up on the incestuous relationship denounced in **1 Corinthians 5:1-8**. In any case, Paul wanted to wait for their reaction to that letter rather than arrive on its heels as if he were reinforcing his mandates with a personal visit to “crack heads” like a harsh and vengeful taskmaster. He wanted to wait until the matter was resolved and the church was restored to love, joy, and peace. His words are those of a loving shepherd, not an angry, self-serving tyrant.

Frank Matera: The first part of the unit (vv. 15–17) raises the issue of Paul’s altered travel plans concluding with two rhetorical questions about his integrity (v. 17). The second part (vv. 18–22) anchors Paul’s faithfulness in the faithfulness of God and Jesus Christ and is related to the first part by the words “yes” (*nai*) and “no” (*ou*), which are present in both parts. The opening verse of the second part (v. 18) acts as a transitional statement and affirms that as God is reliable, so is Paul’s word. In verses 19–20 Paul turns to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to undergird his integrity, and then in verses 21–22 he returns to God, whom he describes with four participles, translated as “sustaining,” “anointed,” “sealed,” and “given.” Thus Paul surrounds the central verses that deal with Christ (vv. 19–20) with two descriptions of God (vv. 18 and 22). In this way he grounds his apostolic integrity in the faithfulness of God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur: Second Corinthians is Paul’s defense of his genuineness and spiritual integrity against the false apostles’ slanderous attacks. In 1:12–14, he gave a general defense of his personal righteousness, appealing to the highest court in the human realm, his own conscience. As noted in the previous chapter of this volume, the apostle’s conscience exonerated him of all the false charges leveled against him. His personal life, relationships with others, and ministry were all above reproach. After that general response, Paul replied in 1:15 – 2:4 to the specific charge that he was not trustworthy. The false apostles claimed that Paul did not always speak the truth, but was unfaithful, fickle, and vacillating. They supported that trumped-up charge with the flimsiest, most trivial evidence: a change in Paul’s travel plans.

Instead of merely explaining why he made that change in plans, Paul dealt with the deeper issue of his integrity and truthfulness. Rather than engage in a battle of details, of specific charges and countercharges, he elevated the discussion to the motives and attitudes of his heart. By so doing, he provided a priceless look at a noble man of God. As this text unfolds, it reveals seven attitudes that were the benchmarks of his spiritual character: loyalty, honesty, reliability, authenticity, sensitivity, purity, and love.

David Garland: Paul's changes in his travel plans and repeated failures to visit Corinth have cast suspicions on the sincerity of his love for them. He is the ever-absent father. Consequently, he seeks to lay the matter to rest in these verses. In **1 Cor 16:5–9** he told them that he would come to them after he went through Macedonia and perhaps even spend the winter with them. He specifically says that he did not want to make only a passing visit but to spend time with them. Because a "*great door for effective work*" had opened for him in Ephesus, he intended to stay there until Pentecost. He does qualify his own announced plans by saying "*if the Lord allows*" (**1 Cor 16:7**). As for the collection for the saints in Judea, he told them to put aside something every week and save whatever extra they earn so that he need not take up an offering when he comes (**1 Cor 16:1–3**). He did not plan to go to Jerusalem himself since he tells the Corinthians he will send letters of recommendation for any whom they approve to take the gift (**1 Cor 16:3**). He then writes that he expects them to send him on his way "*wherever I go*" (**1 Cor 16:6**), which entails assisting in making a journey possible by providing escorts, food, money, or means of travel. Meanwhile, Paul sent Timothy to visit them. If the verb in **1 Cor 4:17** is an epistolary aorist, which is most likely, then Timothy delivered 1 Corinthians. Paul's interesting request — "*see that he has nothing to fear while with you, because he is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. So let no one look down on him. Send him on his way in peace so that he can come to me, because I am expecting him with the brothers*" (**1 Cor 16:10–11**) — suggests that he had some forebodings about their reception of him.

For some unknown reason, Paul modified his original plan and made a **crisis visit** to Corinth (**1:15–16**). Timothy, who had since returned to Ephesus, may have relayed that the situation had taken a turn for the worse. Paul cut short this emergency visit because of a painful confrontation with someone (**2:1**). The super-apostles may already have begun their meddling in the church, but the defining event was the abuse poured upon him by someone in the congregation. Less likely, it was someone from outside the congregation. His pain became intensified when the church either supported this individual or stood by silently and did not come to his defense (**2:5; 7:12**). The dispute does not seem to be over some theological deviation (see **1:24**) but over some affront directed either at Paul's person, ministry style, attempted discipline, or all of the above (see **7:12**). Acts is silent about this painful visit (**Acts 18:1–7; 20:3**) and presents a congenial relationship between the Corinthian church and Paul. Paul's letters, however, show that his relationship with the church had some troubled moments.

This unpleasant event forced Paul to make "*a passing visit,*" something he said he wanted to avoid (**1 Cor 16:7**). Paul withdrew as suddenly as he appeared, vexed and humiliated, and he did not return (**1:23**). Sometimes retreating is better than staying and

fighting. By withdrawing, Paul sought to defuse an explosive situation and let things cool down. He did not want to risk another rebuff and have his authority undermined further. This visit to Corinth exacerbated rather than corrected the problem, and he decided that a return visit so soon after this embarrassing showdown would do little good. Unlike some leaders who try to hide their insecurity behind a blustering facade that projects their mastery of everyone and every situation, Paul is not afraid to let his frailty show. Even now, in this letter, he is apprehensive about returning to Corinth and openly shares his uneasiness with them: “*I fear that when I come my God will again humiliate me in your presence, and I will grieve for many who sinned before and have not repented of the moral impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality they practiced*” (12:21). He confesses that he is not sure how to manage the situation since this person’s posture toward him poisoned his relationship with the Corinthians.

Paul wrote the **sorrowful letter**, now lost (2:1–4), and dispatched Titus, not Timothy, to deliver it (see 1 Thess 3:1–3) rather than return himself to Corinth. Titus was an uncircumcised Greek (Gal 2:1–3) and may have been harder to intimidate than Timothy, or he may have possessed tougher skin and therefore was better suited to deal with stubborn opposition. The disaffected faction may have been only a small minority, but Paul wanted to test the obedience of the entire congregation to see if they would take it upon themselves to discipline the individual (2:9).

Paul had since gone to Troas and did not find Titus there as he expected. He was too preoccupied with worry about what was happening in Corinth to take advantage of another opened door for evangelism (2:12–13). Consequently, he headed on to Macedonia (2:12). The events in Corinth still burdened him (7:5) as he waited anxiously for Titus’s status report (2:13–14). When Titus finally arrived in Macedonia, Paul rejoiced over the good news that confirmed his confidence in them. The sorrowful letter released some of the tension by heightening it, that is, by confronting the issues directly (7:5–6).

Paul, however, had not won over the whole congregation (see 7:6–13). **Pockets of resistance** still existed. Members meeting perhaps in different house churches continued to oppose Paul and to champion the super-apostles. Nevertheless, Paul believed matters had been sufficiently settled for him to plan another visit. Second Corinthians was written to prepare for this next visit (see Acts 20:2). Paul sent Titus on ahead with this letter to solidify the support for him and to stimulate their preparations for the collection (8:1–7; 9:1–4). His return prompted this letter.

I. (1:15-16) PAUL MADE PLANS TO VISIT CORINTH

Frank Matera: In verses 15–17, then, Paul explains that the purpose of the revised travel plans was to provide the Corinthians with “*a second grace*” (*deuteran charin*), by which he means **the favor of a second visit** during which he would undoubtedly strengthen and encourage them in their faith (though **Martin** takes the phrase to mean a second opportunity for the Corinthians to be gracious to Paul). In effect, Paul is

implying that he intended to extend to the Corinthians a special favor that he did not grant the churches of Macedonia, a **double visit**, thereby dispelling any suggestion that he was neglecting them (see **Barrett**, 75).

A. (:15a) Good Intentions

“And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you”

Colin Kruse: Paul’s confidence that the Corinthians will be proud of their apostle was the reason he made his plans to visit them.

Robert Hughes: “*At first*” (**1:15**), as presented in an earlier itinerary, Paul would have visited them twice, which he knew (in his confidence of their good relationship) would be a mutual blessing. But the great troubles in Corinth and his sorrowful visit had put an end to those hopes. Paul had to stay away in order to spare them his severe discipline. But some, interpreting his change as a fleshly vacillation, had questioned his intentions; did Paul stay away because he disliked them?

B. (:15b-16) Mutual Benefit

1. Paul Blessing the Corinthians

“that you might twice receive a blessing.”

Ralph Martin: δευτέραν χάριν is variously rendered “benefit” (KJV/AV, RV, NEB, NIV, **Menzies**, **Goudge**, **Denney**, **P. E. Hughes**), a second “kindness” (**Barrett**), “a second opportunity for rejoicing” (**Héring**), “double delight” (**Moffat**), “second sign of his esteem” (**Allo**), “a second proof of my goodwill” (**BAGD**). Our translation follows **Fee** (“a double opportunity for kindness”), with a variation.

a. On the Way to Macedonia

“that is, to pass your way into Macedonia”

b. On the Return Trip Back from Macedonia

“and again from Macedonia to come to you”

2. Paul Receiving Blessing From the Corinthians

“and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea”

II. (1:17-22) HE MADE THESE PLANS WITH FULL INTEGRITY OF COMMITMENT

-- the commitment which characterizes God, who fulfills all His promises

Frank Matera: Instead of providing the Corinthians with the kind of practical excuse that they might have expected, Paul establishes his apostolic integrity on a firm foundation that cannot be assailed: the faithfulness of God and of God’s Son.

A. (:17-18) Paul’s Word of Commitment Corresponds to the Faithfulness of God

1. No Problem of Indecision

“Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?”

Ralph Martin: The allegation of **vacillation**—blowing hot and cold at the same time—arose directly out of a reneging of Paul’s travel promises (**vv 15–16**).

John MacArthur: Paul was not fickle. His circumstances changed but not his heart attitude. Here Paul affirms that he is loyal to his flock. He would always do whatever he could for their spiritual benefit, as the Corinthians had ample evidence to prove.

2. No Problem of Contradiction

“Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?”

Mark Seifrid: Paul denies that he plans “*according to the flesh*.” To think, act, or speak “according to the flesh” is to do so on the basis of the powers, abilities, and inclinations of the fallen human being. As becomes apparent in this letter, to so think and act is to operate on the basis of that which is outward and perceptible. Living “*according to the flesh*” inevitably comes to entail duplicity and hypocrisy: appearances are used to hide our self-seeking lives.

3. True to His Word

“But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.”

Richard Pratt: Paul began his response to the charge of duplicity with an **oath**: as surely as God is faithful. The charges against him appeared so serious that Paul felt the need to authenticate his claims as strongly as possible. His oath before God witnessed to his truthfulness and integrity.

Paul used a type of argument common among Jewish rabbis in his day. He argued from a greater matter to a less important matter. He called the Corinthians to evaluate the accusation of duplicity in a small matter (his delayed visit) in light of his integrity in a great matter (preaching the gospel). Since he had maintained integrity in the greater matter, his integrity in the smaller matter should not have been questioned.

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

David Garland: Since God is faithful (**1 Cor 1:9; 10:13**; see **1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3**; see also **Heb 10:23; 1 John 1:9**), and God has commissioned him to preach the gospel, his message from God is faithful and his actions to proclaim that message are also faithful. God’s faithfulness stands behind those commissioned to preach Christ (see **3:4–6**). That word is unequivocal and does not fluctuate with the market or change with the tide.

Unreliable, capricious, and impetuous ministers can lead others to regard the gospel they preach as untrustworthy and not worth thoughtful consideration. Paul argues that the Corinthians know the gospel he preached to be trustworthy, and that attests to his trustworthiness. Without saying so explicitly, he insinuates that he failed to come as announced because God overruled his plans. They should infer that God prevented his coming as planned because it was for their greater good.

B. (:19-20) Christ Models the Integrity of Commitment

1. (:19) Christ is the Ultimate Standard for Integrity of Commitment

“For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us – by me and Silvanus and Timothy – was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.”

No vacillation / no Indecision / no Confusion / no Contradiction

Philip Hughes: Nothing could be more incongruous than to suspect of insincerity the Apostle whose entire being was dedicated to the service and proclamation of Him who is the Truth and the Same yesterday, today, and forever. The veracity of the Christ, by faith in whom, in accordance with the word of God, their lives had been completely transformed, was evidence conclusive to them of the veracity of him who had endured so much in order to bring the message to them.

2. (:20) Christ Fulfills All of God’s Promises

“For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

Anthony Thiselton: Why is Paul so emphatic about God’s “yes” and his faithfulness or constancy? From the Corinthians’ viewpoint, Paul’s saying that he had to do what God wanted might seem to shift the blame for inconstancy from him to God. He is therefore all the more eager to stress God’s constancy. Further, God’s promises especially to Israel receive confirmation through Christ. Jesus Christ is the “yes” that fulfils these promises (**v. 20**).

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s open-ended description in **verse 20** of these promises (“*no matter how many promises God has made*”) reflects his conviction that **Jesus is both the midpoint and climax of redemptive history**. There is no event in Israel’s history or promise granted to God’s people that does not find its significance or fulfillment in Christ. God’s unchanging commitment to pour out his grace toward his people by meeting their needs reached its climax in the sending of Christ for their sins (cf. **5:21**). So too God’s promise to deliver his people from sin and evil, the ultimate fulfillment of which is their resurrection from the dead, also takes place in Christ (cf. **4:14**). And God’s intention to judge the world is likewise brought about by Christ (cf. **5:10**). Hence, God’s apparent change of plans in first sending Christ to the cross (cf. **Mark 10:45**) before he comes to judge (cf. **1:14; 5:10**) was, in reality, a consistent fulfillment of his promises to bless the nations (cf. **Gen. 12:1–3; Rom. 3:21–26; 4:11; Gal. 3:13–14**).

The unexpected nature of Christ's first coming was, in reality, the unfolding of God's overarching plan and promise to pour out his grace on his people. Similarly, Paul's commitment in Christ to meet the needs of the Corinthians led him to change his plans in order that they might experience God's grace or "*benefit*" as much as possible (not once, but twice). In other words, because Paul's intention remained the same, his plans changed! Paul utters his agreement (his "*amen*") to what God has done in Christ (i.e., meet their needs), not only in word by preaching the gospel, but also in deed by acting like Christ himself toward the Corinthians.

David Garland: The implication is that if they affirm that the message about Christ is trustworthy, then they should also be able to affirm that the messengers are trustworthy. How can they say yes to God while saying no to God's apostle? Since they believed God endorsed the trustworthiness of the messengers in the proclamation of the gospel, then God will also vouch for their trustworthiness in the less serious business of making travel plans.

C. (:21-22) The Rest of the Godhead Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

1. (:21) God the Father Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

"Now He who established us with you in Christ and anointed us is God."

Richard Pratt: God made them all *stand firm* in Christ. "*Stand firm*" (*bebaioo*) describes believers' faithful devotion to Christ. Instead of letting them waver or stumble, God had empowered Paul and the Corinthians to remain committed to Christ. The perseverance of those who were taught by Paul indicated God's blessing and validated Paul's ministry.

John MacArthur: As important as they were, Paul's ultimate claim to integrity and authenticity as God's messenger and Christ's apostle was not his loyalty, honesty, reliability or any other personal feature; it was what God had done in his life

2. (:22) God the Spirit Ensures the Integrity of our Commitment

"who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."

Charles Swindoll: The Greek word for "*sealed*" is *sphragizō* [4972]. The middle voice of the verb, used here, carries the sense that the Holy Spirit sealed us for Himself. Commentator **C. K. Barrett** gives us a little background on the meaning of the "seal" in the ancient world: "The seal, given and preserved intact, was proof that a document had not been falsified, or goods tampered with in transit. It was also a mark of ownership; and the Christian, sealed . . . with the Spirit, was both visibly marked out as God's property, and secured ready to meet examination at the day of judgment."

Though the promises of God were set in stone and irrevocable, the Corinthians should have held Paul's own hoped-for plans as tentative, subject entirely to the will of God. Instead they had misunderstood his intention as a promise, an error that opened the door to the unfounded charge of fickle vacillation.

Thrall: Summary: The essential points in **21b–22** are therefore these. Paul answers his readers that God has “*anointed*” them (with himself and his associates) as members of the messianic community destined to reign with Christ, and that he has “*sealed*” them as belonging to his chosen people. Hence they are heirs, all of them, to the divine promises which find their fulfilment in Christ (v **20**). In the gift of the Spirit, moreover, they have received the first instalment of the promised salvation which will be consummated at the Parousia.

Robert Hughes: The Spirit was God’s bond between Paul and the Corinthians and also His confirmation of Paul’s divine approval. The charge of fleshly action brought that bond and approval under suspicion. The Corinthians needed to share in God’s suffering and comfort (**1:3-11**) and to affirm His faithfulness in the Spirit (**1:21-22**). They were to reaffirm God’s faithfulness in the gospel and in Paul’s decision-making process, lest their faith in the gospel fall along with their disillusionment with Paul. The issue was indeed that serious (see **11:3-4**).

III. (1:23 – 2:4) HE CHOSE TO CHANGE HIS PLANS – TO SPARE THEM APOSTOLIC DISCIPLINE

George Shillington: With his broad defense now in place, Paul can proceed to answer the specific charges against him and seek reconciliation between himself and his converts at Corinth. He acknowledges two facts for which he is held responsible and advances a motive for each of them. The first fact is that he did not visit Corinth as he had planned initially. The reason was to spare them pain. The second fact is that he wrote a painful letter, because he loved them and wanted to rekindle joy between himself and them. . .

The fact-motive structure of this text is as follows:

Motive—to spare you. (**1:23**)

Fact—I did not come again to Corinth. (**1:23**)

Elaboration—I do not mean. (**1:24 - 2:2**)

Fact—I wrote to you as I did. (**2:3a**)

Motive—so that I might not suffer pain. (**2:3a**)

Elaboration—for I am confident about all of you. (**2:3b-4**)

A. (1:23 – 2:2) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for the Corinthians and for Paul

1. (:23-24) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for the Corinthians

a. (:23) Motive of Mercy (in not coming to discipline)

*“But I call God as witness to my soul,
that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”*

David Garland: He does not spell out what he wanted to spare them from, but we can safely assume he has in mind **severe chastisement**. His reasons for not returning had nothing to do with any wavering in his purpose or fear of being humiliated again. He

wanted to spare them from being humiliated and the severe discipline that might forever alienate them from him and even from the faith.

- b. (:24) Humility of Mutuality (rather than leadership by lordship)
*“Not that we lord it over your faith,
but are workers with you for your joy;
for in your faith you are standing firm.”*

John MacArthur: Paul never abused his apostolic authority to gain prestige or power, or to further his own selfish aims. His goal, even in disciplining the unruly Corinthians, was the joy that holiness would bring them.

Eric Mason: “Lord it over” leadership seeks to control people. “Lord it over” leadership controls people because they don’t trust the Lord. Let me give you this for free: if any leader in a church tries to control every decision you make in your life, they are wrong. You don’t prepare grownups by doing everything for them. “Lord it over” leadership wants to control people and outcomes for their own purposes, but a decisive disciple maker gives you room to fail. Paul refused to lord it over them.

Raymond Collins: Rather than domineering and lording over the Corinthians, the evangelists want to be coworkers (*synergoi*) with them. Paul is determined that the Corinthians understand the nature of their relationship. Rather than standing over the Corinthians as their bosses, Paul and his companions stand in a horizontal relationship with them. More often than not, when Paul uses “*work*” in its various forms (from the root *erg-*), he is referring to the work of the gospel. This is especially the case when he compounds the use of the root with *syn*, “*with*.” The Corinthians are united with Paul and the other missionaries in the proclamation of the gospel, the fruit of which is joy.

2. (2:1-2) Apostolic Discipline would be Painful for Paul

- a. (:1) Discipline is an Occasion for Sorrow
*“But I determined this for my own sake,
that I would not come to you in sorrow again.”*

Richard Pratt: The pain of rebuke is necessary at times in Christian relationships but not always appropriate, even when sin and error persist in the church. Paul practiced what he told the Colossians: “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone*” (**Col. 4:6**).

David Garland: The greatest pain for Paul was not caused by their treatment of him but by their failure to live according to their Christian calling and deserting the true gospel of the cross and resurrection for a false, but more glittering, gospel of success dispensed by false apostles.

- b. (:2) The Sorrow is Mutual
*“For if I cause you sorrow,
who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?”*

Frank Matera: The mention of joy provides Paul with a transition to the second part of the unit (2:1–4), in which he employs the dialectic of rejoicing and sadness to describe his unique relationship to the community. Since the Corinthians are his dear children and he is their founding father (1 Cor 4:14–15), there should be a mutual exchange of joy between the community and its apostle, and this is what Paul hoped his apostolic visit would effect. Since his second visit to Corinth resulted in grief for him and the community, however, he decided against making the promised return visit to Corinth, lest grief be added to grief. After all, if the apostle saddened his children by a further visit, how could they—saddened by him—give him joy? Consequently, instead of visiting them again, Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote a letter out of “*a sense of great affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears.*” The reference to “*affliction*” (*thlipsis*) recalls what Paul has already written about this topic in his benediction. But there is no mention of godly consolation, which must wait until Titus’s report (7:6).

David Garland: If he adds to the sadness with another acrimonious clash, the problems between them would only deepen. The result would produce the exact opposite of joy. Paul’s solution for resolving the situation was to write a painful letter of rebuke instead of confronting them face-to-face.

B. (2:3-4) Loving Pastoral Exhortation Points the Way Towards Joy Instead of Sorrow

(By giving them time to deal with their problems, Paul could make a joyful visit)

1. (:3) Pastoral Exhortation Based on Confidence of Follow Through

“And this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all.”

Scott Hafemann: Paul had the confidence that his mercy toward the Corinthians would have its desired result: The Corinthians would repent and once again share Paul’s joy in Christ (2:3b). The very existence of 2 Corinthians is itself testimony to the fact that Paul’s confidence, if not fully realized (note his emphasis on “*all of you*” in 2:3), was not misplaced. Paul’s love for the Corinthians, expressed in the severe warnings and calls to repentance of his previous letter (2:4), was the instrument God used to bring the majority of the Corinthians back to Paul (cf. 7:8–12). Paul’s hope is that his present letter will do the same for the rest (cf. 13:5–7).

2. (:4) Pastoral Exhortation Flowing out of a Concerned Heart of Love

“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.”

Philip Hughes: Genuine love always experiences profound grief when it perceives those who are loved falling into error and disloyalty; it always manifests itself in deep concern for their best and highest interests. By writing, rather than immediately coming

to them in person with a rod, he lovingly afforded them an opportunity for self-examination, repentance, and reformation.

David Garland: Paul is not stoical about the pain the dispute caused him. He does not try to hide his emotion but boldly expresses it. He had felt deeply their affection for him, and the apparent withdrawal of that affection had deeply wounded him. He wrote from great psychological anguish and through many tears. It was not simply personal hurt that caused the tears. He wept over those who were ethically impure (**Phil 3:18**) and over those who had veered from God's will.

Discipline is never painless for the one who delivers it or the one who receives it. Calvin points out that godly pastors weep within themselves before making others weep. Paul is neither ironhearted nor ironhanded. His love for them motivated his actions entirely. If they were grieved, he leaves no doubt that he was grieved more.

Paul insists that the grief he caused them was the surest sign of his love. He gives them direction and rebukes them as a loving father would (see also **7:8–10; 10:6; 1 Cor 4:14–16, 21**). In the Jewish tradition about paternal discipline, chastisement is proof of love.

Robert Gromacki: The usage of the two words of emotion plus the adjective “*much*” reveal that the apostle was not cold and heartless. Rather, the source . . . of the epistle was a compassionate, loving concern.

John MacArthur: The lying teachers were dead wrong about Paul. He was not an untrustworthy deceiver, and to take a trivial issue and attempt to use it to discredit his ministry was reprehensible. As he examined his heart honestly before God, Paul found loyalty, honesty, reliability, authenticity, sensitivity, purity, and love—the traits that mark all godly pastors.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) The Body of Christ has been designed to function in such a way that every time we are together corporately there is the expectation of mutual blessing – both the giving and receiving of blessing. This is due to our interdependency on what role each member in the body contributes. Christ as the Head of His body orchestrates the flow of these blessings.
- 2) **Verse 19** shows that Christ Jesus as the Son of God was the focus of all of Paul's preaching along with that of the other apostles and their delegates.
- 3) Christ is the ultimate standard for integrity of commitment.

4) All of the precious promises of God find their fulfillment in Christ who demonstrates the faithfulness of God to keep His Word.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection between the faithfulness of God to His promises and our ability to make and keep commitments with integrity and sincerity?
- 2) Is my life characterized by overplanning or underplanning? Do I think that it is somehow unspiritual to make long range plans and set goals? Am I sensitive to how God might change my plans and cause me to go in another direction?
- 3) Why did Paul feel justified in delaying apostolic discipline in this case? How did he expect the Corinthians to deal with the problem they were facing?
- 4) How should faith contribute to joy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: Why did Paul change his plan? That is what the Corinthians wanted to know. Why did he say he was going to come directly to Corinth, and would come twice to the city, but instead did not come directly -- he went by way of Macedonia -- and he came only once? Well, Paul has been saying because the Spirit of God opened his eyes to see factors in the situation that made him change his mind. He could see that the great promises of blessing that God had for this church at Corinth would only be fulfilled if he did not come directly to Corinth, but instead went to Macedonia and waited for Titus there. So, convinced of the Spirit, and in obedience to what he saw of the Spirit's teaching in this regard, with a clear conscience, Paul changed his original plan and went instead to Macedonia instead of Corinth.

Two Reasons:

- 1) Because he wanted to spare them . . .

What he is saying is, he refrained from coming in order to preserve their freedom to act only as they were convinced the Lord wanted them to act, and not because he said so. Now this is a very important principle, because here the apostle is challenging one of the widespread misunderstandings in the church in our day. Paul says, "Look, I am not your boss. If I had come to Corinth the way I had originally planned, after having already paid you a painful visit, it's very likely that my powerful personality, my strong will, my position as a respected apostle would have put such pressure upon you that you would have obeyed me, but not out of conviction that was what the Lord wanted you to

do. So I did not come, in order that you might preserve freedom to do what God wants, not what I want." If he had come he would have given them the impression that he had authority over them. But that is not true, he says, "We are not lords over your faith. We are not your boss. We have no authority to tell you what to do or what to say or how to act, but rather" (in a beautiful phrase he puts it), "we are helpers of your joy." That is wonderful, isn't it? Paul sees himself as a fellow worker, standing alongside them,

helping them to understand what God wants so they would enter into the joy of the Lord. But he is not their boss.

One of the major problems the church is facing in our day is the widespread tendency to misunderstand the nature of authority and leadership within the church, the practice of having somebody who is regarded as the ultimate boss, and everybody has to get directions and permission from him to do anything. I run into this everywhere. I have often said that if we Protestants are right when we say to the Catholics that God never intended to have one man, a pope, over the whole church, it is no improvement to have one in every church.

2) Because the Spirit led him to see that he had already caused pain enough by his letters and his painful visit . . .

Paul is like a skillful surgeon. The surgeon has to cut people, but a good surgeon cuts only as much as he has to. He derives no joy out of cutting people's bodies open to remove the tumor, or the cancer, or whatever. As soon as that is done, and thoroughly done, he stops cutting, because he does not like to create pain.

Bob Deffinbaugh: We should first note that Paul's plans to visit Corinth are not complete or set in stone, and they are contingent upon the Lord's will. Paul tells the Corinthians what he hopes to do, not what he guarantees he will do. Paul's journeys described in Acts demonstrate that God's plans sometimes cause Paul to modify or set aside his own (see **Acts 16:6-10**). If the Corinthians dare to charge Paul with breaking his promise, they simply need to reread his words to discover that he made no firm promises. He speaks to them about what he desires to do, and generally about what he will do, if it is the Lord's will (see also **Acts 18:21**). . .

It teaches us that all of God's promises are sure, for they have been accomplished in Christ. God keeps His word, and so those who trust in Him and serve Him must also keep their word. They dare not make promises they fail to keep, for in so doing, they misrepresent the God who is ever faithful to fulfill all His promises. If we are obliged to keep all of our promises, we must certainly be cautious with regard to the promises and commitments we make. We must never make commitments we do not intend to keep or which we may not be able to keep. Those commitments we do make we should surely keep, even at great personal sacrifice. *"In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change"* (**Psalm 15:4**).

On the one hand, we need to be very careful about presumptuously making plans in a way that presumes upon God and upon the future:

13 Come now, you who say, *“Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit”* (**James 4:13**).

Yet we should also be on guard that we are not rigid about the plans we make and refuse to change our course when it becomes obvious this best serves others. In the story of the Good Samaritan, no doubt the priest and the Levite had plans and stopping to help the wounded man forced them to set aside those plans. Many times I have found that I missed opportunities to minister to others because I had my own plan and I did not wish to change. Paul reminds us that plans may very well change out of love. I am suggesting that we may be unwilling to change our plans out of a lack of love for others and a selfish concern for ourselves.

Paul Barnett: Now, in defending his own integrity, Paul has reminded the Corinthians that they are and will continue to be Christians because of the faithfulness of God. The God who made the promises has faithfully kept them in the coming of his Son, and it is this God who has ‘commissioned’ Paul and his companions to proclaim Jesus Christ the Son of God, in whom the Corinthians now believe. It is God who is keeping them in their relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit given as seal and guarantee.

The God who was faithful to his promise is also loyal to his people. Paul is a minister of this faithful God and of his new covenant. Let the Corinthians understand that, despite their criticisms of him, he too is faithful to them and loyal in his dealings with them.

Copeland: REASON FOR THE DELAYED VISIT (23-24)

1. To spare them, as God can confirm (23)
2. This is not to suggest an attitude of domination over them, for he views himself as one working for their joy, and he acknowledges that they stand on the basis of their faith (24)

Willmouth: Paul's real reasons for changing his plans (1:23-2:4, 12-13).

It was out of his consideration for the Corinthian church (1:23 - 2:4).

- 1) There was probably also the accusation that Paul had shown himself to be a spiritual dictator who tried to dominate his converts and their faith and did not hesitate to cause them pain.
- 2) In answering this charge, Paul solemnly invokes the God who is faithful (v. 23).
- 3) Paul makes it clear that he wanted to spare the Corinthians and himself further pain that he refrained from returning to Corinth from Ephesus after the so-called "painful visit." (v.24; 2:1-4).

A) Paul wasn't some tyrannical overlord, seeking to intimidate and domineer in matters of faith and conduct.

B) An apostle was obligated to serve his converts; he had no right to dominate them.

- It was his privilege to work with them to secure their "joy in the faith" (**Philippians 1:25**), not to lord it over them by causing them unnecessary pain.

- Paul wasn't motivated by power, but by the love he had for the brethren.

David Guzik: "*Anointed us . . . sealed us . . . a deposit:*" Paul refers to three aspects of the Holy Spirit's work within us.

i. *Has anointed us:* The only other place where the New Testament speaks about anointing is in **1 John 2:20** and **27**. Every use speaks of an anointing which is common to all believers, not a special anointing for a few Christian superstars. The idea behind anointed is that we are prepared and empowered for service. The fact that we are anointed means that we share something with the prophets, priests, and kings of the Old Testament, who were also anointed ones.

ii. *Sealed us:* In the ancient world, a seal was used to identify and to protect. If something was sealed, everyone knew who it belonged to (the seal had an insignia), and the seal prevented anyone else from tampering with the item. The Holy Spirit is upon us to identify us and to protect us.

iii. *A deposit:* The word deposit is the word for a down payment. We have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the fullness of what God will do. The Holy Spirit is just a pledge of greater things to come. As Christians, God has purchased us on the lay-away plan, and has given us an impressive down payment. He won't walk away from the final payment, because He has so much invested already!

Harris: His detractors were shrewd enough to convert the charge into one of capricious vacillation, levity of character (*elaphria*, translated "lightly"). His arbitrary changing of travel plans, they urged, was motivated purely by self-interest, with no concern for broken promises or for needs at Corinth. He made his plans on mere impulse like a worldly man, according to the mood of the moment, so that he could say, "yes, yes" one day and "No, no" the next day, or "Yes" at one moment and "No" immediately afterwards, with the result that he seemed to be saying both "Yes" and "No" in the same breath. That Paul is actually quoting the accusation of certain Corinthians seems

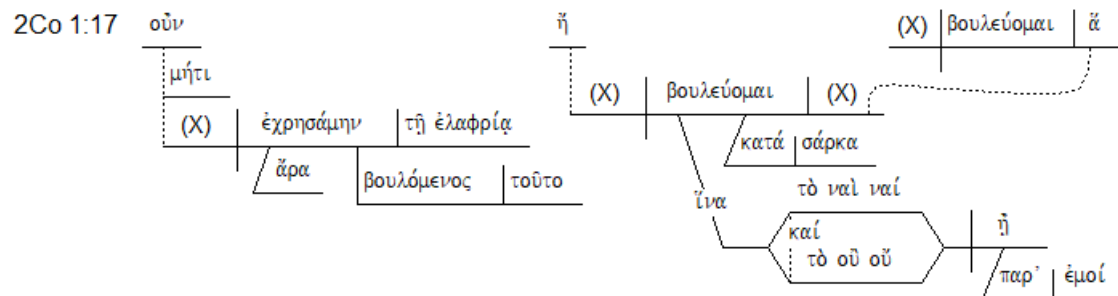
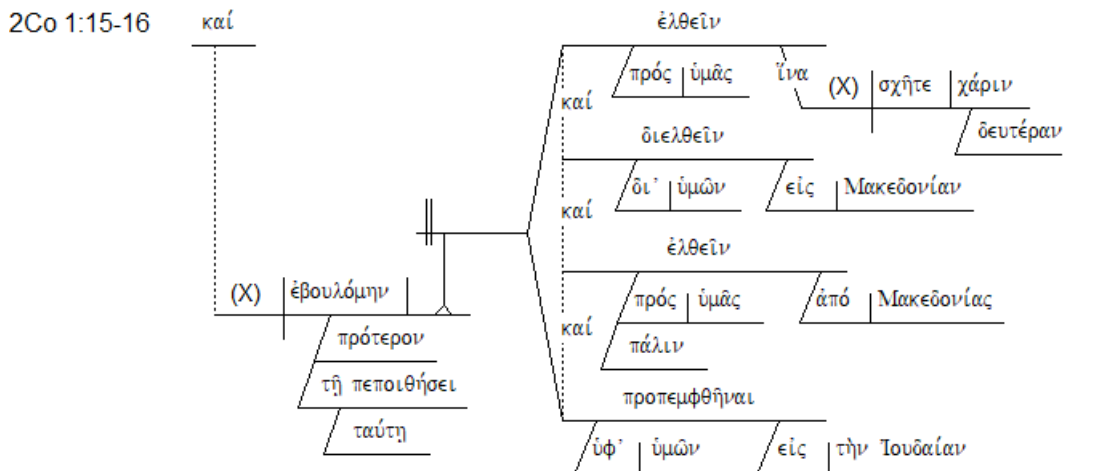
indicated by his use of the definite article with *elaphria* ("fickleness") and with the twice-stated (cf. **Matt 5:37**) *nai* ("yes") and *ou* ("no") (v. 17).

Robert Gromacki: Paul lived by conviction, not by doubt . . . Paul was single minded in purpose and action. He stated his positive assurance in three areas.

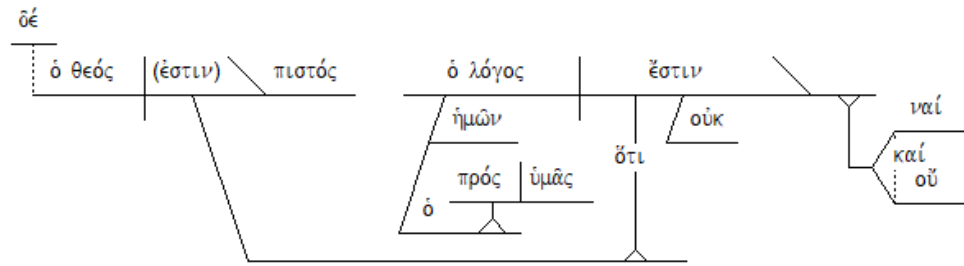
- *First*, he knew that what he preached about Christ was true (1:19) . . .
- *Second*, he knew that the “promises of God” were true (1:20) . . .
- *Third*, he knew that God had worked in his life (1:21-22).

William Barclay: Paul used severity and rebuke very unwillingly. He only used them when he was driven to use them and when there was nothing else left to do. . . When Paul did rebuke he did it in love. He never in all his life spoke merely to hurt. There can be a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince at a sharp and a cruel word. But Paul was not like that. He never rebuked to cause pain; he always rebuked to restore joy. . . When Paul rebuked, the last thing he wanted was to domineer. . . Finally, for all his reluctance to rebuke, for all his desire to see the best in others, for all the love that was in his heart, Paul nonetheless will and does rebuke when rebuke becomes necessary. He does not want to do it but he will not shrink from it when it becomes imperative.

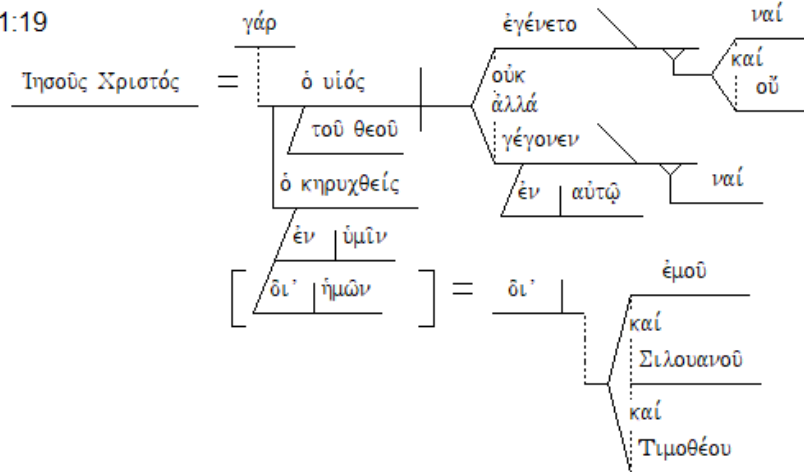
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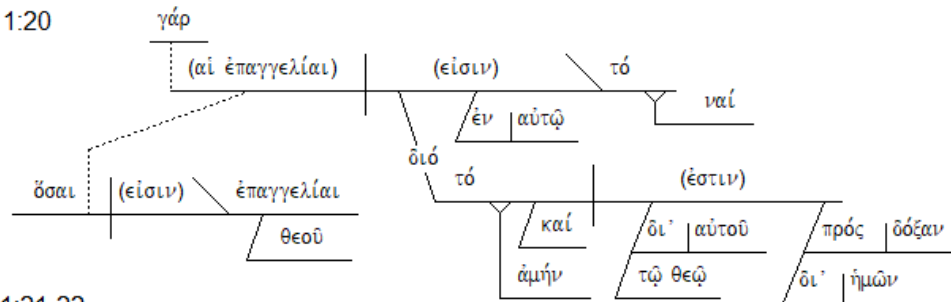
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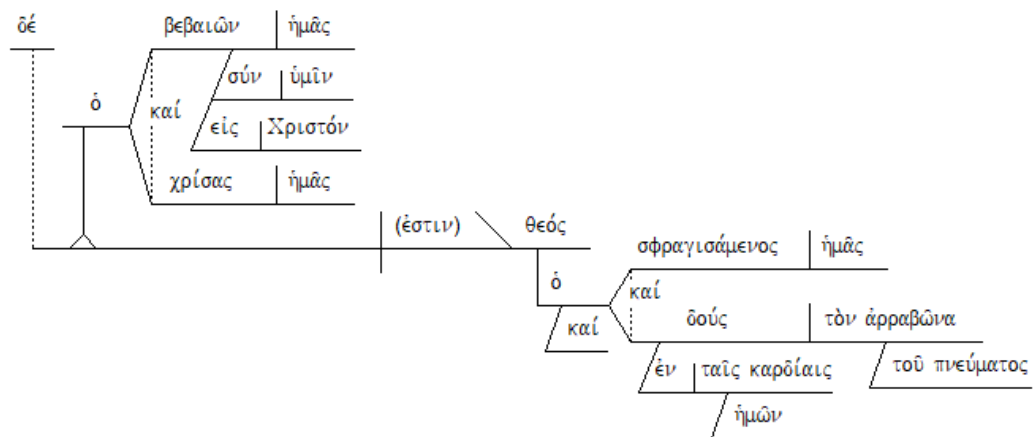
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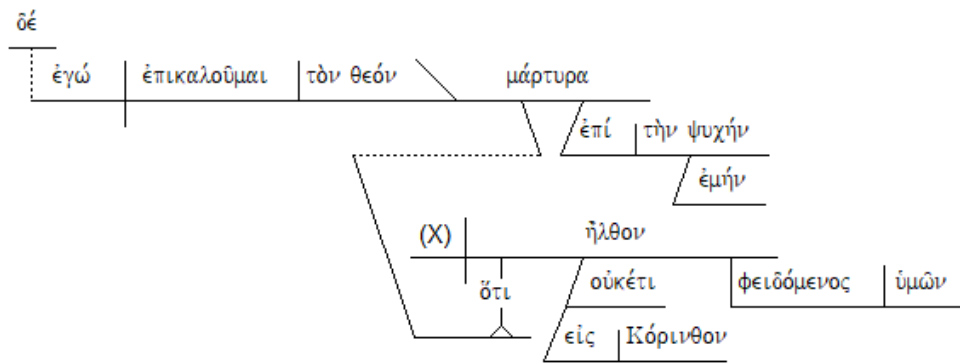
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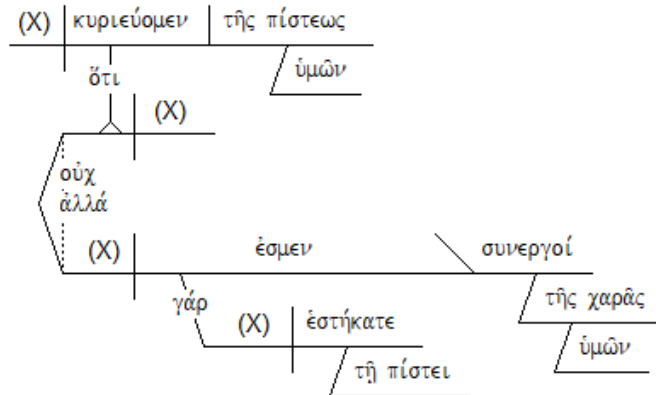
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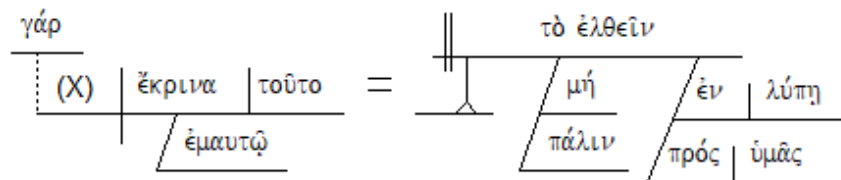
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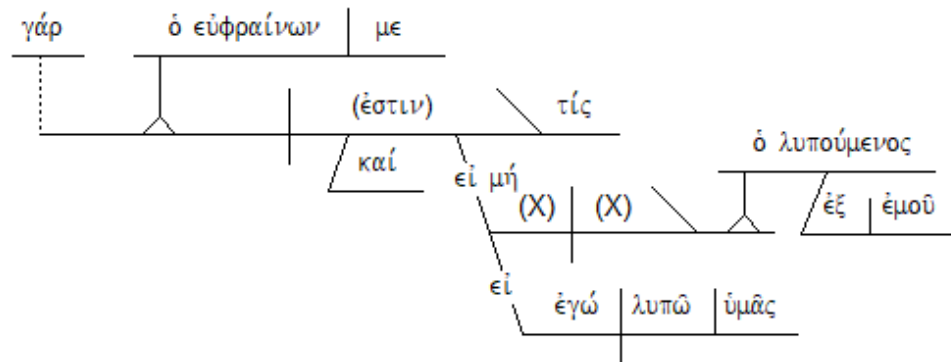
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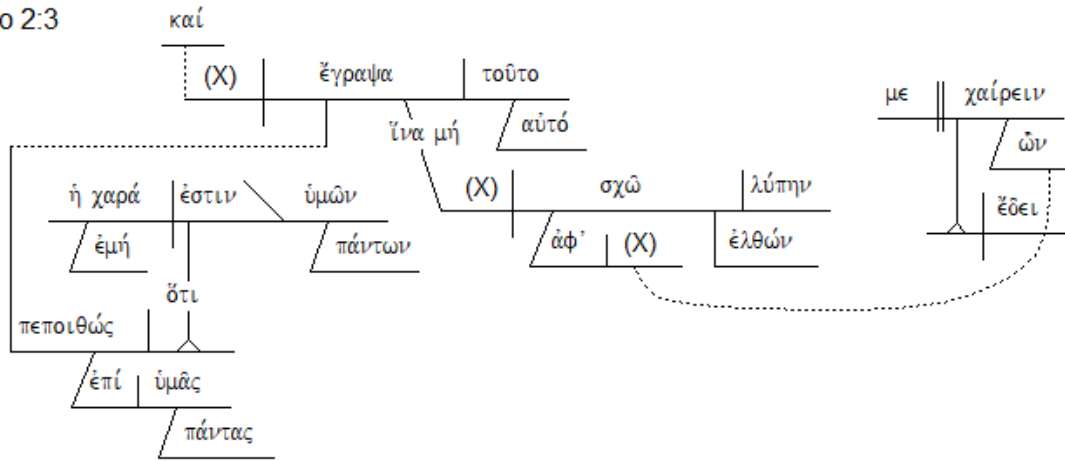
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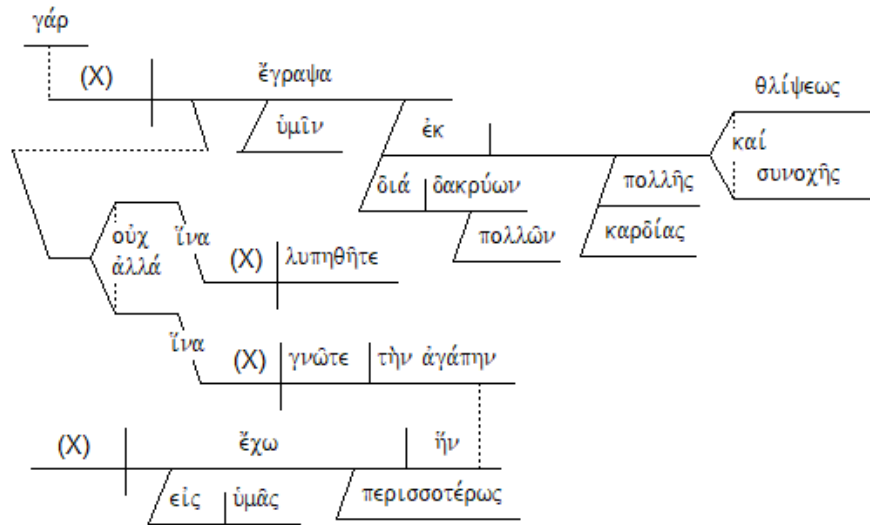
2Co 2:2



2Co 2:3



2Co 2:4



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:5-13

TITLE: THE GOAL OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

BIG IDEA:

THE GOAL OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION – NOT EXCESSIVE PUNISHMENT

INTRODUCTION:

George Shillington: This section alludes to the cause of Paul’s pain on his interim visit, and why he wrote the tearful letter in response. Someone in Corinth defamed Paul in some way, causing him personal grief. At the time of the incident, the community as a whole withdrew themselves and let the insult fall on their apostle, who had brought “*the truth of the gospel*” to them initially (**Gal. 2:14**). By implication, therefore, the insult was as much on them as it was on their apostle, Paul.

Once Titus returned from Corinth with a good report (**2 Cor. 7:5-12**), Paul celebrates with the Corinthians, because his letter of tears achieved its desired end. The community has taken the offender to task and placed him under discipline. Paul’s pastoral counsel to them, by the time of writing this passage, is to lift the disciplinary measures. It is time to forgive and console the offender, and to reaffirm their love for him as Paul does.

Charles Swindoll: Sadly, failure to grant forgiveness to a genuinely repentant person can lead to deep wounding, permanent scarring, and an irreparable relationship between two people. Harmonious fellowship is left hanging. This is true for interpersonal relationships, including those among believers in a church. In fact, the Christians in Corinth struggled with this very issue, as one of their festering, unresolved conflicts was leading to painful schism in the body of Christ.

John MacArthur: We live in a culture that views forgiveness not as a virtue, but as a sign of weakness. Our heroes are the vengeful, who challenge their enemies to give them an opportunity to strike; those who proudly see themselves as their enemies’ “worst nightmare.” Some even argue that forgiveness is unhealthy. Self-help books boldly assert that people should cultivate self-esteem and blame others for causing their problems. The victim mentality reigns supreme, and as a result of these and other perspectives, vengeance and retaliation are exalted, not the noble and Christlike virtues of forgiveness and restoration.

Eric Mason: Be Willing to Accept Authentic Repentance (2:5-11).

- A. Don’t pass blame (**2:5**).
- B. Understand the evidence of authentic repentance (**2:6-7**).
- C. Reconcile with people who repent, and reaffirm your love for them (**2:8-9**).
- D. Don’t fall for Satan’s designs by continuing in division (**2:10-11**).

Scott Hafemann: Though Paul nowhere mentions the specifics of the offense itself, it must have involved some sort of slander against him and his apostolic relationship with the Corinthians. Perhaps the offender had been a person of influence who had sided with Paul's opponents and led the opposition against Paul. Whatever the case, most of the Corinthians had initially sided with this slanderer. Later, after the majority had repented as a result of his "*tearful letter*" (2:4; 7:8–13), they grieved with Paul because of the offender's influence over them. They consequently punished the offender (2:6), most likely by excluding him from the fellowship of the Christian community in accordance with the precedent set in **1 Corinthians 5:2, 5, 13**.

The punishment had its intended, salutary impact. The offender had repented. He was ready to rejoin the congregation. In response, Paul calls the Corinthians to follow in his footsteps not only in pouring out punishment on those who deserve it, but also in showing mercy to the repentant. Paul's purpose is redemptive, not the re-establishment of reputations. The same desire to extend mercy to others that guided Paul's relationship with the Corinthians is to guide the Corinthians' relationships with one another. Paul's concern is that if forgiveness, comfort, and love are not extended to the offender, that person will be "*overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*" (2:7–8). As **Victor Furnish** observes, "any further discipline would be strictly punitive and could only lead to grief of a worldly sort, unrelieved by any redemptive value" (cf. 7:9–11, where such "*worldly grief*" leads to death).

Raymond Collins: Many people find it difficult to forgive, particularly when they have been personally hurt by someone who is close to them. It is so easy to be judgmental. Many times church communities suffer because their members fail to forgive one another for their perceived faults and feelings. Nonetheless, the Lord's Prayer and Paul's forgiveness of the troublemaker are a reminder that forgiveness is a hallmark of Christian existence. A failure to forgive harms the church, harms the world, and harms so many human relationships.

I. (2:5-6) ENOUGH IS ENOUGH -- WARNING AGAINST OVER-PUNISHING

A. (:5) There Has Already Been Sufficient Sorrow (difficult verse to exegete)

1. To the Apostle Paul

"But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me"

i.e. not to me alone; not just to me

Sin inevitably causes sorrow ... whether repented of or not

John MacArthur: One of the chief causes of an unforgiving heart is **pride**. A prideful reaction to an offense can run the gamut from wallowing in self-pity to violent retaliation, and everything in between. But there was no place in Paul's heart for self-glory, self-protection, self-pity, a wounded ego, or retaliation. Paul acknowledged that the offender who assaulted him had caused sorrow, but he refused to take it personally (cf. **12:10**). By refusing to make an issue out of his personal injury, the apostle intended

to soften the animosity toward the repentant offender. The church would deal with him apart from any consideration of Paul.

2. To the Majority of the Corinthian Church

“but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”

Let’s not compound the situation by adding sorrow upon sorrow . . .

Who is the individual who had sinned, caused such sorrow, had repented and now was deserving of forgiveness and restoration?

- older commentators assumed it was the person committing incest in 1 Cor. 5
- but context here seems to indicate it was some sort of ringleader that had risen up against the authority of Paul or of his missionary team

Anthony Thiselton: In v. 5, Paul says that the offender has caused pain not only to him, but to the **whole community**. Sin or offence is seldom a merely individual matter. His pastoral sensitivity forbids him to name the man. **Barrett** and **Bultmann** suggest that this offence was committed during Paul’s painful visit and has no connection with the sin of immorality mentioned in **1 Cor 5:5**. They describe it as a personal insult to Paul; the offender “*was a stranger.*” “*To some extent*” (NRSV; Greek, *apo merous*) is restrictive, i.e., the community was not affected as a whole.

Paul Barnett: The **corporate nature** of Christianity comes out clearly in the passage. Paul’s words are addressed not only to individuals, but also to the church whose members minister to one another by their gifts (**1 Cor. 12:7–11**). Lively and open relationships provide the best context for the word of God to work out its purposes among us. This is why the local congregation is so highly regarded and referred to as ‘*the church of God*’ (**1:1**).

B. (:6) There Has Already Been Sufficient Punishment

“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.”

Shows that the entire church had not gone along with the prescription of punishment which Paul had laid out in his severe letter (written between first and second Corinthians and subsequently lost)

William Barclay: Punishment should encourage and not discourage. It should aim at producing, not the despair which abandons the struggle of goodness, but the new view which inspires to a greater and a more successful struggle. In the last analysis, this can only happen, when we make it clear that, even when we are punishing a person, we still believe in him.

Charles Swindoll: Even if Paul has in mind a destructive sinner other than the man referenced in **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**, the key element of the situation that the apostle addresses is clear: A sinning man had been severely and sufficiently disciplined by the church, resulting in his repentance. Instead of forgiving him, however, they kept him at

arm's length. Instead of extending him gracious pardon, they put him on graceless probation. Paul acknowledges that the sinner had caused sorrow not only to Paul, but also to the whole congregation (**2 Cor. 2:5**). Yet Paul suggests the punishment he had already endured from the majority in the church is "*sufficient*" for his particular actions (**2:6**).

II. (2:7-9) FORGIVE AND RESTORE – INSTRUCTION REGARDING HOW TO FORGIVE AND REAFFIRM LOVE

A. (:7) The Need for Forgiveness and Restoration

*“so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him,
lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”*

B. (:8) The Exhortation to Forgiveness and Restoration

“Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”

John MacArthur: At its core, **unforgiveness is a lack of love**. Forgiveness, on the other hand, fulfills the royal law of love (cf. **James 2:8**). Forgiving love is a precious jewel, a rich treasure in the life of the church. Without it, churches are torn, split, and fragmented. Churches that faithfully practice church discipline must also forgive penitent sinners. The greatest demonstration of love, both by individual believers and the church collectively, is forgiving others.

C. (:9) The Test of Forgiveness and Restoration = Test of Obedience

*“For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test,
whether you are obedient in all things.”*

George Shillington: Does Paul mean obedience to him as an official apostle of the church? Probably not in those terms. His concern, rather, is that the Corinthians follow the "*obedience of faith*" in relation to Christ (**Rom. 1:5**). The demand of the gospel requires that they acknowledge wrongdoing and deal with it, as they have now done. But the gift of the gospel calls both apostle and community to forgive the offender in the presence of Christ (**2 Cor. 2:10**).

Frank Matera: Having urged the community to forgive the offender, Paul explains why he wrote the severe letter: to **test their character**, which will be proven by their obedience in all things. In writing this, Paul is providing the Corinthians with another reason to forgive the offender. For if they do not forgive him, they will not prove themselves obedient in all things—even though Paul has urged rather than commanded such forgiveness. Moreover, if they are disobedient in this matter, Satan will have outwitted them by using their refusal to forgive as an occasion to snatch a member from their midst. Thus Paul's reason for writing the harsh letter (to test their obedience) provides further motivation to forgive the offender, since their obedience must be ongoing.

III. (2:10-11) FORGIVENESS PROTECTS AGAINST BITTERNESS – THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

(Mercy triumphs over Vengeance)

A. (:10) Forgiveness Lies at the Heart of Christian Relationships

“But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also, for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”

Tasker: He forgives the offender, however, not merely as a personal act, but because such forgiveness is necessary for the welfare of the Corinthian church, whose apostle he has been called to be.

Charles Swindoll: Paul then presents his own forgiving attitude and actions as an example to emulate (2:10). As their father in the faith, Paul assures them that his own policy of forgiveness for the truly repentant should give them confidence that when they act with the same spirit of grace and mercy, he will have their back. Forgiveness, like discipline, is not self-seeking. In fact, it can be downright difficult. Nevertheless, Paul tells the Corinthians that his pattern of forgiveness is *“for your sakes in the presence of Christ,”* not for his own personal gain.

John MacArthur: Forgiveness is crucial to maintaining unity in the church fellowship. Without it discord, disharmony, bitterness, and vengeance can destroy unity.

Robert Hughes: Paul forgave in the full *“presence of Christ”* (2:10), a presence that allows no unforgiving hearts and reflects all of the positive aspects of God’s forgiveness. Paul stressed mutuality in forgiveness to show that he had no hard feelings about the past offense.

B. (:11) Satan Uses Bitterness to Drive a Wedge Between Believers

“In order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

David Guzik: *Take advantage* (the Greek word *pleonekteo*) is used in four other verses in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 7:2, 12:17-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:6). It has the idea of cheating someone out of something that belongs to them. When we are ignorant of Satan’s strategies, he is able to take things from us that belong to us in Jesus, things like peace, joy, fellowship, a sense of forgiveness, and victory.

Anthony Thiselton: Christians who are reluctant to forgive not only forget the extent to which they have received God’s forgiveness, but give an advantage to Satan (v. 11), which he may seize and exploit.

Charles Swindoll: Satan’s evil *“schemes”* and conniving plans involve deception and destruction. In the case of the Corinthians, the adversary had deceived them into thinking that church discipline is all judgment and no mercy, all punishment and no grace. God’s goal is not ridding the church of sinners, but reconciling sinners back to

the church. When we forget that, we are no longer pursuing the Lord's will, but rather the devil's wiles.

Frank Matera: Consequently, when Paul writes that "*we are not unaware of his designs,*" he reminds the Corinthians that Satan is continually devising plans to destroy their community, for example, by providing the Corinthians with seemingly good excuses for not forgiving the offender. These references to Satan indicate how real the power of evil was for Paul. Although modern readers may find it difficult to conceive of Satan in such a personal manner as does Paul, they must reckon with the biblical witness that so clearly names and identifies the adversary of God's people.

IV. (2:12-13) RECONCILIATION TAKES PRIORITY OVER MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY – THE PASTORAL HEART OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

George Shillington: Paul's note about his search for Titus, first at Troas and then in Macedonia, adds a finishing touch to the effectiveness of his defense against the Corinthians' charge of fickleness and duplicity. Titus has gone to Corinth, probably with the Letter of Tears (2:1-4; 7:5-13). Paul's mind could not rest until he heard how the community at Corinth received Titus and the letter, so he went on to Macedonia. His restlessness accents his **concern for the Corinthians** and serves to exonerate him from the charge.

Frank Matera: These verses end the first part of Paul's narrative about what has happened since the painful visit (1:12 – 2:13). After this unit Paul will undertake an extended discussion of his apostolic ministry (2:14 – 7:4). He will then conclude this narrative with an account of Timothy's report that the Corinthians have repented (7:5–16). The manner in which 7:5–16 picks up the narrative line of 1:12–13 has led many to speculate that the intervening material (2:14 – 7:4) belongs to another letter on apostolic ministry (Bornkamm) or to the severe letter (Bultmann). In the view of others (Allo, Furnish, Lambrecht, Martin, Thrall), Paul is purposely enclosing the discussion of his apostolic ministry by the narrative of the events that transpired between him and the community. . .

This particular unit is the capstone of the narrative Paul has recounted thus far. Its purpose is to show the Corinthians that his love for them (2:4) was so great that he curtailed a fruitful mission in Troas (or the region thereabout) in order to go to Macedonia, where he hoped to meet Titus and learn how the Corinthians had received the severe letter. Though brief, the unit consists of three parts: a temporal clause about the fruitful mission that God granted him in Troas (v. 12); the main clause, in which Paul says that he was ill at ease because he did not find Titus (v. 13a); a concluding statement of Paul's decision to go to Macedonia (13b).

Robert Hughes: Verses 12-13 provide a stark description of Paul's passing up a wide-open opportunity to minister the gospel. Why did he move on? The mystery of Titus's whereabouts caused the apostle inner turmoil, because his concern for Titus's news

from Corinth superseded even Paul's concern for potential converts in Troas. How could anyone claim Paul had little concern for the Corinthians' well-being?

A. (:12) An Open Door is Not Always the Right Door

“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,”

Robert Hughes: How long he remained in Troas he does not say, but it was sufficiently long for him to discover that there was an open door for the evangelical message. This door of opportunity was apparently still open on his return to Troas the following spring, as the incident recounted in **Acts 20:6-12** indicates.

Paul Barnett: His zeal for the gospel brought him to Troas, but his passionate concern for the Corinthians kept him from staying there, despite the opportunities for preaching the gospel which now existed. Significantly, Paul revisited Troas a year later when finally withdrawing from the region. On that occasion he remained for seven days (**Acts 20:6**). Perhaps God kept the door open?

B. (:13) A Troubled Spirit Must Always be Addressed

“I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”

Charles Swindoll: The word translated “rest” (*anesis* [425]) can also be interpreted as “a loosening” or “a relaxing.” It is the same word used in **Acts 24:23** for “freedom” and in **2 Corinthians 8:13** for “ease.” The idea seems to be that although Paul stood before an open gate leading to a garden of spiritual fruit almost falling from the trees, he felt distracted, disquieted, and dismayed. Some anxiety gripped his spirit and prevented him from focusing on his task of ministry. What should have been a relaxing ministry of ease became a trial and a chore.

Homer Kent: The reason for this restlessness was that Titus had not arrived at Troas. Apparently Titus was the associate who had been sent to Corinth with the severe letter, and Paul had hoped for an early return with good news from the church. Presumably Paul and Titus had planned to meet at Troas. . .

Paul could wait for Titus no longer. His restless spirit drove him to Macedonia, with the plan of encountering Titus on the way. His chief reason for wanting to find Titus was to hear recent news from Corinth. Not even the open door at Troas could entice Paul from his deep desire to meet the needs at Corinth. Surely there was no basis for suspecting his motives or his love for the Corinthians.

John MacArthur: The door that was opened at Troas represented a divinely prepared opportunity, the kind Paul longed for and prayed for. But he was so overwrought and burdened by the situation at Corinth that he found it difficult to focus on the opportunity; he had no rest for his spirit. The turmoil and discontent of his heart were debilitating and threatened to close the door that was opened for ministry at Troas. His

intense concern for the Corinthian church raised troubling questions in his mind. Would they affirm their love for him? Or would they follow the false apostles? Would they deal with the specific issues he had rebuked them for: divisions, strife, incest, marriage, singleness, divorce, the role of women, idolatry, spiritual pride, the abuse of the Lord's Supper, misuse of spiritual gifts? Paul's heart ached because he did not know the answer to those questions, and as a result he had no freedom to minister. Until he heard from Titus, the apostle feared the worst. He was so burdened by the situation at Corinth that he lost interest in the open door of ministry at Troas. Not finding Titus in Troas, Paul went on to Macedonia. He could wait no longer; he had to find Titus to hear about the response of the Corinthians. So he headed for the province of Macedonia, bordering the northwest shore of the Aegean Sea, north of Achaia.

Robert Gromacki: Thus, Paul ended this section as he began, by intimately expressing his concern. He wanted the church to know how he really felt about them and how those feelings affected his travel plans and treatment of the offender.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Forgiveness and Restoration lie at the heart of the ministry of Christ. He came to pay the ultimate price so that reconciliation might be accomplished. We are out of bounds if we are seeking punishment or revenge on those who have wronged us. Mercy must always triumph over judgment in our personal relationships.
- 2) In fact Christ is looking on as a witness, motivating us to respond to others with the same spirit of forgiveness and restoration that He has demonstrated to us (**vs. 10**).
- 3) What drove Paul relentlessly was the burden of bringing the message of the gospel of Christ to people who had never heard the good news before (**vs. 12**).
- 4) The Lord places a priority on relationships over service.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does church discipline make us *sorrowful* or does it inflate our pride as we compare ourselves and judge ourselves to be more spiritual?
- 2) What are the practical steps involved in *reaffirming love* for someone?
- 3) Is there anyone to whom we should be extending *forgiveness* but have been reluctant to do so?

4) What are the *schemes* that Satan likes to use to take advantage of us? How do we protect ourselves?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Applications:

1. First, true repentance calls for immediate and full forgiveness.
2. Second, full forgiveness is demonstrative, not theoretical.
3. Third, to hold back forgiveness invites trouble from the adversary.

Robert Gromacki: Their forgiveness was to disclose Paul's forgiveness, which in turn revealed the graciousness of Christ's forgiveness. Forgiveness is part of God's essence; He stands ready to forgive even before He has been asked to forgive. A forgiving spirit does not keep count of the times that a person has sinned against him.

Harris: **Verse 10** affords perhaps the clearest evidence that the offense was basically a personal act of effrontery against Paul or possibly his acknowledged or delegated representative. There was need for Paul's personal forgiveness, although, in deference to the penitent offender's feelings, he discounts the personal pain he himself experienced (**v. 5**) and deliberately understates the seriousness of the offense (**v.10**) lest anyone imagine that he considered himself virtuous in granting forgiveness so readily. All this would be inappropriate if he were describing a sin of incest (**1 Cor 5**).

The circumstances and purpose of Paul's forgiveness are then defined (**vv. 10b, 11**). First, forgiveness was granted "*in the sight of Christ*," as Christ looked on as a witness and approved – Christ, who taught that willingness to forgive one's brother was a precondition for the receipt of divine forgiveness (**Matt 5:12, 14, 15; 18:23-35**). And in **Colossians 3:13** (cf. **Eph 4:32**) Paul grounds the Christian obligation to forgive others on the Christian experience of God's forgiveness in Christ. Moreover, forgiveness was granted for the welfare of the Corinthians ("*for your sake*"), that is, to preserve unity and to relieve them of their patent embarrassment at not having acted against the offender before Paul wrote to them. They keenly felt their disloyalty to Paul (**7:7, 11**).

David Garland: The issue of church discipline is a difficult one, and the danger is that we might tilt to one extreme or the other.

1. On the one hand, we may not want to do anything when someone is guilty of an offense that brings disgrace upon or disrupts the community. We bury our heads in the sand and hope that all the unpleasantness will soon go away. Or we may try to substitute cheap grace for real grace by letting bygones be bygones without requiring the offender to show signs of genuine repentance.

2. On the other hand, we may be tempted to go too far in discipline so that it becomes destructive rather than constructive. We may try to turn the one who is condemned into a scapegoat and inappropriately cover up our own hidden sins by taking out our anger on this victim.

Hughes correctly recognizes that it is “no less a scandal” to ban a penitent sinner forever from the redeemed and reconciled community as it is to wink at flagrant wickedness. **Calvin** gives sage advice:

Severity is required in order that wicked men may not be made more bold by being allowed to go unpunished — for this is rightly said to be an enticement to sin. But on the other hand there is a danger that a man who is disciplined will fall into despair so that the Church must practice moderation and be ready to pardon anyone as soon as it is sure that he has sincerely repented.

Sinners must pass through a period of despair, but the danger comes when they become permanently mired in gloom and lose all hope of forgiveness. Feeling that one has no way out can present an even worse danger to the soul.

R.C.H. Lenski: This shows that each congregation is autonomous but that it is ever under Christ when it is exercising its autonomy. Expulsion and reinstatement, the ban and absolution are powers conveyed to the congregation by Christ (**Matt. 18:17**). Paul treats the congregation accordingly.

Bob Deffinbaugh: If I understand Paul correctly, there is an important lesson for us to learn here from his example. Someone has sinned against Paul, and the church has taken disciplinary action against that person. The man has repented, but the church has not forgiven him and received him back into fellowship. Paul now mentions this situation in the context of his prolonged absence from Corinth. I believe it is Paul’s desire to forgive this man and be reconciled to him, but first the church must acknowledge his repentance and reverse their disciplinary action. If Paul were to return before the church restored this man, he would not be free to have fellowship with him because he would be bound by the church’s disciplinary actions against the man. When the church does restore the man, Paul can come and be reconciled and thus find joy and comfort in his reunion with him. The church must first act to restore him and then Paul can have a sweet reunion with him, as well as with the rest of the church.

Ray Stedman: The sign that you really see that what you did was wrong is that you begin to see the hurt that you have caused by it; and it creates a sense of sorrow, of remorse that you have been the instrument by which many have been damaged in their faith or in their feelings. Therefore, the mark of true repentance is sorrow. I know that we are being taught oftentimes today that if you do something wrong, all you have to do is go and say to somebody, "Yes, I did that," then you instantly demand, in a sense, forgiveness. Well, it is true that the other person should forgive right away, but the mark that shows him that you are really repentant is that, accompanying that admission of guilt, is a sense of sorrow because of the hurt that has been caused. This is a quite

different spirit than what we see at times today where people get angry if they are not forgiven instantly.

The mark of genuine repentance is that you do not really believe anybody ought to forgive you, that what you have done is hurtful, and you do not think you deserve forgiveness. Therefore, forgiveness is something that is always freely extended to someone who does not feel that he deserves it; and that is what is clear here

Outline: Discipline and Restoration

- I. The limits of discipline, **5-8**
 - A. The extent of hurt, **5**
 - B. The dimensions of discipline, **6**
 - C. The sign of repentance, **7**
 - D. The appropriate response, **8**

- II. The elements of restoration, **9-11**
 - A. Faithful confrontation, **9**
 - B. Ready forgiveness, **10**
 - C. Spiritual awareness, **11**

John MacArthur: There are at least ten biblical reasons for forgiving others. First, believers are never more like God than when they forgive.

Second, the sixth commandment, “*You shall not murder*” (**Ex. 20:13**), does not just forbid murder but also anger, malice, lack of forgiveness, and desire for revenge.

Third, whoever offends another person offends God more, because all sin is ultimately against Him.

Fourth, those who have been forgiven of great sin against God must forgive the lesser sin of others against them.

Fifth, believers who refuse to forgive forfeit the blessing of fellowship with other Christians.

Sixth, failing to forgive results in divine chastening.

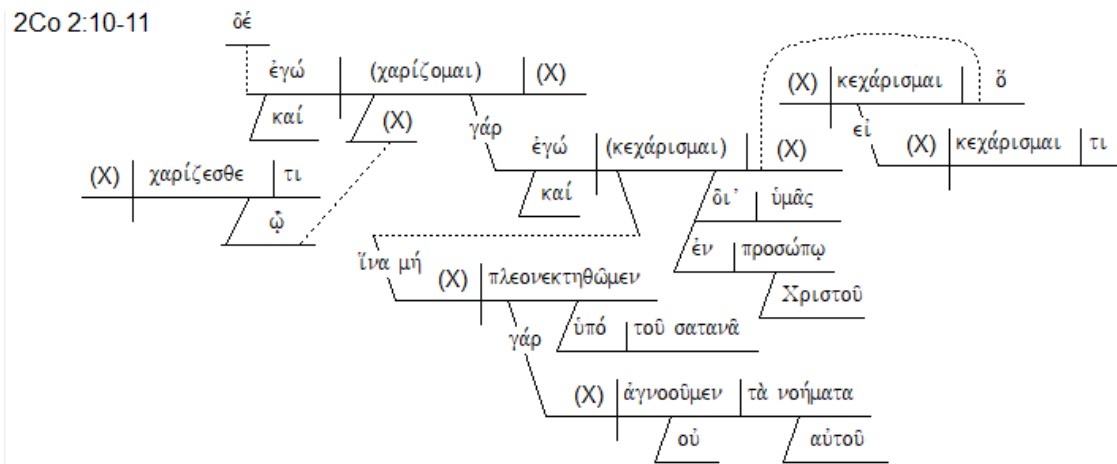
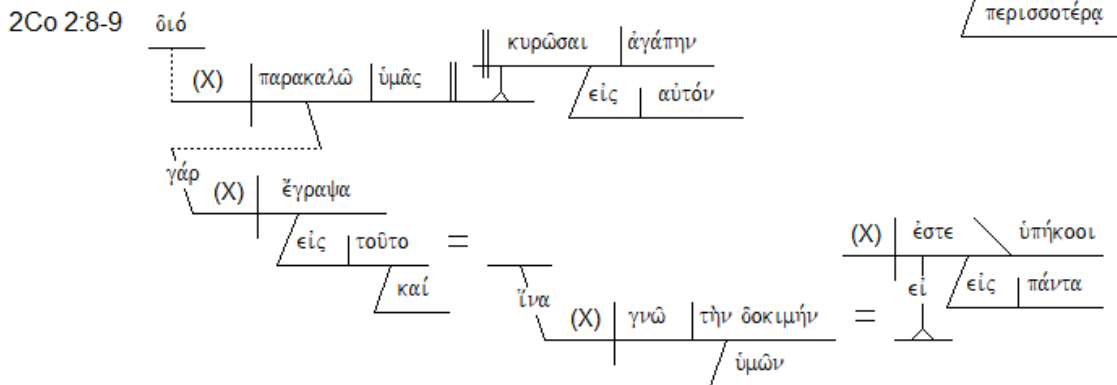
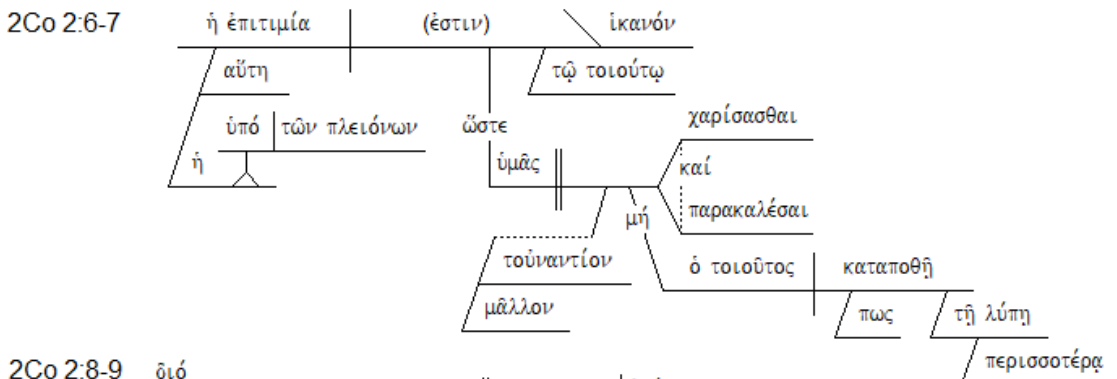
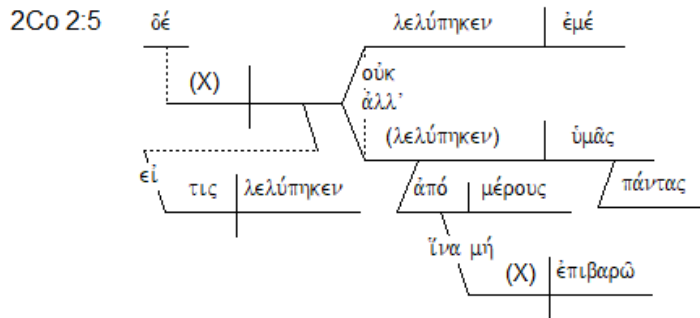
Seventh, God will not forgive believers who refuse to forgive others.

Eighth, failing to forgive others renders believers unfit to worship.

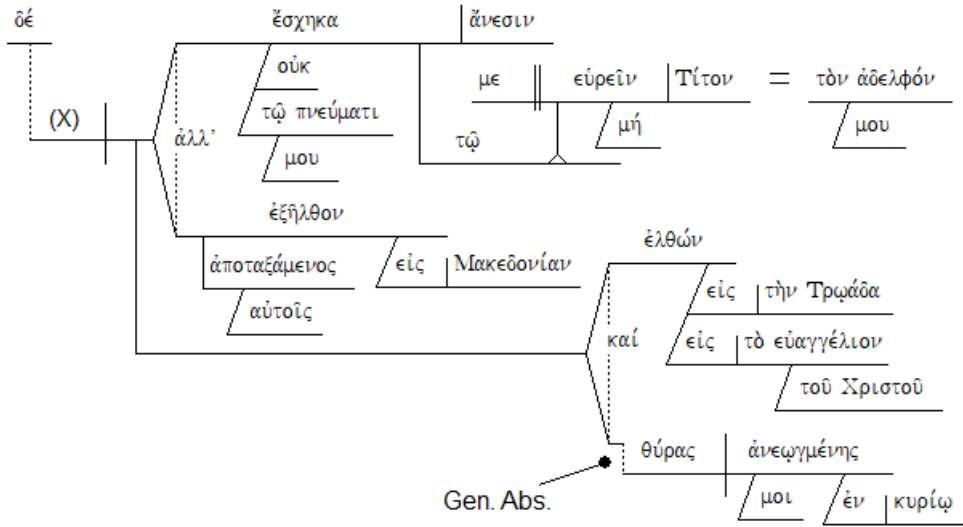
Ninth, to refuse to forgive is to usurp God’s authority. It is to set oneself up as a higher court, with higher standards, than God.

Finally, offenses against believers must be recognized and embraced as the trials that mature them.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



2Co 2:12-13



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

TITLE: *HOW TO ALWAYS BE A WINNER WITHOUT ALWAYS WINNING SOULS*

BIG IDEA:

**GOD GUARANTEES VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST –
OUR SUFFICIENCY IN MINISTRY DOES NOT DERIVE FROM PERCEIVED
SUCCESS**

INTRODUCTION:

2:12-13 was a **Transition passage**

- wrapped up the issue of the explanation of Paul's change of plans and his heart for the Corinthian church
- introduced the forward advance of the New Covenant Gospel Ministry

David Garland: The transition in **2:14** from the previous verse seems abrupt. Since **7:5** seems to continue the thought of **2:13**, some have theorized that **2:14 – 7:4** is a separate letter. If **2 Corinthians** is a **unity**, as I have argued, it is necessary to ask how this sudden shift in Paul's train of thought fits his argument as a whole. His outpouring of thanks to God (see **8:16; 9:15; Rom 6:17; 7:25; 1 Cor 15:57**) may anticipate his joy over the happy result from the letter and Titus's visit (**7:5–16**), but Paul specifically gives thanks for all that God has done in his ministry. He thanks God because God's designs are wiser and more powerful than Satan's (**2:11**). Despite failures here and there, he thanks God that **the knowledge of God spreads everywhere through the apostolic preaching like an aroma**. The preaching generates differing responses — both rejection, which leads to death, and acceptance, which leads to life. The life-and-death impact of Paul's apostolic ministry causes him to ask who is adequate to shoulder the responsibility for proclaiming such a potent word from God.

What follows in **2:14 – 7:3(4)** is a long explanation that establishes **Paul's sufficiency as an apostle** and his justification for his boldness in his severe letter in which he must have frankly confronted them for their moral failures. In this section he does not explicitly address the issue of his rivals who have interfered in the community. Instead, he defends himself against the complaints raised by some Corinthians that he overstepped the bounds of friendship by challenging their moral failures so directly and provocatively. He had to speak to them severely to bring them back into line, but he also had to be careful so that they did not feel he crossed the line of propriety by being too severe. They would then break off relations with him completely. Paul therefore justifies his license to be so frank with them in this letter while assuring them that he meant it for their own good.

Scott Hafemann: Most students of this passage maintain that it is impossible to move smoothly from Paul's anxiety over Titus in **2:12–13** to his praise for God in **2:14**. The transition from anxiety and apparent failure to praise seems too abrupt. It is therefore often posited that Paul's praise in **2:14** anticipates prematurely the good news Paul

received from Titus as outlined in **chapter 7**. Others argue that **2:14 – 7:4** is a fragment from a different letter altogether, usually viewed as having been written earlier than the rest of **chapters 1–7** and then inserted later between **2:13** and **7:5**.

However, once the reason for Paul's praise in **2:14** is clearly ascertained, it becomes clear that **2:14** does not pose a break in Paul's thought at all. Rather, it introduces the necessary and logical response to the suffering introduced in **2:12–13**. Without **2:14**, Paul's continuing honesty in **2:12–13** would play right into the hands of his opponents as yet another evidence of his weakness. So before his opponents can utter a word against Paul because of his anxiety over Titus, Paul praises God for it as part and parcel of his apostolic life of suffering, through which God's power and presence are being revealed.

Paul Barnett: The word **triumphal** is critical in this section. It may be that the new teachers in Corinth presented themselves as sweeping all before them as they triumphantly captured the Gentile churches for Moses and the old covenant (cf. **10:13–15**). To them, Paul, with his recent reversals in Corinth and Ephesus and with his message of a crucified Messiah, was a sorry, defeated figure, **the embodiment of weakness compared with their self-sufficient power**.

The first part of the 'long digression', **2:14 – 3:6**, is particularly important. Paul tells the Corinthians, in vivid language, how he sees his ministry in terms of its inner reality. Let the Corinthians and the newcomers understand that so far from abject defeat **God was actually leading him in a victory procession** – and this regardless of rejection in Corinth, expulsion from Ephesus, turmoil in Troas and anxiety in Macedonia. Even in what appeared to be reversal and difficulty he was being led by God, a matter for which he gives thanks (**14**).

The general picture in **verse 14a** is of a **Roman victory procession**, though Paul's specific point is somewhat uncertain, as witnessed by the variety of suggestions as to the precise meaning. Military leaders were granted a public victory procession (*triumphas*) through Rome only after winning major battles. The most spectacular procession of the first century was the celebration of the conquest of the Jews when, in ad 71, the Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus rode in chariots through the streets of Rome behind their pathetic prisoners of war. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records this at length, and it was also depicted on the Titus Arch in Rome, where it may still be seen. It is not clear whether Paul sees himself as the conquering general or as his captive. A case can be made for both, though the apostle as a captive slave seems more likely. Whatever he meant, we can be sure that, despite the appearance of weakness, it was God who always and everywhere led Paul in triumphal procession (**14**).

This was not, however, the triumphalism of Paul's opponents, who declared themselves superior to Paul in missionary success as well as in ecstatic experience. Success and strength were the marks as well as the objectives of their ministry, and significant numbers of the Corinthians came under their influence.

Frank Matera: Having explained how profoundly disturbed he was at not finding Titus at Troas (2:12–13), Paul suddenly bursts into a **cry of thanksgiving** that approaches a victory shout. This thanksgiving, which is a response to the discouragement that he experienced at Troas and which anticipates the consolation he eventually experienced at Macedonia (7:6–7), also marks the **beginning of a new section**. For the God to whom he gives thanks is the God who is leading him in a triumphal procession so that Paul is the fragrance, which is the knowledge of God and the aroma of Christ, leading some to death and others to life. Overwhelmed, Paul asks if anyone is qualified for such a ministry that results in death for some and life for others. He then explains that he does not exercise this ministry in the questionable way that so many others do, and he suggests that he is qualified to exercise this ministry. Two powerful metaphors stand at the heart of this unit: the triumphal procession and the fragrant aroma arising from incense or perhaps from a sacrificial offering.

I. (2:14-16a) THE CONSEQUENCES (OUTCOME) OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY -- VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST DOES NOT DEPEND ON POSITIVE RESPONSES – TWO METAPHORS

A. Metaphor of Roman Triumphant Procession

1. God is Always Victorious (this truth is assumed)

2. God Always Leads Us in His Triumph

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph”

John MacArthur: Quoting description provided by **William Barclay:**

In a Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shew-bread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at its top, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family; and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *Io triumphe!* their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the cheering crowds, it made a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime. [MacArthur takes the alternate interpretation that Paul and his associates “follow the all-conquering Commander in the victory parade, sharing in the triumph of His decisive victory over sin, death, and hell.”]

Raymond Collins: The marchers include Paul and his fellow missionaries, at least Timothy. Timothy greets the Corinthians in **2 Cor. 1:1** and is cited in **1 Cor. 4:17** (cf. **16:10–11**) as Paul’s emissary to the Corinthian community. **Second Corinthians 1:19** refers to Timothy, along with Silvanus and Paul, as having preached the gospel to the Corinthians. This evidence suggests that Timothy, at least, should be included in the “apostolic we” of **2 Corinthians**. Moreover, **Phil. 1:1** portrays Timothy as a slave of Christ along with Paul himself. Accordingly one must not exclude Timothy from the band of enslaved prisoners evoked by the imagery of the triumphal procession. . .

The procession honors Christ, victorious over sin and death. Paul and his companions are vanquished and enslaved. Paul was taken by God at the moment of his call, and his companions at the moment that they embraced the missionary life. Since then Paul has been enslaved (**Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 9:15–18; Phil. 1:1**; cf. **Titus 1:1**) and subject to harsh conditions (**2 Cor. 11:23–27**), almost manipulated by God. He and his companions (cf. **Phil. 1:1**) participate in the parade under some constraint.

Scott Hafemann: Read against the background of the triumphal procession, Paul’s metaphor in **2:14** may be “decoded” as follows: As the enemy of God’s people, God had conquered Paul at his conversion call on the road to Damascus and was now leading him, as a “*slave of Christ*” (his favorite term for himself as an apostle), to death in Christ, in order that Paul might display or reveal the majesty, power, and glory of God, his conqueror.

David Garland: **Williamson’s** evaluation of the evidence leads him to conclude: “When followed by a direct personal object, *thriambeuein* means ‘to lead as a conquered enemy in a victory parade.’” It was not used to refer to those who participated in the procession as members of the army. If Paul’s use of the verb accords with its common meaning, he does not represent himself as a garlanded, victorious general nor as a foot soldier in God’s army who shares in the glory of Christ’s triumph. Quite the opposite. He portrays himself as a **conquered prisoner being put on display**. The background of this metaphor is the celebration of a military victory in which the spoils of war, rolling stages presenting battle scenes, and pictures of the cities that were sacked were paraded on chariots through the city of Rome to the Capitoline Hill and the Temple of Jupiter. While Paul probably did not ever witness such an event, the image would have been known at least from the so-called Captives-Façade in a prominent location in Corinth. **Heilig** also cites the specific celebration of the victory over Britain in which Emperor Claudius was honored in Corinth with yearly commemorative festivals on its anniversary. . .

The purpose of the Roman triumph was to flaunt the power of the victorious army, the Roman nation, and its gods. The celebration reinforced the mythology of “the ruler as the invulnerable victor and guarantor of the world order.” The victory was ““proof” of the unique and godlike nature of the ruler” and reaffirmed for one and all that the gods were on their side. Captured prisoners were exhibited to exalt the might of the triumphant general and bring glory to the gods who won for him the victory. Paul

subverts the splendorous grandeur of the Roman triumph by applying this image to God. God's triumph is far greater than any Roman triumph, and God is owed far greater honor. The emperor is not the invincible victor and guarantor of world order. That role belongs only to the God who is fully revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and proclaimed by his apostles. The image points to God's absolute sovereignty over the world (see **Col 2:15**). Paul pictures himself as a previously defeated enemy of God who now lives in Christ and is being led in a triumph that reveals and heralds God's majesty and power. Later in his argument, Paul will say that we have this treasure, the knowledge of God's glory, "*in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us*" (**4:7**) and that the purpose of the grace that "*extends through more and more people*" is to "*cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God*" (**4:15**).

Understanding Paul to be Christ's captive in Christ's triumphal procession provides a transition from **1:15 – 2:13** by further defending why his travel plans seem to vacillate. As a captive he is not in control of his movements. God leads him and controls where the procession goes. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth and states that his longtime desire and plan to come to Rome and then, he hopes, to be sent on to Spain will come to pass. He recognizes, however, that it will happen only if it is God's will (**Rom 15:32**).

It also introduces the major issue of the role of suffering as part of his defense of why his apostleship is the way it is. Paul understands his suffering to be a necessary part of his apostolic ministry, but the Corinthians believe it discredits his apostolic authority. From the perspective of those in Corinth who were overly enamored with power, success, and triumphalism, Paul's suffering only displayed impotence, which, in turn, cast doubt on his power as an apostle. The metaphor of being a captive in Christ's triumphal parade fits the wider context of his dealings with the Corinthians, who regarded him as a figure of shame who was exposed to ridicule. . .

Paul's joyous thanks to God derives from his understanding of the **paradox of victory in Christ (1 Cor 15:57)**. The image of the conquered slave exhibited as a showpiece of God's triumph matches his assertion in **12:10**: "*I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" His conquest by God allows him to take part in God's triumphant march as one now reconciled to God. Paul's theology is remarkable for its sense of paradox. He suffers with Christ so that he will be glorified with him (**Rom 8:17, 37**). Victory comes in defeat; glory in humiliation; and joy in suffering (**Col 1:24**). The foolishness of the cross reveals the wisdom of God (**1 Cor 3:18**). Christ who was rich becomes poor in order that "*by his poverty*" we "*might become rich*" (**2 Cor 8:9**).

3. This Triumph Is in Vital Union with the Lord Jesus Christ *"in Christ"*

B. Metaphor of Fragrant Aroma

1. We are Channels for the Revelation of Christ to Others in Every Place *"and manifests through us . . . in every place"*

R. Kent Hughes: The bottom line is this: **Suffering/death** (which is part and parcel with the cross) **is the very thing God uses to make himself known.** Therefore, Paul's driving point is that his suffering, pictured here as being led to death in the Roman procession, is the medium through which God is revealing himself.

2. (Expansion of the imagery) -- We are a Fragrance of Christ, not merely channels of that fragrance
“the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him”

Raymond Collins: The juxtaposition of the two metaphors, with their appeal to different senses and their complementary references to time and space, involves Christ in two different ways.

1. In the image of the triumphal procession, Christ is implicitly compared to a victorious general to whom Paul and his fellows are subservient.
2. In the image of the aroma, knowledge of Christ is produced through the efforts of Paul and his companion missionaries.

John MacArthur: The sweet aroma of the Triumph arose from the incense-filled censers carried by the priests in the parade and from the garlands of flowers that were thrown into the streets. The fragrance speaks of influence; Paul's point is that God, in wonderful condescending grace and mercy, manifests through believers the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place. He uses human preachers to give off the sweet aroma of the gospel, to influence people with the saving knowledge of Christ.

3. God Always Appreciates this Fragrance
“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God”

R. Kent Hughes: Odors and fragrances are intrusive. You can be driving seventy miles an hour, and if a skunk has suffered displeasure along the highway in the last two hours, you will know it. Or perhaps you've had the experience of driving with your windows up and the air on and pulling up behind a car in which a man is smoking a cigar — and smelling it! . . .

So it is when your life bears the crushed fragrance of suffering and daily death. As God led Paul in triumphal procession, the fragrance of God wafted over the ancient world. It could not be shut out. Grace lingered in its train. Even the imperial palace smelled it — and all the saints from Caesar's household will one day greet us (cf. **Philippians 4:22**).

Eric Mason: Consider the Roman generals who would kill the paraded victims in front of everyone. The smell of death remained because sometimes those parades would last for days. They would begin to smell the rotting bodies, so they would burn incense to cover up the smell of death.

Let me give another example. Before I knew Christ, I was in my college room, rolling up and smoking things. We would have incense because it would get rid of the smell of

weed. I didn't want anyone to smell the death that I was going through in my room. In other words, I was trying to hide the death with a fragrance.

It is the same for us: when you're dying in your circumstances, you also tend to try to hide the brokenness. When you get broken in death, a fragrance comes out of you; God is taking you through something to release the fragrance of Christ out of you. To release his fragrance, you have to be broken. You must be split open so that the glorious aroma of Christ can come forth. So Paul is worshiping and thanking the good Lord for this beautiful experience of being led in triumphal procession.

Paul says that Christ's aroma spreads everywhere: "*For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing*" (v. 15). God puts you in situations to encourage those who are being saved. That means those who are going to get saved as well as those who are already saved, who are growing spiritually. So God strategically puts you in trials for others to take notice.

See, that's why you shouldn't close the blinds and sleep in when God takes you through something. **Many of us hide because we want to be viewed as strong all the time.** God says, open the blinds, wash your face and everything else, put on some clothes, eat something, and **go out in your brokenness because I want my strength to be shown through your weakness.** You can't always be seen as the pillar of the family. You can't always be seen as the one who knows everything. You can't always be seen as the one whom everyone confides in. You need to show everyone that the reason you have a reservoir for them is because of the God who is in you.

4. Same Message but Different Responses Yielding Different Results

a. Different Responses

- 1) Those Who Are Being Saved Respond Positively
"among those who are being saved"

George Shillington: The aroma of Christ is to some a deadly odor, *from death to death*. Herein lies the **paradox**. The same word that brings life to one group brings death to another. "Paul was not unfamiliar with the notion of a message that could be both healing and poisonous in its effects." Jewish sources speak similarly of the Law (Torah): "As the bee reserves her honey for her owner and her sting for others, so the words of the Torah are an elixir of life (*sam hayyim*) for Israel and a deadly poison (*sam ha-maweth*) to the nations of the world" (Barrett, 1973:101). *From death to death* can also imply that those who reject the resurrection of the crucified Jesus remain in death.

More likely than not, Paul is thinking of those who see only offense in the death of Jesus. To them, the ugly death of Jesus brings death. On the other hand, those who accept the offense of the crucified Messiah receive newness of life (**Rom. 6:4**). Paul has already wrestled with this problem in **1 Corinthians**. The preaching of the cross is an offense to both Jewish and Gentile minds, but to the ones called, it is the power of God (**1 Cor. 1:23f.**). In the present text of **2 Corinthians**, the same thought may well be present in the metaphor of the aroma. To unbelievers, the aroma is an odor of an

offensive death by crucifixion, nothing more. To believers, the crucifixion is a fragrance of life that gives life to them. The ground is thus laid to pose the question that will guide the argument to its end at **7:4**.

2) Those Who Are Perishing Respond Negatively
“and among those who are perishing”

- b. Same Message but Different Results
*“to the one an aroma from death to death,
to the other an aroma from life to life.”*

Frank Matera: Thus, if the starting point is construed as the death of Christ, Paul is saying that those who view this death apart from its saving effect are moving from this understanding of Christ’s death to eternal death, whereas those who believe that this death is the source of resurrection life are moving from an understanding of death as life to eternal life. . . his ministry, like the gospel he preaches, is paradoxical in nature and results in a profound division among people.

5. The Victory Is the Same in All Cases –

It is God’s victory in which we share (He is accomplishing His sovereign purposes).

**II. (2:16b-17) THE CONFIDENCE (SUFFICIENCY) OF THE GOSPEL
MINISTRY – VICTORY IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST DOES DEPEND ON
PERSONAL FAITHFULNESS**

Question: *Who is sufficient for these things?*

Answer: Those, such as the apostles, who demonstrate faithfulness in the following areas:

George Shillington: *Who is sufficient for these things?*

That is, the things he has just now set out in metaphor and cryptic phrases in **2:14-16a**. Who is qualified for a paradoxical ministry like this? The question is posed from Paul’s perspective. The answer he intends his readers to give is this: **No one**. In one’s self, no one is qualified. Not Paul, and certainly not his opponents. One must assume from the form of address that the opponents were calling for Paul’s credentials for ministry. Who has authorized him to preach the gospel of God’s Messiah? Who among the Gentiles is to say whether his preaching is authentic?

Paul’s rhetorical question stands as his answer. The ministry is too much for any human being. While answering thus, Paul stands in the tradition of Moses, whose self-assessment as minister of the Lord was similar: *“I am not qualified”* (*hikanos*, LXX, **Exod. 4:10**), the same word Paul uses here for sufficient. The enabling for such a ministry comes strictly from the Lord, not from any human source.

Yet the force of the argument is that Paul is abundantly qualified for the ministry in Corinth or anywhere else in the world, because **God has called him and qualified him**

(see **2 Cor. 3:4-6**; cf. **Gal. 1:15-17**). What greater qualification can anyone have? This manner of speech is more than an effective way of writing for Paul. He deeply believes in God's enabling grace for ministry. He will testify in the Letter of Defense to an enabling oracle of God to him: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness* (**2 Cor. 12:9**).

A. Faithfulness to the Message

"For we are not like many, peddling the word of God"

Raymond Collins: Peddlers of the Word

Describing the peddlers of God's word, Paul uses a Greek term (*kapēleuontes*) that does not appear elsewhere in the NT but was known to those familiar with philosophical debates. It was used to disparage pseudo-philosophers, especially Sophists, who delivered shallow lectures for monetary gain. Receiving pay for their lectures was one of the ways such philosophers supported themselves in the ancient world. Other philosophers were clients of a well-to-do patron, while some supported themselves by exercising a trade or begging. Paul preached the gospel free of charge. That was problematic for some Corinthians who thought, People pay to listen to what is important.

David Garland: "Many" need not refer to some particular group but may be a contemptuous reference to "the mob of teachers." The description can apply to both Christian and pagan teachers. **Concern for money** undermines their sincerity as they tailor their teaching to the audience. It causes **preoccupation with success** and to cultivation of only those with money. By contrast,

- (1) Paul speaks as one who is sincere (see **1:12**). God's grace in his life, not worldly cunning, determine his manner and methods.
- (2) He speaks as one whose message comes "*from God*."
- (3) He speaks before God (**4:2; 12:19**) knowing that God will judge him.
- (4) He speaks as one who is "*in Christ*." Speaking in Christ (**12:19; 13:3**) is synonymous with being taught by the Spirit (**1 Cor 2:13; 7:40; 12:3; 2 Cor 4:13**).

What follows is Paul's bid to establish in his converts' minds not only the sufficiency of his ministry but its superiority. This ministry is centered on Christ and therefore can only be bold in its open proclamation of what God has done in Christ.

B. Faithfulness to One's Own Conscience

"but as from sincerity"

C. Faithfulness to the Authority of God

"but as from God"

Scott Hafemann: Understood as a reference to his practice of self-support, **verse 17** continues Paul's argument for the **legitimacy of his ministry** introduced in **2:12-13**. In other words, the description of his ministry in **2:14-16** is framed by two examples of his love for the Corinthians:

1. his willingness to leave Troas and
2. his willingness to preach the gospel in Corinth without charge.

Both occasioned great suffering on his part that he nevertheless embraced for their sake and for the sake of the gospel in response to God's call in his life. In short, Paul ministers as one "*sent from God*" (2:17c).

D. Faithfulness in Union with Christ

"we speak in Christ"

E. Faithfulness in the Light of Accountability

"in the sight of God"

Scott Hafemann: At the same time, far from calling his apostleship into question, Paul's apostolic suffering "*in Christ*," as the embodiment of his proclamation, is that which shows him approved by God. In Paul's words, knowing that he speaks "*before God*" as judge, Paul does so with the "sincerity" that comes from the grace of God himself (2:17b; cf. 1:12). As a result, Paul's assertion that he is not like his opponents is an evidential argument for the divine origin and approval of his apostolic ministry.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) The victory already accomplished by Christ cannot be stressed enough. Although we are engaged in a mighty conflict of unseen spiritual forces, the outcome is not in doubt and the victory is not ours to secure. We have been graciously granted victory by being united to the Victor Himself.
- 2) The knowledge of Christ is a precious, sweet aroma that should permeate those around us and accomplish God's purposes in the lives of those we touch.
- 3) The message of the gospel leads to either life or death – but in either case God is accomplishing His sovereign redemptive purposes and is ultimately glorified.
- 4) All of our testimony springs from Christ Himself as *we speak in Christ in the sight of God*.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage take the pressure off of us when it comes to witnessing?
- 2) How do we measure victory? Do we have the outlook that God is always victorious and that we always share in that victory?

3) What type of fragrance of Christ are we? Does our message and representation of Christ differ depending on whether people respond positively or negatively to us?

4) Do we have a good conscience about our own faithfulness and sincerity in accurately proclaiming the gospel message from pure motives?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wil Pounds: Paul had in mind the Roman Triumph. The picture is the triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome. In a Triumph procession, the victorious generals marched in a certain order through the streets of Rome to the Capitol. First came the city magistrates, state officials, followed by the Roman senate, and then the trumpeters. These were followed by soldiers who carried their spoils from the conquered land. Next pictures and models of the conquered citadels and ships were carried along in the parade. The white bull for the sacrifice followed, and then the captive rulers, their leaders and captured generals in chains who would be executed before the day was over at the sacrifice. Following them came the musicians and priests swinging their censers with a sweet-smelling incense burning in them. To the conquered victims the incense has the stench of death lingering all about them. To the victorious army the fragrance has the sweet aroma of victory. Finally, the conquering general rode in a chariot drawn by four white horses. His family and his army followed wearing their decorations and shouting *Lo Triumphe! Lo triumphe!*

Bob Deffinbaugh: The ministry of the gospel is not easy. In truth, it is not even possible—in our own strength. Thus, some grow weary and discouraged, as we see in the first quotation. Others give in to the temptation to adapt (corrupt) the message of the gospel, hoping that in so doing a greater and more favorable response can be obtained. In our text, Paul clearly corrects both of these improper responses to the difficulties of the gospel ministry. . .

In contrast to Paul and others who preach a straightforward gospel, there are those who “*peddle the word of God,*” (2:17). The gospel peddlers do not believe that salvation is the work of God, and they do not trust Him to give sight to the spiritually blind or to give life to those spiritually dead. They are, however, very concerned with results. They want to be successful, and their motivation for such ambition is questionable. If the gospel is offensive, and no one receives it out of human motivation, there is only one solution for the gospel hucksters: modify the message to make it humanly appealing to the flesh, so that men receive the gospel for the fleshly benefits it seems to offer (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:18-19). If parts of the gospel are offensive to potential converts, the gospel hucksters change them, or at least they do not mention them. If a straightforward presentation of the gospel is “ineffective,” then they employ the same methods Madison Avenue uses to sell soap and toothpaste. Do not tell people they are sinners destined for eternal torment; tell them that if they invite Jesus into their lives, things will go even better for them.

Steve Zeisler: Although a fragrance is invisible, its influence cannot be stopped. When the apostle uses the words "*fragrance*" and "*aroma*" in this figure of speech, he is remembering the priests who walked in the triumphal procession carrying incense burners, the scent of which wafted over the crowds. To the victorious general and his armies, the aroma was a pleasing fragrance which reminded them of the greatness of Rome, but to the defeated prisoners, being led in captives' chains, the aroma of incense had the smell of their impending death at the hands of the executioners. The aroma was a potent though invisible testimony to one of two realities: in the case of those facing death, the reality of tragedy; in the case of the victors, the reality of triumph. Christians are a pleasing fragrance ascending to God which reminds him of the benefits and the wonder of his own Son. This may also recall the Old Testament sacrifices, the aroma of which ascended as a fragrance to God. . .

The "*so many*" to whom Paul refers, the "super-apostles" who offer alternatives to authentic Christianity, have three characteristics.

1) First, they are "*peddlers*" of the word of God. This word was used in the first century of wine merchants who sold their watered-down wines at bargain rates on the city streets. These men knew how to package and sell their inferior products. They knew how to massage the egos of the Greeks, how to sell to the barbarians, how to appear inoffensive to the Jews. The "super-apostles" knew how to package the Christian faith by smoothing out whatever rough edges it had. The good huckster knows exactly what to say to his mark and thus insinuate himself into his confidence. Of course, a side benefit of peddling the word of God was their own profit. As their crowds grew larger, their own reputations grew.

2) Self-commendation – (next section)

3) Paper authority – (next section)

R. Kent Hughes: Paul's Fourfold Integrity:

In point of fact, his suffering came from the fourfold positives of his personal integrity in communicating God's Word.

1. First, he and his cohorts did it "*as men of sincerity*." His preaching, to use the Puritan **William Ames**'s words, came "out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation." Whenever Paul spoke, he was wholly sincere. His was an eloquence of the heart.
2. Second, Paul spoke "*as commissioned by God*" — literally, "*as from God*." As he would later say, "*God . . . gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . entrusting to us the message of reconciliation*" (cf. **5:18, 19**). Paul was "*an apostle of Christ Jesus*" (**1:1**). His commission came from Messiah Jesus — and that is how he preached.

3. Third, Paul ministered the Word “*in the sight of God*” (2:17) — literally, “*before God*.” Thus, he did it humbly and with trembling and with no thought of praise. He was not like the Boston clergyman who prayed such a self-consciously ornate prayer that Monday’s paper described it as “the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience.” God was Paul’s audience.
4. Fourth, Paul spoke “*in Christ*” — that is, in union with Christ. His preaching flowed from his incorporation in Christ.

Ray Stedman: Different views of the victorious Christian life ...

There are a lot of people who have that view of the Christian life. They think, because they are Christians, because they happen to now be a child of God, a son of the King, they are going to be protected and kept from every single pressure and danger of life, and nothing is ever going to get to them . . .

Some people see the "victorious life" as a kind of a constant, visible demonstration of tremendous power so that no obstacle can stand in their way. They see it much like General Patton slashing his way across the countries of Europe in World War II, smashing all obstacles in his path, visibly triumphant all the way into Germany. They expect that. They expect to "feel" powerful, and to see the power of God let loose in such triumphant ways that all the obstacles are visibly crushed. But again, if that is what it is, Paul did not know anything about it.

If we can judge from his life, instead, the "victorious Christian life" is a feeling of weakness, with only brief glimpses of success, seemingly going from one battle to another, from one conflict to another without ceasing, with little sense of personal triumph at the moment. And yet that triumph is happening, and that is what Paul is singing about here. His life was making powerful impact. . .

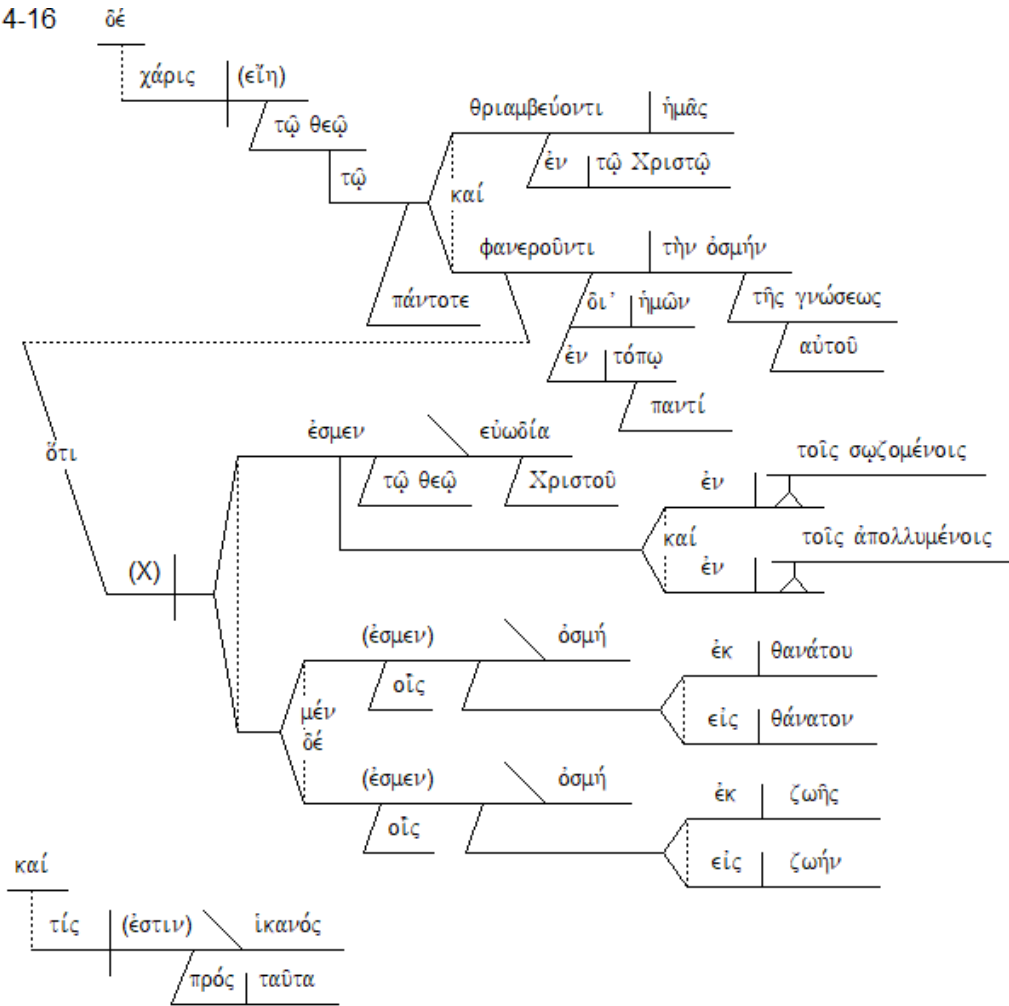
The victorious Christian life is not one of continual victory in the sense of overcoming all obstacles and feeling triumphant as you go. No! No! It is one of anguish of heart at times, of deep inner doubts, of fighting with frustrations without and fears within. It is one of being opposed oftentimes, yet confident that the God who is within you is able to work his work and do his will, that out of the fear, the frustration, and the failure is coming triumph and victory and the fragrance of Jesus Christ.

Robert Hughes: It is characteristic of these intruders that they go about hawking or peddling the word of God, cheapening and degrading the message by the illegitimate admixture of foreign elements, Judaistic or pagan, as a dishonest merchant adulterates wine with water; they seek only their own gain, irrespective of the effect of their teaching on others and careless of the momentous issues which are at stake; self-interest governs their outlook; accordingly they are unconscious of any sense of insufficiency for the task which they profess to fulfil, nor do they hesitate to batten like parasites on the all too gullible members of the church.

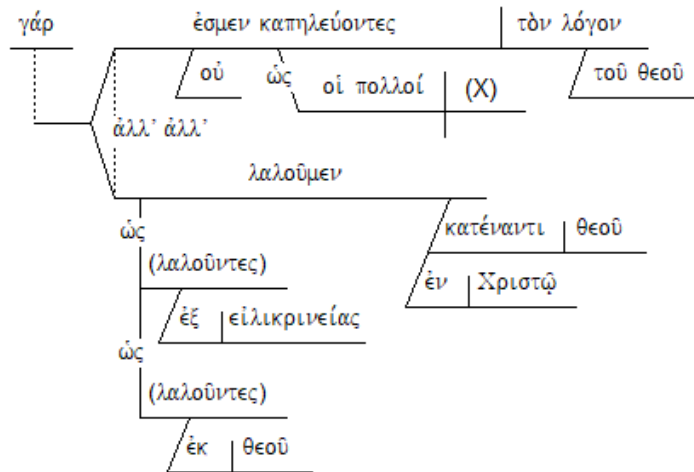
Tasker: Very different from the behaviour of these unscrupulous hucksters is the absolute sincerity that characterized the ministry of Paul. . . The Apostle's motives were wholly unmixed; he preached as one who had a burden laid upon him by God, who was conscious of the divine presence and enabled others to feel it, and who was so united with Christ, and so imbued with His Spirit, that any tampering with the message committed unto him would have been impossible.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

2Co 2:14-16



2Co 2:17



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

TITLE: THE DIPLOMA OF CHANGED LIVES

BIG IDEA:

THE COMMENDATION FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IS CHANGED LIVES

INTRODUCTION:

Anthony Thiselton: Self-promotion was the curse of notions of leadership in Corinth. . . Corinth had achieved a remarkable prosperity in commerce and business. This led to a culture of competitiveness, pragmatism, consumerism, and pluralism. . . “Success” in its crudest form was the key to acceptance at Corinth. In today’s language, they wanted only “celebrities.” Paul’s insistence on authentic apostles was the very opposite to what they sought, and it took courage and integrity for Paul to point to a way that reflected Christ and his true ministers (**3:1–18**).

Charles Swindoll: **Success.** Just the sound of the word in our modern world works like a powerful stimulant. It brings to mind images of money, power, and prestige. Goals achieved, dreams fulfilled, obstacles overcome, enemies vanquished: Everybody loves a dose of success. And we know the recipe for success, don’t we? Successful people are well educated, fashionably dressed, impeccably groomed, and socially savvy. They look the part. They sail through challenges on a vessel of self-confidence propelled by unswerving determination —no distraction can get in their way. These things draw crowds and cameras, and before you know it, their names and pictures are pasted all over the media. In turn, the fame factor then drives both them and their business or organization’s marketing machine, generating more attention, more opportunities, more revenue —more success.

As difficult as it may be to accept, those are not the things that spell success in God’s eyes. A person’s outward appearance or social panache? God’s not swayed an inch by them. Scripture says, “*God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart*” (**1 Sam. 16:7**). Self-confidence that plows forward with goals and plans despite every obstacle? Only if the Lord wills. James wrote, “*Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’*” (**Jas. 4:15**). Shameless self-promotion that sells a slick “public image” to a ready consumer culture? The Lord’s not impressed. Paul wrote, “*For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends*” (**2 Cor. 10:18**). The world may be infatuated with glamour, guts, and glory, but God has a completely different standard of success.

Sadly, these worldly elements of success have worked their way into our churches and ministries. Nowadays a successful ministry is measured by how many thousands attend or tune in to your services, by the level of fame and influence of your preacher, or by the state-of-the-art amenities on your physical campus.

Frank Matera: Letters of recommendation played an important role in the early church, since they were the means by which one community introduced and recommended evangelists, missionaries, and preachers to another (see **Acts 18:27**), thereby assuring the legitimacy and integrity of such people. Accordingly Paul recommends Phoebe, a deaconess of Cenchreae, to the church at Rome (**Rom 16:1**). Likewise, although he does not explicitly use the language of recommendation, he uses **1 Corinthians** to pave the way for Timothy (**1 Cor 4:17; 16:10**) and **2 Corinthians** to prepare for the visit of Titus and the two unnamed brothers (**2 Cor 8:18–23**). Whether Paul ever sought such letters of recommendation for himself is another matter, since, unlike the intruding apostles whom he criticizes (**10:15**), he evangelized where the gospel had not yet been preached. In any case, it is evident that Paul did not come to Corinth with letters of recommendation or seek them from the community when he departed. His question here, however, suggests that he is now under some pressure from the Corinthians to produce such letters, perhaps because intruding apostles have arrived with letters of recommendation and flattered the Corinthians by asking them for such letters.

R. Kent Hughes: Given the situation, Paul's point is that he himself needed no such letters of recommendation, and that such letters would be ridiculous in the light of his lengthy association with the Corinthians. Paul, in effect, declares the absurdity of the idea that he needed human commendations so that he could then present his true credentials — credentials of the heart authored by Christ and the Holy Spirit. In presenting his credentials, Paul gives us **the indispensable credentials of all true gospel ministry**.

Scott Hafemann: Paul's argument now takes a decisive turn. Up to now, he has argued for the legitimacy of his ministry based on his suffering as the divinely ordained means for mediating the comfort of God to believers (**1:3–11**) and the knowledge of God to the world (**2:14–17**). Beginning in **3:1–3**, Paul vies for the validity of his apostleship based on the presence and power of the Spirit as the specific content of his mediation. If the means of Paul's apostolic ministry is his suffering, the Spirit is its content as the one who converts and comforts the Christian and convicts the world (**1:21–22; 2:15–16a**). By embodying the gospel, Paul mediates the Spirit.

The transition in Paul's train of thought is marked by the two rhetorical questions of **3:1**, both of which anticipate a negative response (he introduces them in **3:1a** with the negative particle *me*). In view of his suffering and weakness, Paul's opponents had evidently dismissed his exalted claims as an apostle to be nothing more than unsubstantiated "hot air." His rhetorical questions and their implied answer anticipate this charge once again. Paul is not engaging in mere self-commendation when he claims that his suffering is the divinely orchestrated vehicle of God's self-revelation, as if he had no evidence to back up what he said. After all, his leaving Troas and his practice of self-support are clear evidence of his genuine nature as an apostle.

Nor, for the same reasons, does he have to rely on letters of recommendation from others to validate his claims, as his opponents do for theirs. In the ancient world, like

today, the need for letters of recommendation indicated that someone lacked his own evidence to back up the claims being made. Letters of recommendation are a substitute source of credibility. But Paul's work as an apostle speaks for itself, especially his founding of the church in Corinth (10:12–18; cf. 1 Cor. 4:14–17; 15:10). Thus, the Corinthians themselves are Paul's "*letter of recommendation*" (2 Cor. 3:2; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1–2). It is this "*letter*" (i.e., the Corinthians themselves as Christians) that Paul carries around "*written on our hearts,*" so that it can be "*known and read by everybody.*"

Paul Barnett: Paul's difficulty was that he lacked external accreditation. He was not one of the original disciples of Jesus. The Corinthians had only Paul's word that he was in good standing with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). His only course was to reiterate that the risen Lord had called him to be an apostle and to point to his sacrificial lifestyle as legitimizing that call. Yet this easily made it appear that he was 'commending himself'. His dilemma was that he must either say nothing in his defence and allow the work in Corinth to be destroyed by default, or run the risk of the accusation that he was blowing his own trumpet. According to Goudge, 'Self-defence is almost impossible without self-commendation. St. Paul's opponents made the former necessary, and then blamed him for the latter.'

Although he does not answer his own question directly, the implication is that he was not, in fact, commending himself. If he will commend himself it is to their 'consciences' and then '*in the sight of God*' (4:2). He knew that it is the Lord who commends people, not people themselves (10:18), and that the commendation is directed towards the consciences of others. Although he does not commend himself, he feels deeply that the Corinthians should have commended him (12:11), since he was in no way inferior to his opponents, not even in their much-vaunted field of '*signs, wonders and miracles*' (12:12). Nevertheless he does remind them of the facts. It is through him that God manifests the fragrance of the knowledge of God, and it is by his ministry that the Christians in Corinth manifest that they are a letter from Christ to the watching world.

John MacArthur: As he replied to their scurrilous attacks, the apostle found himself in a delicate position. He was aware that no matter what he said in his defense, the false apostles would twist it around and accuse him of pride, egotism, and self-commendation. Nothing would have been further from the truth; Paul was not interested in mounting a self-serving defense designed to protect his prestige and reputation. Yet the apostle knew that it was crucial that he defend himself, because he was the apostolic channel through which God's truth flowed to the Corinthians. If they succeeded in discrediting him, the false apostles would block the pipeline through which divine truth flowed to the church.

As he defended his spiritual adequacy, Paul revealed five marks of a competent minister of Jesus Christ—all of which he exemplified.

1. A competent and effective minister has an established reputation for godliness,
2. has been used in transforming lives,
3. has confidence in his calling,

4. has humble dependence on God's power,
5. and has a new covenant message.

I. (:1) UNNECESSARY TYPES OF COMMENDATION

A. (:1a) Personal Boasting

“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?”

Prov. 27:2 *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth”*

How did Christ demonstrate His authority and His power to change lives?

B. (:1b) Lifeless Words on a Piece of Paper (cf. academic degrees)

“Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”

The Apostles were not polished graduates from some academic institution.

Not saying that sending churches should not provide letters of commendation.

Harris: Paul is not here disparaging the use of letters of introduction. Their use had already become established within the Christian world (see **Acts 18:27**) and Paul himself had sought epistolary credentials from the high priest at Jerusalem before setting out for the synagogues of Damascus (**Acts 9:2; 22:5**). Also he himself gave what amounted to commendatory letters (**Rom 16:1, 2; 1 Cor 16:3, 10, 11; 2 Cor 8:16-24**).

Frank Matera: Although Paul seems to alternate between protesting that he does not commend himself and commending himself, the general pattern of his thought is clear enough. He knows that he has been commended to the Corinthians by God, as he will soon explain. To that extent, he need not commend himself to them as if he enjoyed some special competency of his own. But he does commend himself to everyone's conscience in God's sight, and he commends himself as God's servant on the basis of his apostolic afflictions (**6:4**), because of his apostolic integrity, to which his own conscience bears witness (**1:12**).

II. (:2-3) THE ONLY VALID COMMENDATION FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY = CHANGED LIVES

A. Impressive Disciples – Changed Lives Evident to All

“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men”

Mark Seifrid: The legitimation of the apostle rests in the Corinthians themselves: *“You are our letter.”* As the legitimation of apostolic ministry, they are not in a position to legitimate that ministry by their own judgments. Paul's apostolic credentials lie in them and their faith, which has its boast in God's work in and through Christ. As he indicates at an earlier stage in the conflict, the Corinthians themselves are “the seal” of his apostleship, the confirmation of its validity (**1 Cor 9:2**). In a profound and tragic irony, the Corinthians are seeking the signs of an apostle in the weak and suffering Paul

(12:12). They have not yet realized that they themselves are the proof of God's power that is also at work in him (1 Cor 2:5). . .

The letter of the Corinthians, written within his heart, is "*known and read*" by everyone. Paul's claim that his love for the Corinthians is a matter of open and public knowledge is an assertion of his integrity and, in fact, pregnantly echoes his earlier claim concerning his letters: just as those letters contain nothing other than what the Corinthians "*read and know*" (1:13), so all the world knows that he has them "*written in his heart*." Paul's love for the Corinthians is a matter of record: he boasts of his cost-free ministry among them. His distress in Troas and joy in Macedonia over them were likewise known to others. He also has boasted about them ("*Achaia*") to the Macedonians in their commitment to the collection for Jerusalem (9:1-2). His claim here that this love letter is "*known and read by all*" is hyperbolic. Or perhaps it is not: the apostles have been made a spectacle to "*humanity and to angels*." They bear the drama of Christ in their bodies and lives (1 Cor 4:9). Paul carries the treasure of the Gospel in an earthen vessel so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in his flesh (4:7-12). He has been made manifest to God and thus, he hopes, to the conscience of the Corinthians (5:11). In his suffering and deliverance, and in the sincerity that is his through the Gospel, his apostolic life has become a prolepsis of the final judgment, when all human beings shall be made manifest before Christ's seat of judgment (5:10). That all persons know and read the love letter written in Paul's heart is his claim to the final and decisive significance of his apostolic life and mission. The eschaton, which has broken into the world in Christ, is present in Christ's apostle and servant.

Richard Pratt: In response to his own question, Paul asserted that he actually had letters of recommendation: the Corinthian Christians themselves. Their new lives in Christ proved the effectiveness and divine approval of Paul's ministry. He described them as letters written on our hearts. This phrase has been the subject of controversy. Some ancient texts read "*your hearts*." This alternate reading makes more sense with the context. If it is correct, then Paul was saying that the changes that had taken place in the hearts of the Corinthians were his letters of recommendation. These changes were on their hearts, but they were not hidden. Everybody was able to see these changes of the heart displayed in their lives.

Frank Matera: Some commentators argue that the alternate reading ("*your hearts*") makes better sense of the context, since the Corinthian community would be a letter that all can see, whereas a letter on Paul's heart would be hidden. There is, however, a logic to the more difficult and better attested reading, "*our hearts*."

1. First, since a letter of recommendation must be carried by the bearer, Paul carries his letter of recommendation in his heart.
2. Second, since Paul is the minister of a new covenant written on human hearts by the Spirit of the Living God, his letter of recommendation is written by the Spirit on his heart.
3. Third, his letter can be known and read by all because his apostolic integrity (the theme of this letter) makes him apparent to all.

To summarize, Paul's work as the apostolic founder of the Corinthian congregation is

his letter to and from the community, written by the Spirit on his heart, because he is the minister of a new covenant.

Paul Barnett: Nevertheless, what is now ‘*manifest*’ for all to read was first written in their hearts with the Spirit of the living God. The new lifestyle which was so visible and striking was the outworking of something which began within the inner recesses of their hearts, through the power of the Spirit of God. True Christianity is not a veneer of morality glued on to the exterior of our lives, but a profound change of heart, mind and will which is then expressed in outward behaviour. The word of God changes individuals, in the context of Christian fellowship, from the inside out.

B. Imitators of Christ – Nurtured by Good Role Models

1. Producing Christlikeness

“being manifested that you are a letter of Christ”

Ralph Martin: Where is the true source of authority? What are genuine credentials for ministry? The Corinthians themselves gave evidence that they are “*a letter of Christ*” (ἐπιστολὴ Χριστοῦ, where the **genitive is subjective**: they are a letter whose author is Christ).

John MacArthur: Paul’s letter of commendation was not private correspondence, hidden in hearts and therefore readable by only a few; it was known and read by all men. All who witnessed the transformed lives of the Corinthians had read it; it was continually being manifested or made conspicuous. **C. K. Barrett** writes, “The existence of the Corinthian Christians in Christ is a communication from Christ to the world, a manifestation of His purpose for humanity; this communication, incidentally, has the effect of commending Paul as a trustworthy bearer of the word of Christ”.

The Corinthians were a living letter of Christ, because it is He alone who saves and sanctifies, through the preaching of His Word by faithful men like Paul. This introduces an essential and wondrous truth—that when a preacher proclaims divine revelation accurately, it is Christ speaking through him.

R. Kent Hughes: Paul took care to make sure that the Corinthians understood that he was not the author of the letter: “*And you show that you are a letter from Christ*” (v. 3a). A letter of recommendation must always come from a third party, and the ultimate third-party recommender is Christ, the Messiah himself. By claiming Messiah as the author, Paul was able to claim higher authority for his credentials than his enemies could claim for theirs. Thus Paul’s role was secondary, that of delivery — “*a letter from Christ delivered by us.*” Since the literal meaning of “*delivered*” is “*ministered*,” this suggests that Christ is the author and Paul is the scribe who ministers or serves by the preaching of the gospel. **Calvin** says of this:

[Paul] says that it was ministered by himself, likening himself, as it were to the ink and the pen. In other words, he makes Christ the Author and himself the

instrument in order that his detractors may understand that they have Christ Himself to deal with if they go on speaking maliciously against His apostle.

The effect of all this is stunningly remarkable. Paul has the Corinthians embedded as living letters in the deep interior of his heart, but they were written by Messiah himself.

2. Using us as Spiritual Caretakers *“cared for by us”*

David Garland: Today, most people in churches recognize that it is not the academic degrees earned but the degree of concern for the lives of others and the willingness to sacrifice for them that truly commend a minister.

C. Supernaturally Changed – by the Holy Spirit

“written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God”

Mark Seifrid: Paul here speaks of the saving work of God as simultaneously fixed and yet dynamic, complete and yet in progress. The medium of God’s writing is not mere ink but “the Spirit of the living God,” the God who, according to name and title, is powerful and active in the hearts and lives of the Corinthians. Paul thus contrasts the inert and dead medium of “ink” with the agency of the Spirit: “*written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God.*” Nevertheless, in that the Corinthians are a written letter, God’s work in them is complete and fixed, as is all writing. They are, moreover, “a letter of Christ,” who has been communicated to them by the Gospel that Paul must defend against all misunderstanding. The fixity of the epistle does not exclude, but includes, the incessant work of “*the Spirit of the living God,*” in ever new, living, and fresh ways. As Paul will make clear in the following context, the Spirit establishes an active, saving communication between the fallen human being and God, a communication that does not end, not even with death itself (vv. 17-18). This communication is both determinate and yet unendingly new.

David Garland: Paul gives three characteristics of the letter in this verse.

- First, they are a letter authored by the Spirit of the living God and not by humans. For Paul, this image means that others may have letters authored by humans, but in the Corinthians he has a divinely authored letter. If Christ is the one who authors this letter and writes it on the hearts of believers through the Spirit, then Christ “is the new covenant counterpart of the Yahweh of **Exodus 31** who wrote the law on the two stone tablets with his finger.” The risen Christ continues to be present and active in the Christian community.
- Second, this letter is the result of the Spirit’s work through Paul’s ministry. The phrase translated “*delivered by us*” reads literally “*being ministered by us*” (*diakonētheisa huph’ humōn*). Paul is the letter’s writer courier. The letter written by the Spirit endorses its bearer as an authorized minister of Christ and the gospel.

- Third, Paul draws a contrast between what is written “*with ink*” (which fades) and what is written by the Spirit (which does not fade), what is chiseled on stone tablets and what is inscribed on human hearts.

D. Internally Transformed -- a Matter of the Heart (not external reform)

“not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.”

John MacArthur: The *tablets of stone* were those on which God supernaturally inscribed the Ten Commandments (**Ex. 31:18; 32:15–16**). But the miracle of Sinai cannot match the miracle of salvation. At Corinth, God had written not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts. In both cases God inscribed the same law; His standards of morality do not change. Some wrongly assume that because believers are under the new covenant they no longer have to keep God’s law. But that is not true. Being under the new covenant does not excuse believers from keeping the Law; it frees them and by the Spirit enables them to keep it. The Law written on the tablets of stone at Sinai was external; it confronted people with their inability to obey perfectly the holy, righteous, and good requirements of God and thus condemned them. But in the new covenant, God writes His law on the hearts of those He redeems. The power of the indwelling Holy Spirit enables them to keep that law, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed to them by grace, covers all their violations of it. . .

The false apostles at Corinth were clinging to the external Law written on tablets of stone, advocating salvation by works, rituals, and ceremonies. This, as always, is a damning message because no one can be perfect enough to keep the whole Law.

Frank Matera: To summarize, in this second subunit (**3:1–3**), Paul presents the Corinthian community as his apostolic letter of recommendation. The community is a letter from Christ administered by Paul and written by the Spirit of the Living God. With this reference to the Spirit, Paul anticipates what he will say in the next subunit (**3:4–6**) about his new covenant ministry.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Jesus Christ came to change the heart of man ... to transform him from the inside out ... not to reform the externals. Initial conversion plays itself out in ongoing sanctification by the Spirit so that increasing Christlikeness is evident to all.
- 2) We don’t have to worry about how others evaluate our ministry; the only one whose opinion counts is our Lord and Master. It is the Holy Spirit who commends men to positions of ministry leadership in the church.
- 3) Jesus Christ makes His disciples a “*letter of Christ*” by transforming them by His grace and writing His law on their hearts and enabling them to fulfill His righteousness.

He took a bunch of fishermen and outcasts from society who had no formal training or academic degrees and transformed them into the pillars of His church.

4) Our shepherding work in caring for the flock is patterned after the Chief Shepherd who gave His life for the flock.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of commendation are we asking others to receive to validate our ministry? Are we overly impressed by the wrong type of credentials?

2) Is our life an open book – transparent to others – so that they can see the reality of our own changed life? Can we be accurately “*read*” by others, or is there a secret, mysterious side that we do not show to others?

3) Do we acknowledge the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as the one who changes and molds Christlike character or do we seek to take some of the credit and glory?

4) Are we satisfied with mere external reform and legalistic righteousness or are we truly concerned with the state of the heart?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Hughes: Paul indeed has a letter of commendation the validity of which is beyond dispute, but it is a *human* letter: none other than the Corinthian believers themselves. This is a letter engraved in his heart, not flourished in his hand or carried in his luggage. It is something far more intimate than an external document of paper and ink, and at the same time far more permanent. It could not be forgotten, nor mislaid. This letter of his, moreover, is “*known and read of all men.*” By no means least are the Corinthians themselves aware of its complete authenticity, for it is the transformation of their lives by the power of the gospel which, in striking contrast to their former manner of existence, presents incontrovertible testimony to the world at large of the genuineness of Paul’s apostleship. By implication, the authenticity of the letters produced by the invading “apostles” is suspect and will not stand close scrutiny. .

Paul did not deny the need to support the adequacy and excellence of his credentials. The Corinthians themselves were a letter in his heart (3:2), Paul said, which further reflected the care and comfort he felt for them. Those credentials were public (3:2), available to any who desired to check out the adequacy of his ministry. That public openness is elaborated on in 3:3; the Spirit of God wrote his letter of commendation. That exposes the basis of adequacy—credentials based on the glory of the Spirit, not on

superficial glory from faint human praise. Paul was building to the great process of transformation in glory by the Spirit of God (3:18).

Any examiner would find a letter manifesting Christ, not praising Paul (3:3). Paul was a steward (“*cared for*”) not a master, and he carried the witness of the Corinthians’ spiritual growth in his heart as a letter, certifying the adequacy of his ministry. His commendation was the Spirit-caused manifestation of Christ in the lives of others. No ink and papyrus letter could match that kind of spiritual authentication. But Paul’s mention of two kinds of tablets -- “*stone*” and “*heart*” (3:3) -- shows that he had more in mind than simple letters of reference. He was controlled by the great contrasts between the Old and New Covenants.

Homer Kent: Paul and his helpers were more like *amanuenses* whom Christ had used to communicate His message. Christ was the One who had wrought the change in the Corinthians’ lives. Through His power they had become His letter to the world, displaying what the gospel could do. As such they were no mere document written with ink but had been acted on by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Nor were they like the inanimate tablets of stone in the old covenant of law given to Moses. Rather Christ had written His message on tablets of human hearts. This concept was undoubtedly based on the Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant (**Jer. 31:33**; cf. **Heb. 8:8-12**). The new covenant mediated by Christ through the Spirit produced an inward change whereby God’s Word was actually implanted in believers, not just externally imposed. This transforming work made the believers Paul’s greatest recommendation.

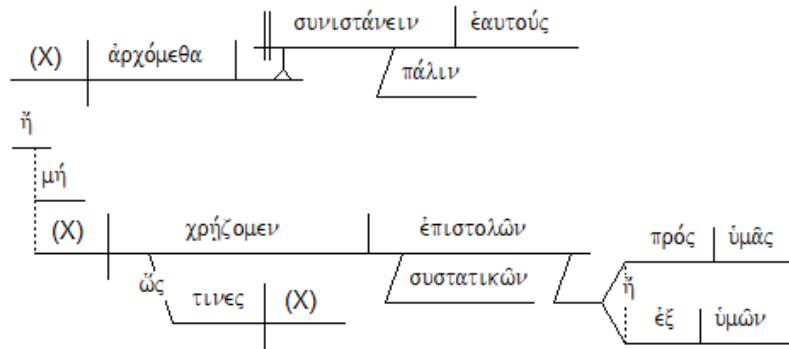
Ray Stedman: It is amazing, unbelievable, that these people would ever think that the Apostle Paul needed a letter of recommendation when he came back to them. After all, he had led these people to Christ, and yet here they more or less infer to him that the next time he came it would be very good if he brought some letters from John, or Peter, or James, or one of the real apostles. Paul is asking them, "Do you really mean that? Don't you understand? You are our letter of recommendation. Christ has written it on your hearts. He didn't use paper, or deliver it on stones, as he did with Moses on Mount Sinai. He wrote it on your hearts, and the ink he used was the Holy Spirit. As for me, I'm nothing but the postman; I just delivered the letter. God did the work." Paul wants these Corinthians to understand that the changes that had occurred in their lives, the freedom they were experiencing, the deliverance from evil habits such as immorality, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, thievery -- "*such were some of you*" (**1 Cor 6:11a** RSV), he said -- all happened because Christ had changed them.

Bob Deffinbaugh: I am not saying there is something evil about biblical and theological education. I am deeply indebted to Dallas Theological Seminary for the tools it gave me to better study and proclaim the Bible. Nevertheless, my degree from the seminary does not accredit me or my ministry. There are those who have graduated from this and other fine schools who have denied the faith and taught error. Here and elsewhere, Paul tells us what commends a Christian’s integrity in ministry.

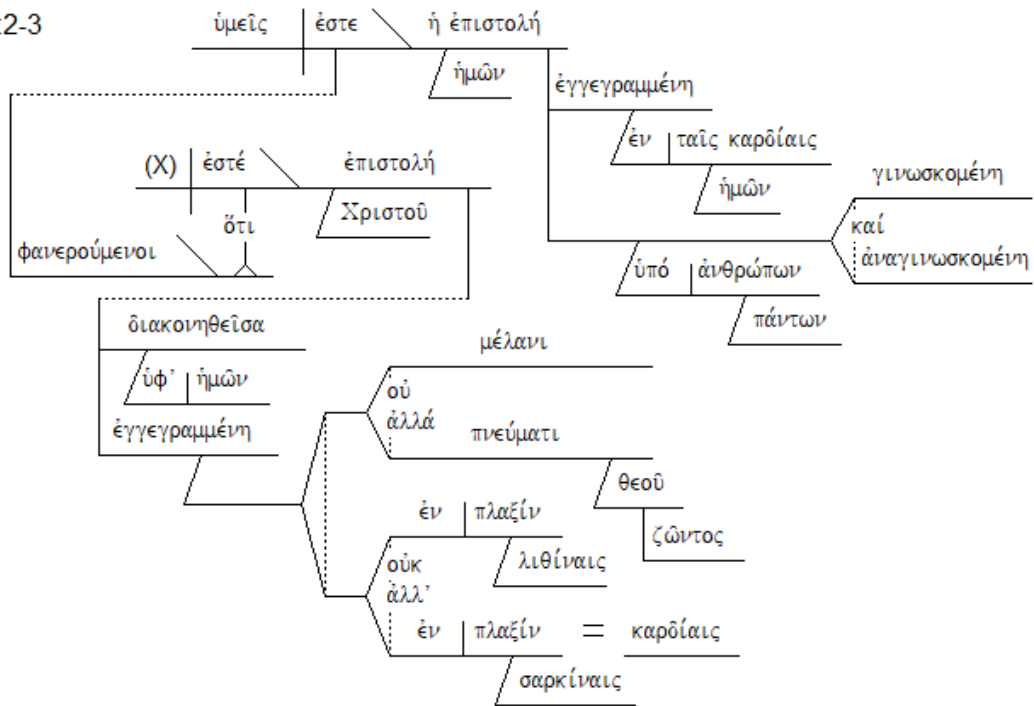
1. A Christian's ministry is commended first by the practice of **servanthood**, rather than by an authoritative or authoritarian leadership style. Paul reminds the Corinthians in **verse 3** that he "*cared for*" them. The marginal note in the NASB informs us that literally the word is "*served*." Those whom God has certified are servants, not "lords."
2. Second, true laborers of Christ are marked by the **integrity of their message and their methods**. They are not "*peddlers*" of the Word of God, but those who simply, boldly, and truthfully proclaim the truth of God's Word in such a way that men turn to God and depend upon His Word, rather than upon those servants who proclaim it (see **Acts 20:17-32**).
3. Finally, true servants of God are evident **when men are convicted and converted** by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and whose **lives are so changed** that the world cannot help but notice. True servants of God may or may not have educational diplomas, but the fingerprints of God are all over them and their ministries.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

2Co 3:1



2Co 3:2-3



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:4-18

TITLE: SURPASSING GLORY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:

THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT (NEW COVENANT) FAR SURPASSES THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW (OLD COVENANT)

INTRODUCTION:

Key Questions:

- How to solve a crisis of confidence in the ministry?
- Who is adequate to be a minister of the Gospel?
- How can anyone really have a vision for the Glory of the Lord?
- How can New Testament ministry be effective?

I. (:4-6) SOURCE OF NEW COVENANT MINISTRY CONFIDENCE AND COMPETENCE

Scott Hafemann: Paul's suffering and the presence of the Spirit are twin supports of his sufficiency since they are also evidence that God is the one who has "*made* [him] *sufficient*" (NIV "competent," **3:6a**). For Paul, therefore, his confidence concerning his competence (**2:16b; 3:4**), as evidenced by the work of the Spirit in and through his apostolic suffering (**3:2-3; 3:6b**), is based on the call of God in his life (**2:17b; 3:5-6a**).

George Shillington: According to this text (**2:14 - 3:6**), Paul's critics infer that he is too self-assured. He ministers without proper approval. He answers that his confidence is through Christ toward God (**3:4**). That thought leads him back to his earlier question of **2:16b**, not completely answered to this point: *Who is qualified or competent?* The same word is used again in **3:5-6** as adjective, noun, and verb. The point is moot for Paul, not because the criticism is a personal affront to him, but because **his competence and his call go hand in hand**. If he is not competent for the ministry, then he is not called to the ministry. But he knows he is called, therefore he is competent.

However, his competence is not simply innate; it is a gift from God (**3:5**). God made Paul competent by a divine authority that outranks human convention. The Corinthians are thereby left with little choice. Either they accept Paul on these terms or they reject him. To reject him is to reject God and enter the path that leads to death (**2:16a**).

A. (:4-5) Confidence Due to Competence from God vs. from Self

Cf. Jay Adams' book: Competent to Counsel

1. Source of Confidence

- a. Possession of Confidence

“And such confidence we have”

b. Provider of Confidence
“through Christ”

Ralph Martin: He claims no virtue for himself but proceeds to express in a heavily loaded sentence that his “sufficiency” is a gift of God in grace (**1 Thess 2:4; 1 Cor 15:10**: cf. **Eph 3:7–8; 1 Tim 1:12, 14**).

Mark Seifrid: Paul’s little phrase “*through Christ*” is crucial. The crucified and risen Christ is the vehicle of his empowerment. His confidence is thus a confidence that life is given in and through death — not just any death, but the death of Christ in which he shares. This is the mission and ministry of the new covenant that Paul unfolds in **vv. 4–11**: the newness of the covenant of the Spirit is the life and righteousness that it brings out of the death and condemnation worked by the old covenant.

c. Orientation of Confidence
“toward God.”

Paul Barnett: The ministry of Paul and of all who have subsequently become ministers of the new covenant is not offered for the approval of men and women but for the endorsement of God. It was before God that Paul had his confidence. Nor does the strength which all ministers of the word of God need come from within themselves. Ministers of the gospel will say with Paul, **our competence comes from God**.

John MacArthur: The false apostles, in contrast, were self-confident and arrogant, trusting fully in their own cleverness. But they were in reality man-pleasing, insincere corrupters of the Word of God (cf. **2 Cor. 2:17**). On the other hand, the goal of Paul’s ministry was, through the power of Christ, to please God. His Lord was both the source of the apostle’s ministry and its ultimate goal.

2. Source of Competence

- a. Negatively: Not from Relying on Self
*“Not that we are adequate in ourselves
to consider anything as coming from ourselves”*
- b. Positively: Solely from Relying on God
“but our adequacy is from God”

Cf. “*The Sufficient One*” as a name of God – **Ruth 1:20, 21; Job 21:15; 31:2; 39:32**

John Piper: Here Paul explains why he has such an amazing confidence that he is actually an instrument of God in the great fulfillment of the new covenant promises. His confidence is not based on anything that comes from himself. Instead he says it is all of God, and the evidence is that he is not merely handing on written laws or traditions like the scribes and Pharisees. Rather, he is preaching Christ in the ministry and power of

the Spirit. And the result is new life. This new life is the authentication of Paul's authority as a minister of the new covenant.

William Barclay: Paul is feeling that perhaps his claim that the Corinthians are a living epistle of Christ, produced under his ministry, may sound a little like self-praise. So he hastens to insist that whatever he had done is not his own work but the work of God.

David Garland: God has demolished Paul's former confidence in himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee who thought he was blameless when it came to righteousness under the law (**Phil 3:3–6**). He no longer places any trust in his own heritage, devotion, or natural gifts but now recognizes that the only resource from which he can draw is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God's empowering Spirit. In saying he does not reckon that we have any sufficiency from ourselves, Paul is not resorting to false humility. He would argue that he is fully sufficient to exercise his ministry, yet at the same time he admits that his sufficiency comes entirely from God's Spirit who works in and through him.

B. (:6) Confidence Due to Transformative Power of New Covenant Ministry

1. Transition to New Covenant Ministry

“who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant”

Not just is God adequate in Himself, but He has made us adequate!

Frank Matera: These verses [:4-5] begin the third subunit that comprises **verses 4–6**. In this unit, Paul presents himself for the first time as the **minister of a new covenant empowered by the Spirit**. The subunit returns to the question that Paul raised at the beginning of this unit, *“Who is qualified (hikanos) for these things?”* (**2:16**). Using *hikanos* as a hook word and employing a literary plural “we,” Paul affirms that of himself he is not “qualified” (*hikanoi*). Rather, his “qualification” (*hikanotēs*) comes from God, who has “qualified” (*hikanōsen*) him as the minister of a new covenant of God's life-giving Spirit. This introduction of Paul's new covenant ministry sets the stage for the comparison that he will draw between the glorious ministry of Moses and his own ministry, which is more glorious still (**vv. 7–11**), allowing him to act with an openness that Moses did not have (**vv. 12–18**).

Robert Hughes: Three interconnected lines demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old:

- (1) the superior nature of the New Covenant,
- (2) the resultant superior New Covenant ministry, and
- (3) the superior benefit for those who receive that ministry.

2. Transformative Power of New Covenant vs. Old Covenant

Cf. new and old wineskins:

- old covenant is worn out and obsolete;
- replaced by new covenant which is enduring

Study OT promises of New Covenant in **Jeremiah 31:31-33** and **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

a. Ministry of the Spirit vs. of the Letter
“not of the letter, but of the Spirit”

Plummer: In all this disparagement of *to gramma* there was no danger of seeming to disparage Christian writings, for as yet there were no Christian Scriptures.

Mark Seifrid: The distinction between “*the letter*” and “*the Spirit*” is the difference between Moses in action and Christ in action. In these terms Paul signals the decisive events in and through which God’s promises come to fulfillment.

Scott Hafemann: If Paul’s authority as an apostle is based in part on the parallel between his sufficiency and the sufficiency of Moses (**3:4–6a**), it is equally supported by the contrast between his “*ministry*” (*diakonia*) and the “*ministry*” (*diakonia*) of Moses (**3:6**, as unpacked in **3:7–18**). Paul is called like Moses, but with a distinctively different function. In the end, then, the character of Paul’s ministry as an apostle, compared and contrasted to the ministry of Moses, becomes the key to understanding Paul’s self-conception and defense. The heart of this comparison and contrast is the famous letter/Spirit contrast of **3:6**.

John MacArthur: As a minister of the new covenant Paul was a servant not of the letter but of the Spirit. The contrast between the letter and the Spirit further distinguishes the new covenant from the old covenant. Mere external adherence to the letter of the Law will not result in salvation. Though “*the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good*” (**Rom. 7:12**), nevertheless “*by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (**Rom. 3:20**), because “*a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*” (**Rom. 3:28**; cf. **Gal. 2:16**). Salvation comes only through the “*washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*” (**Titus 3:5**; cf. **John 3:5**; **Rom. 8:2**; **1 Cor. 6:11**; **2 Thess. 2:13**).

The writer of Hebrews highlights the contrast between the external letter of the old covenant and the internal reality of the new covenant: **Heb. 8:8-13**

The difference between the old Mosaic, Sinaitic covenant and the new covenant is not a difference in moral standards. God’s moral law does not change, because it is grounded in His immutable holiness. But under the old covenant, the law was external, consisting of written commands; in the new covenant, it is internal, written on the heart by the Holy Spirit.

b. Ministry of Life vs. Ministry of Death
“for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Ralph Martin: It is clear that Paul found no fault with Torah, the law itself (**Rom 7:12, 14**), but he knew from his own experience that the law set a high standard which it

beckoned a person to attain, yet it provided no power to achieve the goal. The trouble lay with “*humanity*” as σάρξ, “*flesh*”; human frailty and proneness to evil allowed the σάρξ, “*flesh*,” to turn the law of God (which God intended as good) into a death-dealing instrument (**Rom 7:13**). The reason why the law became our enemy is given in **Rom 8:3a**, and Paul glides into a set of equations when he assesses humankind’s alienation from God: sin, flesh, Satan, and law all lead to the ultimate end of death.

Jason Meyer: Paul’s new covenant confidence shines in these verses. The new covenant provides sufficiency for ministry through the Spirit of the living God. The Spirit has the power to give life, whereas the letter of the law lacks any life-giving power and can only produce death.

II. (:7-11) SUPERIOR GLORY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

Frank Matera: 3:7–11 The glory of two ministries

- vv. 7–8 Death contrasted with Spirit
- v. 9 Condemnation contrasted with righteousness
- vv. 10–11 What is being abolished contrasted with what remains

Richard Pratt: New Covenant Contrasted with the Old Covenant

Old Covenant	New Covenant
brought death and condemnation (3:7,9)	brings righteousness (3:9)
engraved on stone (3:7)	of the Spirit, written on hearts (3:8)
fading glory (3:8,11)	more, surpassing, lasting glory (3:8,10–11)

A. (:7-8) Contrast in Glory Based on the Agency of Divine Revelation

1. Glory of Ministry of Moses

“But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was,”

Paul Barnett: These Hebrew newcomers, apparently, sought to impose the old covenant upon these Gentile Corinthian Christians. While they proclaimed Jesus and the Spirit, it was another Jesus and a different spirit (**11:4**); though what exactly they did teach, Paul does not say. What is clear is that, in seeking to impose the old covenant upon the Corinthians, they did not accept the radical nature, the newness, of the new covenant, or the power of the Spirit of God. Paul, however, recognized that what they advocated would mean a retreat from life back into death, as he proceeds to explain. . .

But why should the Corinthians have been attracted to the newcomers' message about Moses and the law? If for modern people the problem with Christianity is its antiquity, the problem people had then was its novelty. People of those times venerated the past, believing that old ideas and customs went back to the gods. Cicero wrote that 'ancient times were closest to the gods'. Doubtless these ministers pointed to Moses as a venerable figure and to their temple as an ancient institution. Moreover, the Jews were God's historic people who had, by that time, settled in many parts of the world and represented approximately a tenth of the population of the Roman Empire. The existence of numerous 'God-fearers' or Gentile onlookers in the synagogues is evidence of the attractiveness of Judaism to many pagans. It would have been easy enough for the newcomers to dismiss Paul as a self-appointed, self-recommended upstart peddling a heretical, novel version of Judaism.

2. Glory of Ministry of the Spirit

"how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?"

David Garland: The law is "*spiritual*" (**Rom 7:14**), but it kills since it only prescribes and proscribes but cannot overcome the weakness of the flesh, and sin hijacked the law and perverted it into an instrument of death (**Rom 7:5–11**). The law cannot empower obedience. It only pronounces judgment on disobedience. Origen misrepresented Paul's meaning in arguing that "*the letter*" referred to the literal, external sense of Scripture and that "*the Spirit*" referred to the spiritual, internal sense of Scripture. This passage then became the support for the **allegorical interpretation of Scripture**, which he championed, and which dominated biblical exegesis for centuries. Few make the same distinction today between two levels of meaning in the text, but some still argue that Paul contrasts two different ways of understanding the text, the literal and the spiritual. The Spirit is understood to be the hermeneutical key for understanding Scripture. Although this principle may be true, it is not what Paul had in mind in distinguishing the letter and the Spirit. **Paul refers to the Spirit's work as a divine power who gives life rather than the Spirit's work who gives divine inspiration that opens the true meaning of Scripture.** The Spirit achieves God's new action in Christ by enabling believers to do what they could not otherwise do — obey the law (**Rom 8:1–4**).

Scott Hafemann: The structure of Paul's argument in **3:7** thus makes it clear that the point of the "*even more*" comparison in **3:8** is not that Paul's ministry possesses God's glory in a greater quality or quantity, as if God's glory is given out in varying degrees. Rather, Paul argues that since the old covenant ministry, which brought death, came in glory, as testified to by its having been veiled, "*then how much more must the ministry of the Spirit exist in glory*" (**3:8**, lit. trans.), since it brings life (**3:6c**). Paul is arguing for the very existence of glory in the ministry of the new covenant, despite the absence of visible displays of God's presence, not its degree or kind. The basis of his argument is the consequence (i.e., life) brought about by the ministry of the Spirit, in contrast to that of the ministry of the letter (i.e., death).

B. (:9) Contrast in Glory Based on the Intended Effect = Ministry of Righteousness vs. Ministry of Condemnation

1. Ministry of Condemnation

“For if the ministry of condemnation has glory,”

John MacArthur: But if the old covenant had a certain fading glory how, Paul asked, will the ministry of the Spirit (the new covenant) fail to be even more with glory? The Law written on stone in the old covenant, which produced death and condemnation, had the glory of God in it because it revealed His glorious nature as holy and just. The new covenant reveals God’s glory in a full manner because it not only reveals His holy nature, justice, wrath, and judgment (as did the old covenant), but it also manifests His compassion, mercy, grace, and forgiveness (cf. **Ex. 33:19**). And by the new covenant, the Spirit gives life and righteousness: *“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [sets believers] free from the law of sin and of death”* (**Rom. 8:2**). The old covenant commands righteousness; the new covenant confers it. The old covenant made people hearers of the truth; the new covenant enables them to be doers of the truth. . .

But apart from salvation in Christ, the old covenant remained a ministry of condemnation, of judgment, and, ultimately, of damnation. It brought people to the bar of God’s judgment but provided no means of satisfying His justice except for eternal punishment in hell. Yet despite its shortcomings, the old covenant did have glory, because it reflected God’s nature as holy. And if even the old covenant had a certain glory, how much more does the ministry of righteousness (a descriptive name for the new covenant) abound in glory by revealing God’s nature as loving and gracious. The new covenant far surpasses the old covenant because it provides what the old covenant could not—righteousness: *“But now,”* under the new covenant, *“apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe”* (**Rom. 3:21–22**). In the new covenant, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers (**2 Cor. 5:21**), wrapping them in a *“robe of righteousness”* (**Isa. 61:10**).

2. Ministry of Righteousness

“much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.”

Ray Stedman: Righteousness means being fully accepted, having a sense of being approved by God, of being honored and cherished by him. The nearest word I know to describe this is the word worth. God gives you a standing of worth. You don’t have to earn it; you start with it. God tells you already in the new covenant, “I have loved you, I have forgiven you, I have cleansed you. You are my dearly beloved child. I intend to use you; you are part of my program; your life is significant. There is nothing more you can add to that. Now, on that basis, with the security of that acceptance, go back to your work.” And you go with a sense of approval and security.

David Garland: In this segment of his argument [7-18], Paul contrasts the ministry of Moses and the glory associated with the giving of the law with his own ministry and the glory associated with the gospel. He is not concerned that rivals “have overstressed the OT and understressed the newness of Christ.” Paul is not arguing against false apostles who have invaded his territory and supposedly appealed to **Exodus 34** to undermine his

apostolic authority and advance their agenda. **He is defending his bold speech in correcting the Corinthians.** He argues from premises that the Corinthians would readily accept about the different glories of the two ministries, the ministry of Moses that yields only death and the new ministry in Christ that brings life. He is an agent of this new ministry in Christ and shares in its surpassing glory. **Glory, not the contrast between law and grace, is the key theme of this unit.** Paul makes the incredible assertion that his ministry is far more glorious than that of Moses, the most illustrious figure in Scripture. Because he is an apostle of this glorious ministry, it provides the basis for his frank speech in the letter written in tears.

C. (:10-11) Contrast in Glory Based on the Duration of the Covenant

*“For indeed what had glory,
in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it.
For if that which fades away was with glory,
much more that which remains is in glory.”*

Jason Meyer: The new covenant is qualitatively greater (v. 10). The glory of the new covenant is so bright that it eclipses the glory of the old covenant. The glory of the new covenant out-glorifies the old to such a degree that it de-glorifies the old. . . The new covenant is permanently greater because the old comes to an end while the new remains (2Co 3:11). No future covenant will eclipse or replace the new covenant.

Paul Barnett: However, it is not merely that one ministry is superior; it is, rather, that the lesser, temporary glory of the old did not continue but concluded once the greater, permanent glory of the new dispensation arrived. The glory on Moses’ face was transitory (7, 11, 13), or, more accurately, had been ‘abolished’. In placing his ‘radiance’ on Moses’ face, God set limits to its duration. By contrast, the glory of the new ministry is unlimited and permanent (11). Now that the new has come, what was glorious has no glory . . . in comparison (10).

Mark Seifrid: The paradoxical relationship between the letter and the Spirit continues here. The contrast that Paul sets between them is so radical and difficult that most, if not all, translations do away with it: *“that which has been glorified has not been glorified, on account of the surpassing greatness of glory.”* On account of the glory of the apostolic mission, the former glory is made no glory at all. It has been done away with. Yet it is to this very glory that Paul makes appeal as a confirmation of the glory of the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness. Negation and affirmation are juxtaposed, as are death and life. The glory associated with the letter prepares for that of the Spirit. Only those under condemnation may receive the gift of righteousness. Yet the glory of the mission of righteousness is so bright that it eclipses and eliminates the former glory. There is no line of continuity that may be drawn between them. They meet in the crucified and risen Lord alone.

Charles Swindoll: The old covenant with all its glory paled with the dawn of Christ. Yes, the Old Testament Law was good, righteous, and holy. It had been given by God through a miraculous series of events. Yet the glory of its *“ministry of condemnation”*

(3:9) dims into obscurity in the light of the gospel's "*ministry of righteousness*" (3:9). In fact, so vast is the difference between the glory of the old covenant and the glory of the new that the contrast makes it appear as if the old had "*no glory because of the glory that surpasses it*" (3:10). Although the old covenant was full of glory, the new covenant's glory is far greater (3:11).

III. (:12-18) SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION ACCOMPLISHED BY NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

Frank Matera: 3:12–18 The veiling and unveiling of glory

- vv. 12–13 The behavior of Moses and the behavior of Paul
- vv. 14–15 Israel of old and Israel of Paul's day
- vv. 16–18 The Spirit and the unveiling of glory

A. (:12-13) Boldness Should Characterize New Covenant Ministry

1. Boldness in Ministry Inspired by Assurance of Enduring Glory

"Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech"

John Piper: Now we should be able to see what the hope is that Paul has in mind. It is the hope of the new covenant promise. It is the confidence that the sovereign Spirit of God is at work in his ministry to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and to give life (v. 6) and righteousness (v. 9) and permanence (v. 11) to all God's people. God is at work! Not simply to tell them on tablets of stone what they must do but to do it in them!

Paul's hope is that God has now undertaken to fulfil his ancient promise to take out the heart of stone, to write his law on soft hearts of flesh (**Jeremiah 31:33**) and put his Spirit within them and cause them to walk in his statutes (**Ezekiel 36:27**). The age of fulfillment has begun! And the victory of God's purpose is certain because his Spirit is sovereign. He will create new hearts wherever he pleases. He will cause the obedience he requires. He will preserve permanently all that he calls. And the glory of his work will be great beyond anything the Old Testament ever knew.

John MacArthur: **Hope** is the confident belief that God will fulfill all the promises of His new covenant. Many of those have already been fulfilled; yet great and glorious as the new covenant is, the heart of it has not yet been fully manifested. The new covenant was ratified at the Cross, though its benefits have always been appropriated by faith, but the fullness of its hope will not be experienced until believers' future glorification. It is then that they will receive their glorified bodies and be freed not only from sin's penalty, but also from its presence (**Rom. 8:16–17, 23–25, 29–30; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20–21; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2**). . .

So sure, well established, and irrevocable is the hope provided by the new covenant that those who preach it confidently use great boldness in their speech. They fearlessly and unhesitatingly proclaim the gospel message. *Parrēsia* (*boldness*) describes courageous, confident, outspoken proclamation of the gospel, without reluctance or wavering no

matter how severe the opposition. Paul unhesitatingly preached the liberating message of the new covenant, even though it enraged his Jewish opponents, who clung fiercely to the old.

2. Boldness Contrasted with Caution Exercised Under Ministry of the Law

“and are not as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away.”

Tasker: This frankness, so characteristic of Paul’s ministry, was not conspicuous in the ministry of Moses. This was not due to any moral failure on the part of Moses. It was inherent in the very nature of the revelation he mediated. He was concerned very largely with types and shadows, in which truth was very often wrapped up in mystery and symbol; and the mystery remained till the archetype was made known and the reality became visible.

Paul illustrates this from the Exodus story, and underlines the secondary inference that he has drawn from it in passing in **verse 7**. Moses, he says in effect, veiled his face not only because the Israelites shrank back from its brightness, but also because he knew that the glory upon it was fading; and in the providence of God, though not necessarily in the express and conscious design of Moses himself, the Israelites were not to see that the fading was symbolic of the ultimate abolition of the old dispensation. . . In the providence of God the Israelites, under the Mosaic dispensation, were able to enjoy only a revelation that was preparatory to something better. The sacrifices enjoined upon them were temporary and inferior sacrifices, the blood of bulls and goats; those who offered them could not see the end to which they were pointing; viz. the perfect sacrifice of Christ, which inaugurated the new covenant, and so had as its corollary the abolition of the old.

B. (:14-16) Hardening and Rejection Contrasted with Enlightening and Empowering

1. Hardening and Rejection

“But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart”

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s introduction of the terminology “*old covenant*” is a declaration of his eschatology, not a denigration of the law. He refers to the Sinai covenant as “*old*” only because he is convinced that Jesus, as the Christ, has inaugurated the “*new covenant*” of **Jeremiah 31:31–34** and **Ezekiel 36:26–27** (cf. again the allusions to these two texts in **2 Cor. 3:3, 6**). The designation “*old*” is not a pejorative evaluation of the content of the Sinai covenant, but an eschatological designation of its fulfillment. To speak of it as “*old*” is to view the covenant ministered by Moses through the lens of the dawning of the “*new covenant*” ministered by Paul.

2. Enlightening and Empowering

“but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”

David Guzik: Paul says that the Jews of his day were unable to see that the glory of Moses’ ministry had faded in comparison to the ministry of Jesus. If the veil were unlifted, they would see that the glory of Moses’ ministry had faded and they should now look to Jesus. But since the “*same*” veil that hid Moses’ face now lies on their heart, they still think there is something superior or more glorious in the ministry of Moses.

James Meyer: Only the new covenant has the power to remove the veil of hardheartedness and spiritual blindness. Moses removed the veil only when he turned to the Lord in the tent of meeting. In the same way, the veil is removed now only in conversion when someone turns to the Lord Jesus.

C. (:17) Liberty Associated with the Ministry of the Spirit

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Ray Stedman: Freedom is being out in the open, it is having boldness, nothing to hide. That is what Paul is talking about. The man who is free is one who does not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve about himself. He can be himself. That is what freedom is. . .

This accounts for what many of us have difficulty understanding. It is the work of the Spirit to remove the veil, which is what is keeping us from seeing ourselves, and how futile it is for us to try hard to please God. There is another way of pleasing him -- accepting what he gives you. As long as you are trying hard, you never can lay hold of what he is ready to give. Therefore, the work of the Spirit is to help you to see how futile your efforts at trying have become.

Paul Barnett: The **imagery of the veil**, therefore, is central in the contrast Paul is making between the people under the old and under the new covenant. Moses and the Jewish people are veiled, whereas Paul and other Christian people are unveiled (**18**).

W. C. van Unnik has shown that to cover the face means ‘shame and mourning’, whereas to uncover the face means ‘confidence and freedom’. In other words, because of condemnation under the old covenant the people were shamefaced and hesitant in the presence of God, whereas, because of the ‘*righteousness*’ through the ministry of the new covenant, the people are open and confident with their God. Those who turn to the Lord who is the Spirit possess the Spirit and enjoy freedom (**17**), whereas the others are, by implication, still in a state of slavery.

Richard Pratt: Those who seek salvation through obedience to the Law of Moses (as many Jews did in Paul’s day) are in bondage to the law and death (**Rom. 6:6–22; Gal. 2:4**; cf. **Heb. 2:15**). Those in Christ, however, are free from the dominion of sin and death (**Rom. 7:6**). In Christ believers are set free from sin’s guilt and influence. Believers are no longer slaves to sin, incapable of resisting its influence over their

behavior. Instead, they become free to withstand sin and to do good instead of evil. Freedom stood as one of those words that Paul used to summarize the experience of salvation in Christ.

Paul did not mean that believers were free from all obligation to obey God. Rather, for Paul freedom in Christ was only freedom from sin—it was not also freedom from righteousness. In fact, freedom from sin was slavery to righteousness. Only this slavery to righteousness enabled a person to serve “*in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code*” (**Rom. 7:6**). It is easier to understand Paul's perspective and vocabulary when one considers that he probably drew the image of freedom not from slaves and freemen in the Roman empire, but from **Israel's freedom from their slavery in Egypt**. Thus, he did not contrast slavery to another's control with freedom to be autonomous. Instead, he contrasted slavery to a sinful power that prevented proper worship with the freedom to be ruled by God—to obey him and to worship him.

James Meyer: The Spirit of the Lord in the new covenant brings freedom. This freedom is spelled out in **verse 18**: it is not merely freedom from the veil; it is also being set free to see with unveiled face. This gazing on the glory of the Lord is transformative. Believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ by beholding the glory of Christ (v. **18**). There is no such thing as sightless sanctification.

D. (:18) Inward Transformation to Mature Christlikeness is the Goal

“But we all, with unveiled face reflecting/ beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

Commentators differ as to the meaning of the word “*reflecting/ beholding*” here ...

Homer Kent: Although the idea of reflecting fits the parallel with Moses who reflected the glory of God, the translation “*beholding*” is usually preferred. The ancient versions commonly understood it this way. There is no clear instance of the verb having the meaning “*reflect*” unless it is in the active voice (it is middle here). Furthermore, the passage speaks of believers who can now see clearly because the veil has been removed from them.

Paul Barnett: How does this **character transformation** take place? It occurs whenever anyone turns to the Lord (**16**), so that the veil is taken away and we begin to contemplate, or ‘*behold*’ (rsv), the glory of the Lord (**18**). Although the verb can mean ‘*reflect*’ (niv margin), ‘*behold*’ is to be preferred because a parallel passage (**4:18**) uses the synonym ‘*look*’ (‘*fix our eyes on*’). By this Paul means coming within the ministry of God’s word, the gospel, which affirms that Jesus Christ is the image of God and also Lord (**4:2–6**). Through this ministry the knowledge of God is imparted to us (**4:1, 6**). We must take steps to place ourselves under the ministry of the gospel through church membership and also by personal Bible reading and prayer. In another letter Paul expresses the same essential idea in these words: ‘*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*’ (**Rom. 12:2**). Clearly the process of transformation, while ‘spiritual’, is not

mystical but educational in character. The content of the education is the gospel of Christ.

John MacArthur: Ceremonial, sacramental religion offers nothing to new covenant believers. It does not provide justification, has no power to sanctify, and will not lead to glorification. The Christian life does not consist in rituals but in a relationship to Jesus Christ; not in ceremonies but in “*the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ*” (2 Cor. 11:3). As believers single-mindedly focus on the Scriptures, they will see God’s glory reflected in the face of Jesus and be transformed into His image by the powerful internal work of the Lord, the Spirit (cf. Eph. 3:16).

Scott Hafemann: In other words, by the power of the Spirit we are experiencing in a progressive sense more and more of this **freedom to obey God**, and as a result we are being **changed into God’s own image** by becoming obedient to his will. To be in the image of God is to manifest his “*likeness*” by acting in accordance with his commands as an expression of God’s own nature.

This **moral transformation** of God’s people marks the decisive difference between the ministries of the old and new covenants. Moreover, the allusion in 3:18 to the image of God from **Genesis 1:26–27** points forward to Paul’s later identification of the new covenant with the new creation (cf. 4:6; 5:17). Just as those in Adam disobey God’s will, those in Christ, the second Adam, are being brought back into the relationship of faith-generated obedience that characterized Adam and Eve before the Fall. As in the Garden of Eden before the Fall and at the Exodus before the golden calf, the new creation is characterized by encountering God himself.

In Paul’s words, this transformation is taking place “*with ever-increasing glory*” (lit., “*from glory unto glory*”). To say that we are being transformed into his likeness “*from glory*” means that the believer’s gradual growth in obedience pictured in 3:18 takes place in response to God’s presence. To say that we are being transformed into his likeness “*unto glory*” means that the final result of becoming more and more like him in anticipation of the final consummation of this age is that we will one day participate in his glory in all its fullness. Our life with God begins and ends by entering into his glorious presence—now in the Spirit, then face to face.

For this reason, the present transformation of God’s people “*comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*,” since the Spirit is the down payment of God’s presence and power in our lives (1:20–22; 3:3–6, 8). Finally, this transformation takes place because, from beginning to end—that is, from glory unto glory—“*we behold as in a mirror*” (not “reflect,” as in the NIV) the glory of the Lord without being destroyed by it, since we do so “*with unveiled faces*.”

The spiritual and moral transformation pictured in 3:18 is the final support for Paul’s prior assertion that Israel continues to be hardened “*to this day*” (3:14a, 15b), which in turn supports the validity of Paul’s bold ministry in spite of his lack of success among his fellow Jews (3:12–13). If the people of Israel in Paul’s day had not continued to be

hardened like their “*fathers*” before them, they too would be able to behold the glory of God on the face of Christ and be transformed by it. Moreover, that Moses provides a type of the believer’s experience (3:16–17), in contrast to the ongoing experience of Israel in her stiff-necked condition (3:14–15), demonstrates that a remnant of Jews and Gentiles is still being saved (3:18; 5:17).

Furthermore, this restoration of God’s people in Christ is **taking place through the gospel** as embodied and proclaimed in Paul’s own ministry. As a mediator of the glory of God on the face of Christ (cf. 4:4, 6), Paul’s “*ministry of the Spirit*” (3:6, 8) is the means by which the prophetic expectation of the new creation under the new covenant is already beginning to be realized. At the center of the “*new creation*” is the manifestation of God’s presence in the midst of his people, both Jew and Gentile, in anticipation of the final redemption of all creation.

The result of this present revelation of God’s glory is a **life of growing obedience to God’s commands**, in stark contrast to Israel’s present rebellion and the continuing wickedness of the nations. It is this transformation “*from glory unto glory*” that supports Paul’s legitimacy, so that he needs no “*letter of recommendation*” beyond the Corinthians themselves (3:1–3). As new creatures in Christ (cf. 5:17) under the new covenant (3:6; cf. 6:16–18), the Corinthians testify by their Spirit-induced obedience that the glory of God is now being revealed in their midst, unveiled, through Paul’s apostolic ministry.

Charles Swindoll: Paul gives the secret of our confidence in **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**. The source of our confidence is not found in ourselves, our riches, our gifts, positions, power, prestige, or accomplishments. Instead, the liberating source of our sufficiency is His Spirit (3:17). No longer do we need to live imprisoned in fear, shame, guilt, or a constant need to impress anybody —especially God. No longer do we need to feel concerned about transforming ourselves in our own power. Instead, we simply remove the veil of self-deception from our hearts, setting aside our own desire for recognition and accomplishment, and allow Christ to shine through us.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

1) The one who has reconciled us to God the Father, has granted us free access and boldness to approach the throne of grace for whatever help we need is the one who has filled us with *confidence towards God* that we truly have the resources to effectively minister in the context of the glory of the New Covenant (vs.4).

2) Christ as the New Adam has made us *adequate* to serve as ministers of the New Covenant to extoll all of the blessings associated with the ministry of the Spirit. Whereas the Old Covenant was filled with types and shadows that pointed ahead to fulfillment in Christ, the New Covenant is one of surpassing glory and permanence (vs. 6).

3) Only the Lord is able to grant the freedom that comes from the enlightenment of a true knowledge of who He is and what He has accomplished in redeeming His own. This true knowledge removes the veil that obscured the vision of the Jews who were locked into Old Covenant realities and the fading glory of the ministry of Moses (vv. 14-16).

4) The identification of the Lord with the Spirit is an interesting one (v. 17). The ministry of glorifying Christ and hence the Father is now conducted by the Holy Spirit who grants the freedom and enlightenment that we need.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is holding me back from full *confidence* in the ministry God has called me to and in *boldness* in proclaiming Christ and fulfilling my ministry?

2) Am I completely open to others in how I reflect the glory of the Lord or do I put any type of veil over that presentation that obscures the truth?

3) Am I comfortable with the dominant role of the Spirit in this New Covenant dispensation or do I prefer the legalism of external righteousness?

4) Is this inward transformation presented as an instantaneous experience or as a gradual process in the life of a believer?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chafer: Not referring to different methods of interpreting Scripture – but to two dispensations with their different methods of divine rule – the ministry of the law contrasted with divine life, spiritual vitality, energy and power which are provided for the believer under grace . . . the blessing of the indwelling Spirit is an essential characteristic of this age (IV, p. 90).

John Piper: What is his boldness. The word Paul uses here has three connotations. There are three aspects of boldness. You could probably come up with these yourself by asking what the opposite of boldness is.

1. First, the opposite of boldness is fear or timidity. And so one aspect of boldness is the courage of fearlessness.

Example: 1 Thessalonians 2:2, "*Though we had already suffered and been treated insolently at Philippi, as you know, we had courage (same word in Greek!) in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition.*" Boldness overcame the fear of suffering persecution.

2. Second, the opposite of boldness is also shame. And so another aspect of boldness is the courage of being unashamed.

Example: Philippians 1:20, "*It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage (same word!) now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*" Boldness overcame the temptation to feel shame about the gospel.

3. The third aspect of boldness (not so much in English, but definitely in this peculiar Greek word, *parresia*) comes out when you see that often in the NT the opposite of boldness is guarded speech and minced words and indirect, vague, obscure communication. So the third aspect of NT boldness is direct, open, frank, straightforward, forthright, plain speech concerning the things of God. When a bold person speaks people know what he means; his cards are on the table; he doesn't seek to protect himself with obscurities or subtleties or euphemisms or generalities.

Example: John 10:24. The Jews say to Jesus, "*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" This word "*plainly*" is the same as the word for *boldly* in all these other places. So boldness overcomes the temptation to conceal the truth in vagueness. It is frank and plain and straightforward. It is not political and cagy and slippery

So when Paul says here in **2 Corinthians 3:12** that his great hope in the fulfillment of God's promises makes him very bold, I think he probably has in mind mainly this third aspect of plain and open speech (since the contrast is with the veiled ministry of Moses, vv. 13ff.) But since all three of these meanings are so closely tied together I think it would be fair to say that he means is this: since we have such a great hope, we are unafraid of what man can do to us, and we are unashamed of the gospel, and we are unwilling to cloak the word of God in palatable generalities and euphemisms that obscure the clear and sharp contours of the truth. "*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold!*"

Ray Stedman: Paul is talking about **confidence**; and everybody in the world is trying to get confidence. Every time you turn on television, or listen to the radio, or pick up a magazine, you are constantly bombarded with suggestions on how to become a self-sufficient, confident, capable, well-adjusted person, able to handle life. There are all kinds of approaches, and almost all work on the same basis. Confidence, we are told, has to come from yourself. You have to somehow find in yourself the power to achieve and to be a success. You can build it up through courses you can take and skills you can develop. That is how you will prove to be a successful individual. The world understands, quite properly, that you have to have a degree of confidence. People who lack confidence, who are unsure of themselves, who are insecure, go stumbling through

life and never make a good impression on anyone and are always losing and failing. Therefore, the great thing to aim for is to build up a deep sense of confidence. . .

The ability that is evident in my ministry, the changes that occur in people's lives because of what I am and where I go have nothing to do with my natural skills or ability. It's all coming from God at work in me." The old covenant is Paul trying to do his best on behalf of God; the new covenant is God doing his best through Paul. What a difference that is! That is the great truth we need to learn.

Bob Deffinbaugh: A careless reading might cause us to explain Moses' actions in a way that does not square with the text in Exodus or with Paul's words in our text. We might conclude that Moses veiled his face so the people would not be overcome by the glow of his face. Putting on the veil in this case would be like dimming his high beam lights. The only problem is that we are told Moses left his face uncovered until after he spoke to the people. His face was only veiled from the time he spoke to the people (after his encounter with God) until the next time he again went into the presence of God. Why would he need a veil during this period of time? Paul tells us. It was because the "glory-glow" faded. The longer Moses was away from God, the more the glow on his face dimmed. Each meeting with God was like recharging the batteries which powered the facial glow of Moses. Moses did not want the people to see the glow of God's glory dimming, and so he covered his face during that time when the glory faded.

Paul's point is this: the glory Moses experienced in conjunction with the old covenant was a fading glory; in stark contrast, the glory which Paul enjoys in conjunction with the new covenant is unfading: "*For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory*" (verse 11, emphasis mine). Moses needed a veil because the glory of the old covenant, as great as it was, faded away. The messengers of the good news of the gospel need no veil at all, because the greater glory of the new covenant never fades: "*But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*" (verse 18).

William Barclay: The word that Paul uses for *new* when he speaks of the **new covenant** is the same word as Jesus used and it is very significant. In Greek there are two words for new. First, there is *neos*, and *neos* means *new in point and in point of time alone*. A young person is *neos* because he is a newcomer into the world. Second, there is *kainos*, and *kainos* means not only new in point of time, but *new in point of quality*. If something is *kainos* it has brought a new, fresh, different element into the situation altogether. Now, it is the word *kainos* that both Jesus and Paul use of the new covenant, and the significance is that the new covenant is not only new in point of time it is quite different in kind and in quality from the old covenant. It produces, not just a new relationship between man and God, but a relationship of a totally different kind.

John MacArthur: **Second Corinthians 3:6–18** is a condensed summary of the new covenant distinctives, the most complete exposition of which is found in the book of Hebrews. As Paul does in this passage, the writer of Hebrews makes clear the

superiority of the new covenant. The new covenant has always been a better covenant than the Mosaic Law because it has a **better mediator**, Jesus Christ (**Heb. 8:6**). A mediator acts as an intermediary between two parties in a dispute (cf. **Gal. 3:20**). The mediators of the old covenant, Israel's prophets, priests, and Moses (cf. **Ex. 20:19; Deut. 5:5; Gal. 3:19**), could not adequately represent both God and men, since they were mere men. But as the God-man, Jesus can perfectly represent men to God and God to men. Therefore Paul declares that there is "*one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (**1 Tim. 2:5**). New covenant believers have **direct access to God** through Jesus Christ alone, "*for through Him we ... have our access in one Spirit to the Father*" (**Eph. 2:18**). There is no need for priests, the saints, or Mary to intercede with God on believers' behalf.

The new covenant is also superior to the old because it has **better promises**, the most significant of which is the promise of complete forgiveness and permanent cleansing from all sin. Jeremiah records God's new covenant promise, "*I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more*" (**Jer. 31:34**). The old covenant could not provide cleansing from sin, "*for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*" (**Heb. 10:4**). Forgiveness of sin comes only through the blood of Christ. The writer of Hebrews declares, "*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ... He [Christ], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God*" (**Heb. 10:10, 12; cf. 7:27; 9:12; Matt. 26:28**).

Hebrews 8:8–12 describes seven characteristics of the new covenant.

First, the new covenant comes from God. In **Hebrews 8:8** God declares, "*I will effect a new covenant.*" Its terms are based on His sovereign plan and purpose.

Second, the new covenant is different from the old covenant. It is not an upgrade but something entirely new. The Greek word translated "*new*" in **Hebrews 8:8** is *kainos*, which means new in the sense of **different**, not new in the sense of subsequence in time.

Third, the new covenant is made "*with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*" (**Heb. 8:8**), but that does not mean, of course, that Gentiles are excluded from it, because "*it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise*" (**Gal. 3:7, 29**). Gentiles enter into the blessings of the new covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. The Law given to Moses has always been applied to Gentiles, even those who never heard Moses, and violation of it will bring eternal judgment. So also new covenant forgiveness has always been offered to Gentiles who have sought grace and forgiveness from God.

Fourth, the new covenant is gracious, not legalistic. In **Hebrews 8:9** God said the new covenant is "*not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in*

My covenant, and I did not care for them.” Israel’s disobedience did not abrogate the old covenant but caused the nation to forfeit its promised blessings. Though under the new covenant God, as a loving Father, chastens His disobedient children (**Heb. 12:5–11**), they will never forfeit its blessing of forgiveness of sin (**Jer. 31:34**).

Fifth, the new covenant is internal, unlike the old covenant, which was written on tablets of stone (**2 Cor. 3:7**; cf. **Ex. 31:18**). **Hebrews 8:10** records God’s promise under the new covenant to “*put [His] laws into [His people’s] minds, and [to] write them on their hearts.*”

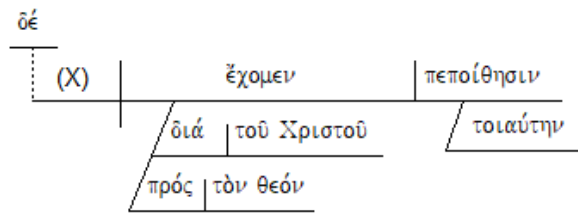
Sixth, the new covenant is personal. It will finally be fulfilled to Israel (**Rom. 9:26–27**), but only when the Jews repent and believe the gospel. Salvation comes only to individuals. The Jews, one day in the future, on new covenant terms through faith in Jesus Christ (**Zech. 12:10**), “*all will know [the Lord], from the least to the greatest*” (**Heb. 8:11**).

Seventh, the new covenant brings complete forgiveness. As noted above, that is something the old covenant could not provide (**Heb. 10:4**). It is the blood of Jesus Christ that provides the forgiveness of sin promised under the new covenant (**Matt. 26:28**; cf. **Heb. 9:14–15**).

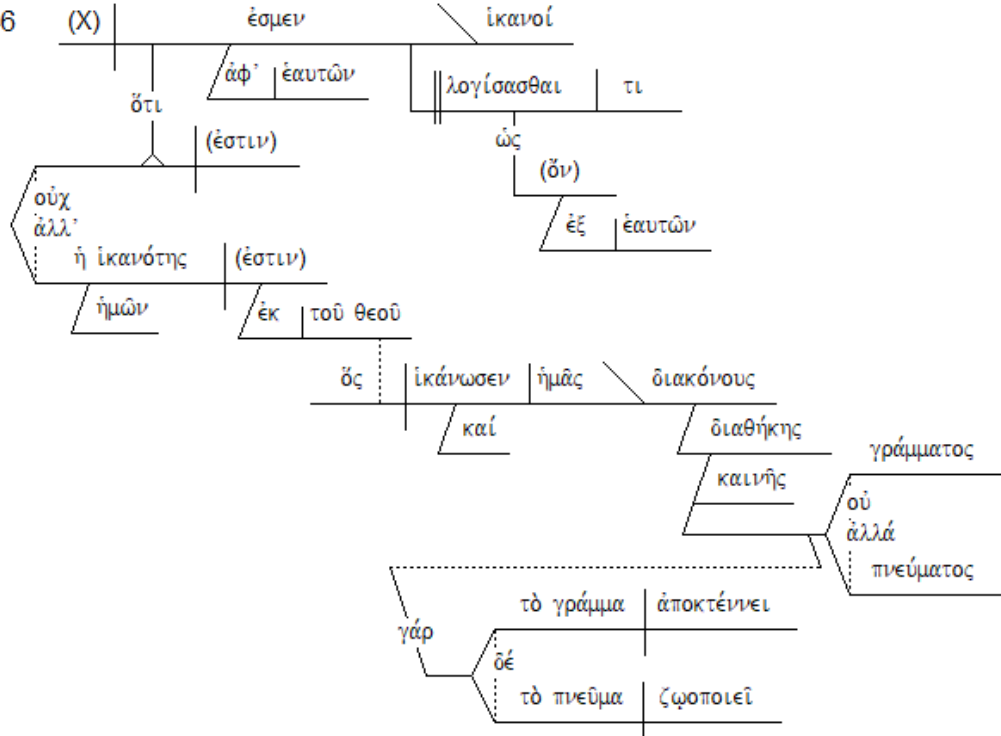
In addition to the list given by the author of Hebrews, Paul in this passage reveals eight distinctive qualities of the new covenant: It gives life, produces righteousness, is permanent, brings hope, is clear, is Christ centered, is energized by the Spirit, and is transforming.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

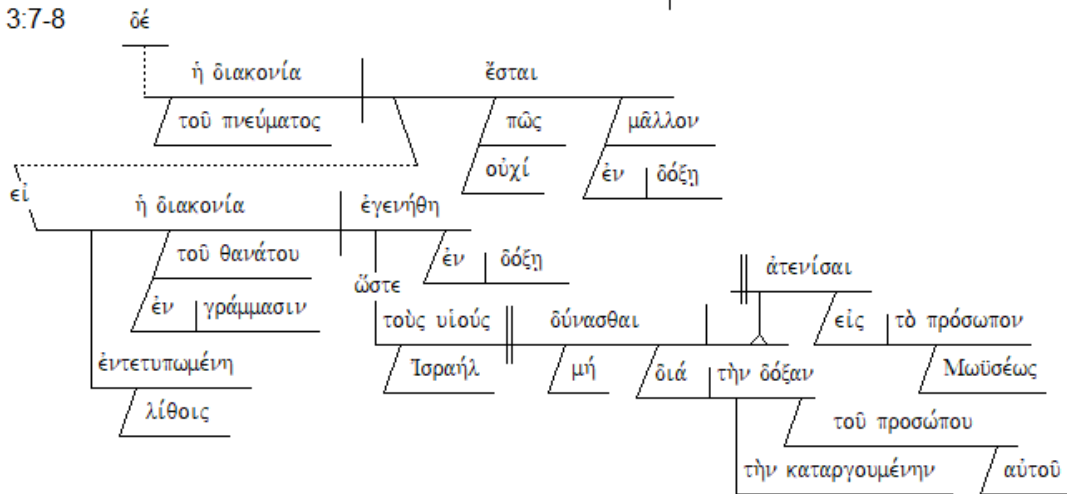
2Co 3:4



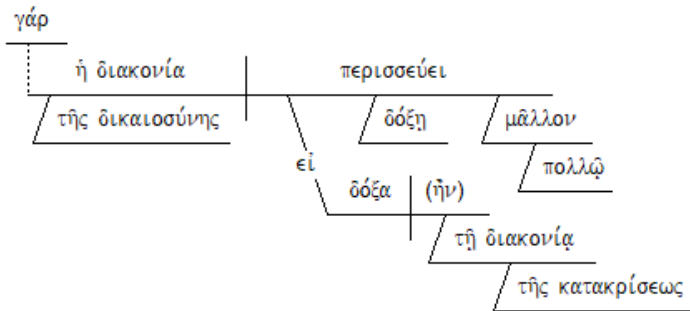
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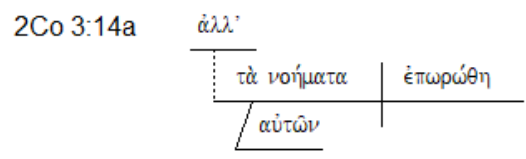
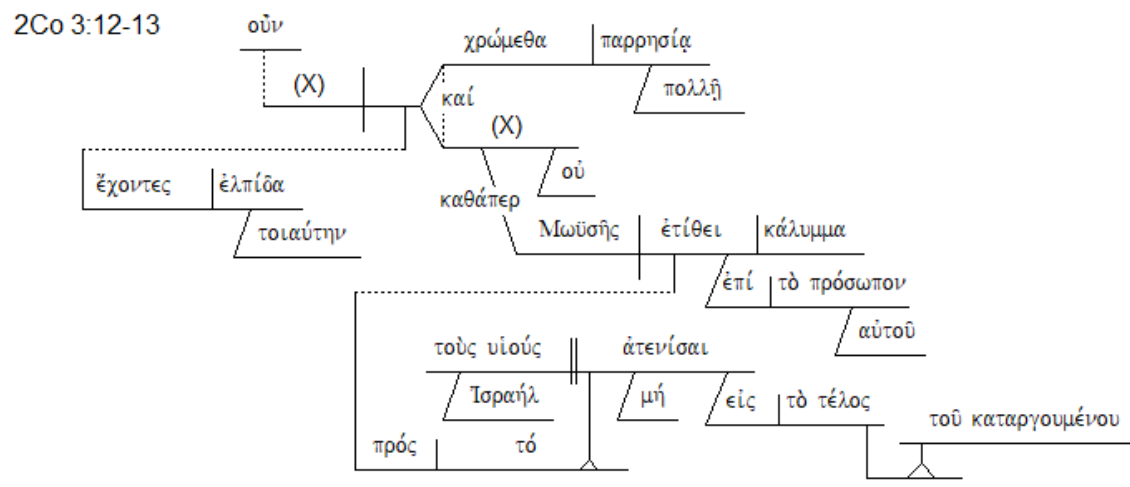
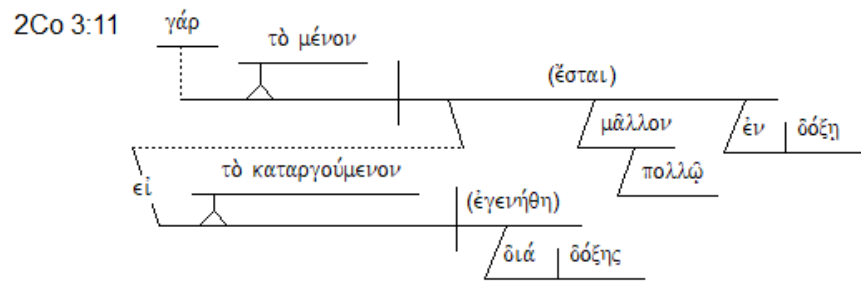
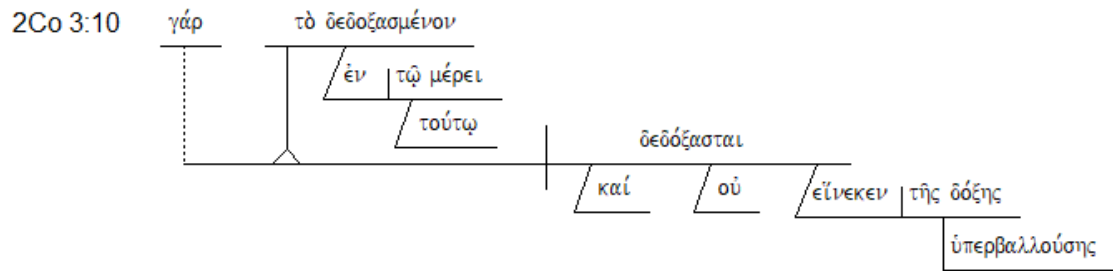


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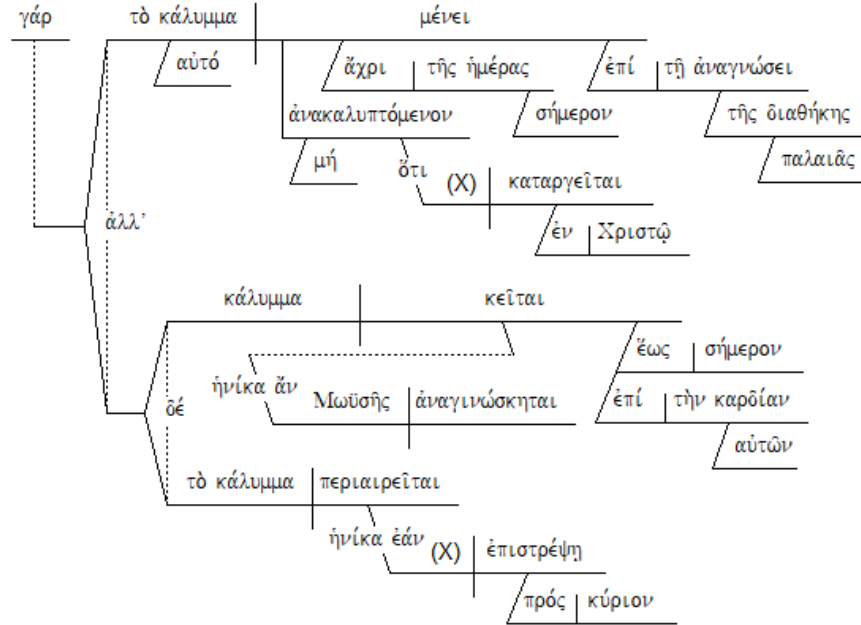


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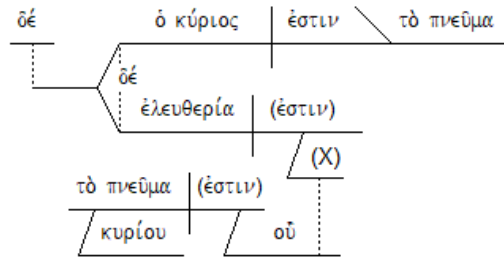




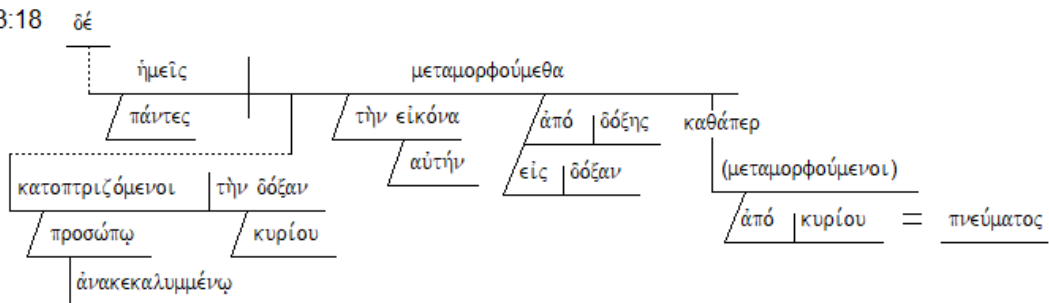
2Co 3:14b-16



2Co 3:17



2Co 3:18



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

TITLE: NEVER LOSE HEART – AVOIDING MINISTRY BURNOUT

BIG IDEA:

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY (PROCLAIMING THE GLORY OF CHRIST) IS TOO PRECIOUS TO GIVE IN TO DISCOURAGEMENT

PREPARATION SKIT:

Here is a **simple skit** to introduce today's topic -- with apologies to C.S. Lewis – *The Screwtape Letters* –

The Setting: Satan's war room – He is discussing his battle plans with his top advisors –

The Topic: How to stop the rapid growth of the first century church

The Strategy: Get the Apostolic Leaders ... especially the Apostle Paul who has proven really effective ... **to quit the ministry**

Satan: I think we have the right strategy ... Jesus might have made a huge blunder ... all that time He spent in ministry and He only developed 11 key leaders to kick off his church ... It's easy to see where we need to attack ... it was good we got our mitts on Judas and had an inside mole ... at least we could track what was being planned

Demon1: Yeah, boss ... but what about that Saul guy He came out of the blue ... really surprised us ... and look at how effective he's been ... I thought he was going to be a big time player for us ... He had that persecution thing down real good ... the disciples were so shook up they had a hard time believing he had flipped!

Satan: That WAS a shocker ... but if he quit on us maybe we can make him quit on Jesus, too ... maybe he just doesn't have the perseverance to hang in there when things get tough ... We have to figure out how to discourage him and make him back off his ministry .. We could just let him burn out on his own ... a lot of people start off a ball of fire and just fizzle out after awhile .. but he's too strategic a leader for us to leave alone ... we need to go after him aggressively

Demon2: I don't know if that's going to work ... we've already shot a lot of our best ammunition at him ... Remember what we've tried already??

- The **prison deal** is usually a good tactic for educated folks like Paul ... they don't usually like being locked up with the riff raff of society ... but he keeps turning it into another episode of "Unshackled" ... preaching the gospel and sending out missionaries like prison is their home church .. plus all that singing and worship time ... we were losing some of our best people ... That Prison Fellowship Ministries has been a real pain in our side

Demon3: That's why we decided to **get physical** with him

- The Jews didn't need much encouragement to haul him into the synagogue and administer their Friday night special = 39 lashes .. but it didn't seem to phase him ... I thought we finally had him with that stoning incident ... but somehow he lived through it

Satan: What are his weak points ... What scares him the most ... We need to do some more research and discover **his Achilles heel**

Demon4: We had a source that told us he was deathly **afraid of the water** ... so we had him shipwrecked three times ... but it turns out he was an undercover lifeguard ... no problems there ... we ditched that source ...

Demon5: We found somebody else who had heard that he was **terrified of snakes** ... but that didn't seem to bother him either. . . he just shook it off . . . the natives ended up thinking he was a god ... I don't know what to try??

Satan: We've been going about this all wrong ... He just gets stronger when he faces obvious evil ... We need a more **subtle approach** ... one that will sneak up on him and hurt him from the inside ... Let's plant some false disciples and attack him from inside the church... We will use some real leader types ... guys with a lot of charisma and speaking ability ... guys that are very persuasive ... maybe some lawyers that we have sitting around just trying to get those Christians to sue one another and divorce one another

Demon1: But how can they say anything against Paul that the church would believe?? He's beyond reproach ... his character is well known ...

Satan: Let's **infiltrate that Corinthian group** ... they have a lot of immature believers ... it seems they argue among themselves about everything ... For a lot of them, Paul's not even their favorite speaker ...

Here's our plan

1) First, We will attack Paul's character by saying that he is trying to profit by building up a kingdom for himself – at least the city government workers should understand what we're saying

2) Secondly, we will attack his message – you know he keeps talking about that grace stuff like you don't have to follow Moses and the law and you can live however you please We can really go after him there – We'll call our legalistic message the gospel as well and use a lot of the same terminology ... that should confuse them

3) Thirdly, we will accuse him of not being very productive or effective – I know some specific examples where he preached for an hour and no converts at all ... that doesn't look good for him

4) Finally, let's question his fitness to be an apostle – we'll have our guys claim to be apostles as well and muddy the waters – how can you tell the true from the false .. it will be just as easy as our campaign last year to pass off counterfeit denarii .. we made a mint off that scheme

That should finally discourage him ... imagine all that sacrifice he's made and now he has his own people turning against him and questioning his authority ... Why wouldn't he just throw in the towel and give up the fight???

INTRODUCTION:

Easy for ministers of the gospel to get discouraged and lose heart. Look at all that Paul was facing:

- attacks against his character
- attacks against the legitimacy of his apostleship
- attacks against the effectiveness of his ministry

In some sense all believers are ministers (small "m") of the gospel – not just isolating some special paid clergy class; so these instructions apply to all of us

Anthony Thiselton: The practical lessons of this short section are many: avoiding faintheartedness, bearing unjust criticism, witnessing to those who have been blinded, preaching Christ and not ourselves, bringing light from God who created light, conveying a great treasure even though we are like fragile earthenware vessels, and much else.

George Shillington: The present text reaffirms Paul's confidence as a minister of Christ, denies charges of cunning or deceit, and presents Paul and his fellow leaders as slaves to the Corinthians for the sake of Christ. Stated otherwise, the thoughts that open the series of arguments on Paul's worthiness as a minister are recast in these verses to bring closure to the line of argument. . .

However, these verses are more than a summary statement of earlier points. They form a transition to the next major movement in the second variation on the theme of ministry. If the new ministry in the light of Christ operates in terms of the Spirit of God (rather than any human spirit), what does the new ministry hold out to human existence? Paul's answer begins in part already in these verses. Christ, the image of God (4:4), the illuminating presence of God (4:6a), enters human hearts (4:6b) so as to renew them (4:16) and prepare them for life in the age to come (5:1-10).

Frank Matera: To summarize, Paul is not discouraged, because he received his new covenant ministry by God's mercy when God shone into his heart so that he might reveal the knowledge of God's glory in Christ. This gospel is veiled only to those whom Satan has blinded lest they see the light of the gospel.

Eric Mason: Main Idea: We must be able to discern true gospel ministry.

- I. True Gospel Ministry Can Be a Heartbreaking Journey (4:1).
- II. True Gospel Ministry Is Not Above Healthy Gospel Evaluation (4:2-4).
- III. True Gospel Ministry Exalts Jesus above the Preacher (4:5-6).

I. (:1-2) MINISTRY INTEGRITY PROTECTS AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT

A. (:1) Giving Up is Not an Option in the Ministry

1. Stewardship of Precious Ministry

“Therefore, since we have this ministry”

Look back at **chapter 3** to see the nature of this New Covenant Ministry – one of life, one of the Spirit, one of hope, one of confidence, one of boldness, one of glory

Concept of being a stakeholder – having some ministry niche that you own and are passionate about; not being pressured by others to meet needs in areas where you have not been called to minister.

John MacArthur: *Therefore* points back to Paul’s discussion of the new covenant in 3:6–18. Strength to endure trials comes from the unveiled look into the face of Christ made possible under the new covenant. That look was also the source of strength for Paul’s new covenant ministry. The apostle used the plural *we* as a humbler way of referring to himself. By so doing, he softened the personal nature of his defense of himself and his ministry. The phrase *we have this ministry* emphasizes Paul’s humble acknowledgment that God had graciously granted him the privilege of being a new covenant minister (cf. **5:18; Acts 20:24; 26:16; Rom. 15:15–16; 1 Cor. 4:1–3; Eph. 3:7–8; Col. 1:23, 25; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11**).

2. Safeguarded by Divine Mercy (against opposition to our ministry)

“as we received mercy” – Mercy both for salvation and service

Paul served in deep humility; not with a big ego

John MacArthur: Paul’s call to the ministry was based solely on **God’s mercy**. God’s mercy is His withholding of the judgment that sinners deserve, temporarily in the case of the unsaved to give opportunity for repentance and faith, and permanently in the case of the redeemed. In this context God’s mercy means that instead of condemning Paul because he was a *“blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor”* (**1 Tim. 1:13**), God showed him mercy by *“putting [him] into service”* (v. **12**).

Scott Hafemann: The very existence of his ministry is evidence of God’s reality in his life, from which he derives great encouragement. The mercy granted to Paul in the past undergirds his confidence for the future.

3. Staying the Course (when faced with discouragement)

“we do not lose heart”

Willmouthe: Tenacity of Ministry -- The way we view our ministries will often help determine how we will fulfill it. If it becomes a burden instead of a privilege, then it becomes easy to quit when things don't go our way. Paul was overwhelmed by God's grace and mercy, which gave him the tenacity to keep on serving Christ regardless of

his circumstances, regardless of what others said about him, regardless if anyone responded the way he wanted them too.

David Garland: In **4:1**, therefore, Paul says more than that he does not lose heart or give up. Because he has such a ministry and such a hope (**3:6–18**), “*he does not draw in his horns*” despite the pressures to become fainthearted. **Plummer** comments: “Such faintheartedness takes refuge in silence and inactivity, in order to escape criticism, and therefore is the opposite of *παρρησία* [*parrēsia*].” The Spirit enables Paul to preach an unveiled gospel and use raw candor in trying to effect moral transformation in teaching his charges.

George Shillington: He does not shrink back from a ministry graciously granted by God. On the human side, he has every reason to withdraw. His afflictions are reason enough. His humiliation in receiving the thirty-nine lashes five times could easily make him lose heart in the ministry. Vilification by opponents is hard to take. But he does not lose heart. Paul knows God’s mercy and sees God’s plan for the world unfolding in the Gentile mission in which he is engaged. For this reason he does not lose heart.

R. Kent Hughes: **C. H. Spurgeon**, in his classic *Lectures to My Students*, in the chapter properly titled “The Minister’s Fainting Fits,” describes the pressures upon the Christian minister to lose heart.

“Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, waxing more bold in sin — are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth? The kingdom comes not as we would, the reverend name is not hallowed as we desire, and for this we must weep. How can we be otherwise than sorrowful, while men believe not our report, and the divine arm is not revealed? All mental work tends to weary and to depress, for much study is a weariness of the flesh; but ours is more than mental work — it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul. . . . Such soul-travail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail.”

Such pressures were not unique to the Victorian ministry because weary hearts have been common to the ministerial calling from the beginning. Spurgeon’s words will find sympathetic resonance in any heart acquainted with ministry.

B. (:2) Standing Up with Transparent Integrity is the Ultimate Safeguard

Or Personal Purity as well?? Which is in view??

You’ve heard the expression: “He’s a stand-up type of guy” = willing to shoulder responsibility; not trying to sluff the blame off on someone else

1. Aggressive Opposition to Deceit and Marketing Manipulation

“but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame”

Integrity is the best safeguard against discouragement.

Paul’s ministry and his life were an open book

Mark Seifrid: Paul’s renunciation of *“the hidden things of shame”* implies the undoing of the fall and the presence of the new creation. It implies confidence in the coming judgment, at which the legitimacy of the apostle will be truly tested.

Richard Pratt: Paul described **the inappropriate practices** that he resisted with three phrases. First, he said he would not resort to **secret and shameful ways**. Paul did not use underhanded tactics or methods in his ministry. Paul did not suggest there was nothing shameful in his life. He was not perfect (**Gal. 5:17**). Instead, he spoke of his goals and strategies in ministry. In this respect, Paul had nothing to hide. If the most secret aspects of his service to Christ were revealed, he would still have nothing of which to be ashamed. He had always ministered in holiness and sincerity, according to God’s grace, and had even sworn with God as his witness that his motivations had always been pure. Paul had no skeletons in his closet.

Second, Paul insisted that he did not use **deception**. Often in the New Testament, the term translated here as *“deception”* (*panourgia*) denotes deplorable action or speech that tricks others. But Paul was so confident of the glory of ministering in the new covenant that he never resorted to this means of persuasion.

Third, Paul rejected the accusation that he would **distort** the word of God in his preaching and teaching. Paul’s opponents could have considered any number of Paul’s teachings to be distortions. For example, he rejected a legalistic outlook on the role of Old Testament law in the Christian church. In his earlier Corinthian epistle, Paul had also attacked those who relied too heavily on human wisdom. He had taught that Christians could eat meat that had been offered to idols, but also insisted that the weaknesses of others should take precedence. The natural response of Paul’s opponents on these issues would have been to accuse him of distorting the Scriptures. But Paul rejected this accusation as unthinkable.

Instead, Paul took a different approach in his teaching and preaching. **He presented the truth plainly.**

2. Authentic Consistency with the Truth of God’s Word

a. Negatively

1) *“not walking in craftiness”*

- Gospel Charlatans – deceivers = pretending to be other than what they are
- Gospel Politicians = men-pleasers; hidden agendas
No convictions
- Gospel Manipulators = playing on emotions

David Garland: He repudiates all **deception**. The noun “*deception*” translates a Greek word that literally means “the readiness to do anything” (*panourgia*). When used in a negative sense, it applies to someone who is sly, crafty, deceitful, and tricky. Such persons will stoop to any ruse to accomplish their dishonorable purposes, and they usually resort to secret plots and intrigues. In **11:3** Paul connects such cunning to Satan, who beguiled Eve. The word also occurs in **1 Cor 3:19**, where he cites Job 5:13, “*He traps the wise in their craftiness,*” to denounce the foolish wisdom of this world that thinks it can outfox God. Worldly shrewdness offers only fleeting success and will eventually ensnare the clever in their own tangled web of deceit. The deceiver is the opposite of someone who is candid and forthright.

- 2) “*or adulterating the word of God*” – handling deceitfully ...
- Using same terminology but changing the meaning
 - Twisting the meaning; taking it out of context
 - Adding to the Scriptures
 - Subtracting from the Scriptures – this does not apply today; caving to cultural pressure (divorce, role of men and women, etc.)

Charles Swindoll: Unlike many popular preachers and teachers today, Paul refused to rely on cleverness, wit, and charm to woo people into the kingdom. He had no place for gimmicks and tricks in order to get results. He refused to play on people’s emotions. He knew that when you appeal to emotion to draw people in, you need to keep giving them an emotional fix to keep them coming. Rather, Paul relied upon the unadulterated word of God to do its work (**4:2**). Paul’s strategy might appear quaint compared to that of the glitz and glamour preachers we have today. He simply presented the plain, unvarnished truth of the gospel, depending on the Spirit of God to do His work through His word. . .

How do you know when you have let pride creep into your ministry? When you frequently talk about yourself and your accomplishments. When you expect special treatment and flaunt your privileges. When you pursue promotion, bigger job titles, and higher pay. When you convince yourself that you must have a private jet to travel here and there. When you expect others to submit to your every word while allowing nobody to hold you accountable. When these attitudes and actions crop up in your life, you are headed for trouble. You need to step down until the Lord regains firm authority. Also, when you see these attitudes in other leaders, it is time to distance yourself from them. Those are the makings of a cult of personality, not a Christ-exalting church.

Scott Hafemann: Hence, both the content of Paul’s message (he preaches Jesus as Lord) and the manner of his ministry (his change of plans and practice of self-support, both resulting from his love for the Corinthians as their “slave”) have already demonstrated the genuineness and divine origin of his calling. In contrast, Paul’s opponents have made the Corinthians their slaves (cf. **2 Cor. 11:4–20**). Moreover, his opponents’ refusal to take up their cross on behalf of the Corinthians clearly reveals that they preach another Jesus (**11:4, 18–20**). Indeed, they water down the gospel for the sake of their own financial gain (**4:1–2** in view of **2:17**).

b. Positively

“but by the manifestation of the truth” (John 3:19-21)

John MacArthur: The false apostles were, in effect, first-century marketing experts. They viewed the gospel as a product and themselves as salesmen. Part of selling the product (the gospel) was veiling its truth and sprucing it up by adding some mystery and magic. By tweaking the message, repackaging it to make it more popular and trendy, they hoped to better appeal to first-century consumers. They would then succeed in making converts (and money). Paul’s straightforward, powerful presentation of the pure unadulterated gospel (cf. **Rom. 1:16**) frustrated and threatened them. It also exposed their secret lives of shame. It is no wonder, then, that they bitterly opposed Paul.

3. Accountable Conduct before the Supreme Authority

“commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

Ritchie: Men intuitively recognize the truth. They do not need to be convinced of it. God has so constituted our consciences that we know truth when we hear it. When it is declared a sympathetic vibration is set up in side us. Truth does not really need to be proved to us. The reason people reject the truth is not that they do not sense it is true but because they choose to disbelieve. They would rather go their own way than respond to the truth.

William Barclay: His enemies had leveled three charges against him. They had said that he used underhand methods, that he exercised an unscrupulous cleverness to get his own way, and that he adulterated the message of the gospel.

Frank Metera: And whereas earlier he called upon the witness of his own conscience (**1:12**), now he commends himself to the conscience of others. Thus, if they allow their moral consciousness to bear witness, it will acknowledge his apostolic integrity.

R. Kent Hughes: Thus, by forthright **openness of his ministry** Paul solicited the approval of all, because he was convinced that when people were true to their consciences, they would be compelled to acknowledge that his ministry was one of **integrity**. The further fact that he conducted his straight-on ministry *“in the sight of God”* means that his ultimate concern in everything was God’s approval (cf. **1 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 5:10**). God was his primary audience; thus Paul preached the undiluted Word of God with bold simplicity and clarity.

II. (:3-4) LACK OF RESULTS DO NOT DETRACT FROM THE PRECIOUSNESS OR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL

A. (:3) The Light of the Gospel Will Never Penetrate the Non Elect

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.”

No human way to reach this target group successfully; takes the pressure off us;
No reason to get discouraged by a lack of response to the gospel;
Still we are responsible to make the offer available to all men

B. (:4a) Spiritual Blindness Is a Powerful Reality

“in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see”

Reality of the spiritual warfare behind the scenes

John MacArthur: Underlying much of modern evangelism is the heretical idea that anyone can and will respond to the gospel if it is presented in an ingenious enough way. That view sees unbelievers as consumers, for whom the gospel must be cleverly packaged in order to make the sale. **Roy Clements** writes perceptively of this trend:

“A preacher ... is a herald, and a herald is precisely a one-way communicator; he does not dialogue, he announces a message he has received. But if our communication experts are correct, announcements do not change anybody. Where is the flaw in their reasoning? ... It lies in the theology. For people who argue like this are assuming that Christian preaching is analogous to a **marketing exercise**. You have your product: the gospel. You have your consumers: the congregation. And the preacher is the salesman. It is his job to overcome consumer resistance and persuade people to buy.

According to Paul, there is one very simple but overwhelming reason why that analogy is not a good one. The preacher does not overcome consumer resistance. He cannot. Consumer resistance is far too large for any preacher to overcome. All the preacher does, Paul says, is to expose that resistance in its formidable impenetrability. If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded their minds and *‘they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.’* ... The preacher does not save anybody. He is an instrument whereby people who are being saved become aware of the fact.

Evangelism has to be proclamation because preaching is a sacrament of the divine sovereignty.”

(The Strength of Weakness [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 75–76)

Salvation is never the result of human persuasion; it is a sovereign act of God. In **John 6:44** Jesus declared, *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”* **Acts 11:18** affirms that *“God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”* Lydia was saved when *“the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul”* (Acts 16:14). Paul counseled Timothy,

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in

opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24–26)

The apostle reminded Titus that “[God] *saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*” (**Titus 3:5**).

The issue is not the skill of the one proclaiming the message, the packaging of the message, or the technique used in proclaiming it. The issue is the **condition of the hearer**. Jesus illustrated that principle in the **parable of the sower**. The same message (the seed) is proclaimed by the same individual (the sower); the only variable is the condition of the four soils. What is essential for messengers of the gospel is not cleverness but **clarity**. Only God can open the sin-blinded eyes of those who are “*dead in [their] trespasses and sins*” (**Eph. 2:1**; cf. v. **5**; **Matt. 8:22**; **Eph. 4:18**).

C. (:4b) No Fault Lies With The Gospel Itself -- Which Remains Precious and Glorious

“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Ray Stedman: So what hope is there that anybody who has been blinded by the devil will ever believe the good news? It looks hopeless, doesn't it? If a veil lies over their minds, and if, as we have already seen in the previous passage, only when someone turns to the Lord is the veil removed -- yet, in order to turn, men must see the glory of Christ that the veil obscures -- what hope is there? It is very evident from this that men cannot remove the veil themselves. Only Christ can take it away. How then can men be saved? That is the question Paul is facing.

III. (:5) IT IS NOT ABOUT US -- THE FOCUS OF GOSPEL MINISTRY IS THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST

A. (:5a) The Focus Should Never Be On Ourselves

“For we do not preach ourselves”

We are not capable of saving anyone; we are not looking for praise and attention

Anthony Thiselton: The more that we understand about the “*false*” apostles in Corinth, the clearer it becomes that they were intoxicated with themselves. **Thrall** comments, “He is criticizing by implication the behaviour of rival missionaries whose activity (as he sees it) is nothing other than **self-promotion**.” This is also a timely reminder for today when “truth through personality” is used to draw more attention to the self than to Christ. Everyone knows about self-centered ministry where the preacher becomes the sole focus. By contrast, Paul reverses the role to that of “*ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake,*” while Jesus alone is proclaimed as Lord (cf. **1 Cor 12:3**).

David Garland: To **preach oneself** is to vaunt one's superior qualifications, to put on airs, and to turn the throne of Christ into a soapbox from which to spout one's own pet themes and biases. No one is immune from the temptation to manipulate the ministerial role to build a following rather than to build up a congregation or to exploit the gospel's "drama, pathos, solemnity, and majesty, for the display of one's own powers, one's ability, eloquence, humor, learning, gifts of popular exposition." Some ministers may do this in blatant and crude ways. Others may do it in more subtle and refined ways. Cranfield observes, "How often is that which is hailed as a successful ministry little more than success in winning a personal following!" The temptation to preach ourselves is fed by congregants who are "prone to like to be entertained and to enjoy a minister's self-exhibition" and are inclined "to indulge in a personality cult." Corinth appears to have been such a congregation. They rallied around and exaggerated the importance of their ministerial heroes and used their worship to show off their own individual gifts (**1 Cor 14:26**). They may have expected Paul to display more dramatically his apostolic prowess.

Paul Barnett: The "*ministry*" is expressed by **preaching (5)**. It is regrettable that the distinctive activity of the apostle has such negative associations today. The very word evokes images of religious buildings, strangely dressed clergy and long, dull sermons. "*Preaching*" certainly sounds off-putting to modern people. But **what did Paul mean by preach?** In his day the word we translate as "*preach*" was not primarily a religious but a secular word. The verb *kēryssein* comes from the noun *kēryx*, meaning a "herald", a person who brought important announcements from a king or emperor to his people, scattered throughout his kingdom. An approximate modern equivalent to the ancient *kēryx* is the radio or television newsreader who announces the news to the listening world. Like the modern news broadcaster the ancient "herald" had to possess a good speaking voice and the self-discipline not to embellish or alter the message. It is unfortunate that the profound and good news of God about Jesus Christ has been made to appear trivial and narrowly religious by associations with the word "preaching".

B. (:5b) The Focus Must Always Be On the Lordship of Christ
"but Christ Jesus as Lord"

What type of false gospel is it that presents Christ as less than Lord?
We are all accountable to our Creator

C. (:5c) But We Do Play a Critical Supporting Role
"and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake."

Robert Gromacki: Paul served others; he did not expect others to serve him. He used his apostolic prerogatives as greater opportunities for ministry, not for selfish gratification.

Tasker: All the service Paul (and every true Christian missionary and pastor) renders to his converts is not done primarily for their sakes. He has a more compelling love and a more overriding loyalty. He is their servant, because first and foremost he is the servant

of Jesus Christ, by whose love he is constrained, and the promotion of whose glory is his passionate desire.

Ray Stedman: If you want to know where we fit in, here it is: we are your servants for Jesus' sake. We are not your masters; we do not own you; we are not your bosses; we do not come to tell you everything to do and give you orders and be a little pope in every church we come into. No, we are your servants. We have come to help you. We have come to minister to you, to labor among you, to teach and instruct you, but we are not here to boss you." The apostle is careful to make that plain.

Raymond Collins: In and of itself, the title *Lord* (*kyrios*) suggests the designation of others as servants and slaves. So, using the title *Lord*, Paul is able to say that he (and his fellow evangelists) are “*slaves*.” But in an unusual turn of phrase, Paul says he is a **slave of the Corinthians**, with respect to whom he does not exalt himself. Only here in the extant correspondence does Paul describe himself as a slave of the community (cf. **1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:8**). He functions as a servant for Jesus’s sake. His service of the Corinthians takes place in his ministry of evangelization; **he serves them as a minister of the new covenant.**

IV. (:6) GOD CAN MAKE THINGS HAPPEN IN A BIG WAY ANY TIME HE WANTS -- THE PRECIOUS STEWARDSHIP OF THE GOSPEL DEPENDS ON SOVEREIGN ENLIGHTENMENT

- Our testimony of conversion is one of Sovereign Enlightenment
- Our confidence in presenting the gospel to others is that God can also perform such a Sovereign work of Enlightenment in others

A. (:6a) Example of God’s Sovereign Activity in Creation

“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’”

Some Christians argue that it is no big deal whether you believe in evolution or creationism; well it is a big deal to God. He has based many important doctrines on the foundation of His role in creation.

Mark Seifrid: “*Darkness*” and “*light*” do not merely represent “ignorance” and “knowledge,” although these are obviously included in the figure. “*Darkness*” also signifies “evil” (whether physical or moral), just as “*light*” is a symbol for “blessing” and “good” (again, whether physical or moral). It is “out of darkness” that God causes light to shine: out of evil, God creates good; out of nothingness and death, God brings forth life.

Robert Hughes: The clear reference to **Genesis 1:3** in “*light shall shine out of darkness*” (**4:6**) has several implications for Paul’s argument:

- (1) It shows the divinely potent commission behind his preaching;
- (2) it shows the consistency of God, who has dispelled darkness and sin from the dawn of creation up to the present; and

(3) it shows the truth of the “*new creature*” (5:17), which operates throughout Paul’s thought—the new humanity in the glory of the new Adam (1 Cor. 15:45).

But where was all this new glory? Paul appeared to be weak.

B. (:6b) Testimony of God’s Sovereign Enlightenment in Conversion

“is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Jeffries: Consider for just one moment how differently you might approach every single “people” occasion -- even the most hum-drum routine occasions -- if you remained constantly aware that God desires that “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*” should shine through you so that it can be observed by whomever He has brought into your life at that moment.

David Garland: The **image of light shining** reminds most interpreters of the account of Paul’s own **conversion experience** recorded in Acts. Acts describes a light from heaven flashing around him (Acts 9:3; 22:6, 11; 26:13). In Acts 22:11 the light is connected to “*glory*” (*doxa*, translated as “*brilliance*”). Acts does not portray this event as some internal awakening but as an external reality. Paul describes an external reality becoming an internal reality — “*has shone in our hearts.*” This glorious divine light illuminated the darkness that was in him but also revealed to him that he was not defined by his sins.

Richard Pratt: The **illumination of the hearts** of individuals is not just a mental state of enlightenment. From Paul’s perspective, it is an act of re-creation. Christ’s coming into the world, and the illumination of individuals to see his light, is a gracious divine act by which believers receive the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. When Paul came to know Christ personally on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3), this act of God surpassed the original act of creation in its ability to reveal the glory of God.

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s gospel declares the light of the new creation by showing forth how Christ himself manifests the glory of God’s image, that is, his righteous and merciful character (4:4). When in conjunction with this gospel God shines his presence into the lives of those whom he is now re-creating in Christ, he makes it clear how Christ himself embodies in his death and resurrection on behalf of those who were living in the darkness of sin the very glory of God (4:6). Because of the reality of this mercy, both in Paul’s own life and in the lives of those to whom he is sent, Paul does not lose heart (4:1). Those who reject Paul do so because they remain blind to the reality of God in Christ. For the very glory of God himself is now being revealed through Paul’s ministry.

CONCLUSION:

**(:7) THE DANGER SHOULD NEVER BE DISCOURAGEMENT ...
IT SHOULD BE AVOIDING CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH**

leads into rest of **chapter 4**

Jars of Clay – good name for a Christian vocal group

What are our expectations of God?? Here Paul makes reference not just to His power ... but to the surpassing greatness of His power ...

This glorious ministry performed through vessels of weakness Great Paradox!

Outer man decaying ... inner man being renewed

Read vv. 16-18 – same theme of **Not losing heart!**

Never forget that just as God has a plan for your life ... so does Satan ... We made fun of things in our little play ... but make no mistake ... Satan is the god of this world and is actively at work scheming how he might discourage each of us from fulfilling the personal mission that our Lord has laid before each of us

But remember today's message:

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY (PROCLAIMING THE GLORY OF CHRIST) IS TOO PRECIOUS TO GIVE IN TO DISCOURAGEMENT

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) The message of the gospel focuses on the *glory of Christ*.
- 2) Christ supremely reveals God as *the image of God*.
- 3) Any gospel that does not preach *Christ Jesus as Lord* is a false gospel.
- 4) We need to be gazing intently into *the face of Christ*.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of ministry have you received from the Lord?
- 2) When are you tempted to get discouraged in your ministry; to question whether it is worth it to keep making sacrifices and putting forth the effort? How do you deal with this temptation to despair or to withdraw?
- 3) Do you truly believe that God is Sovereign when it comes to who responds to the truth of the gospel? How does this impact your desire to witness?
- 4) How glorious and precious do you find God's revelation about Himself in the person of Christ to be to you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: He says that he never loses heart in the great task that has been given to him, and by implication he tells us why. There are two things which keep him going.

(a) There is the consciousness of a great task. A man who is conscious of a great task can do amazing things. One of the great works of musical genius is Handel's Messiah. It is on record that the whole work was composed and written down in twenty-two days, and that during the whole time Handel would scarcely consent to eat or to sleep. The strange thing about a great task is that it brings its own strength with it.

(b) There is the memory of mercy received. It was Paul's aim to spend all his life and all his effort seeking to do something for the love which had redeemed him.

Ray Stedman: I am always amazed at how up-to-date the Scriptures seem. You would think that Paul had just been listening to some Christian radio broadcasts, or television programs, when he wrote this. Evidently there were people in his day, preaching in churches and evangelizing, who were practicing disgraceful, underhanded ways. They were relying on cunning approaches and even tampering with the Word of God. Paul

says, "I have given all that up," (if he ever did it). "Seeing other people do this, I want nothing to do with it." . . .

Notice particularly what this consists of, because this speaks to our own time. First, he says, "I have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways," that is, the practice of deliberate deceit. . .

Paul says he refuses to practice cunning. Now what does that mean? Well, it means to rely on some psychological trick played on people to get them to respond, some intense pressure tactic in a meeting, perhaps beautiful seductive music to get them to give way, telling stories that bring tears to people's eyes, playing upon their emotions, this kind of thing. Paul says, "We don't need any of this any longer. We don't rely upon that."

In our day it is largely a matter of going in for Christian showmanship, seeing who can put on the biggest spectacle to attract people to come in by hiring a special band or getting trapeze artists to come and put on a show, etc., Paul says we do not rely on those kinds of things anymore.

R. Kent Hughes: The symmetries and beauty of Paul's thought in this paragraph are remarkable. Paul's defense of himself as a minister of the new covenant has given us an exposition of how the ministry of the gospel ought to be conducted.

- Paul ministered with heart because in God's mercy he was met at Damascus and was called to minister to the Gentiles. The new-covenant ministry's surpassing glories of liberation and transformation energized him. And because of the ministry's grandeur and the astonishing mercy of his having been given the ministry, Paul did not lose heart.
- The apostle also ministered with forthrightness . Paul would have nothing to do with secretive cunning and trickery. And he never diluted or altered God's Holy Word. Rather, Paul got it straight and gave it straight, appealing with confidence to the consciences of men.
- Paul also ministered with perception in respect to the veiled and blind condition of the unbelieving. And Paul's own experience of transformation informed him of what was necessary for men to believe.
- The apostle therefore ministered by lifting Christ up. Preaching Jesus Christ as Lord left no doubt about the full work of the incarnate Son, the Messiah, and his lordly sovereignty established by his resurrection. When a man or woman exalts Christ, there is no room for self-exaltation. Instead of self-promotion, there is servanthood.
- Lastly, Paul ministered with divine confidence . *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6)*. Nothing less than creation power is applied to blind souls. There was, and is, no one beyond the grace of God.

Paul's heart, Paul's forthrightness, Paul's perception, Paul's exaltation of Christ, and Paul's gospel confidence are meant to inform and strengthen our ministering hearts.

And having such a ministry, we will not lose heart!

Bob Deffinbaugh: The God who has been gracious to me by saving me, an unworthy, undeserving sinner, is the God who continues to show mercy to me by using my words to enrich others and to bring praise and glory to Himself.

This assurance frees me from succumbing to my sense of inadequacy and enables me to reject all of those means and methods which are unworthy of the gospel. The gospel is not some broken down, used car, which requires much deception and deceit to sell to someone. The gospel is glorious, and the Holy Spirit is mighty to save. The gospel brings glory to God always and saves some when it is proclaimed in simplicity and truth, empowered by the Holy Spirit. My job is never to convince or to convert; it is only to convey the truth as simply and accurately as I can. I do not have to water down the message of the gospel, adulterating it so that it will be more palatable. The gospel is not palatable. People believe the good news and trust in Jesus as the Savior because they have been supernaturally quickened by the Holy Spirit. When they are divinely quickened, they can do nothing but believe. We see this in Paul's conversion (see **Acts 9:1-19**). We must realize that Paul's experience is not the exception but the rule. This is the way every unbeliever is saved—supernaturally. And thus, we only need to preach the truth, with no gimmicks or modifications, trusting in God to save the lost (to bring

the spiritually dead to life, to give sight to the spiritually blind), by His grace and by His power.

If men do not receive and believe our message, there is a good reason. Not only are they naturally predisposed to reject the truth of the gospel, they are supernaturally blinded to keep them from seeing the truth. This is what Paul tells us in **4:3-4**. Satan, the god of this world, blinds the minds of unbelieving men, so that they cannot and will not believe the gospel and be saved. Only God can overcome Satan's blinding and override men's blindness. But when men fail to believe, we should not assume automatically that it is because of a deficiency in our message or methods so that we are tempted to imitate the peddlers of the word. If it is true that men are saved in spite of their sin and our weakness, it is just as true that those who reject the truth are not lost due to our weaknesses, but due to their blindness to the truth.

Paul reminds us that when we preach the gospel as we ought, we are not preaching ourselves but Christ. Those who are converted through our ministry and message are not grounds for pride and boasting on our part. And those who are not saved through our preaching should not be a blow to our pride. We are but servants, preaching the gospel for Christ's sake, for the glory of God and not for personal gain. Yes, there is a personal blessing when the lost are saved, but we must never preach out of selfish ambition (see **Philippians 1:15-17**).

God is sovereign in the salvation of men. At his best, Elijah could not convert the nation Israel. At his worst, Jonah could not prevent the conversion of the entire population of Nineveh. The God who gave us the Great Commission is the same God who called forth light in the midst of the darkness. He said, "*Let there be light,*" and there was light. He is the One who has declared that the "*light will shine out of darkness.*" We are lights shining in a dark place, and God will use our light to bring others out of the darkness into the kingdom of light. He who causes others to see the light is He who has shone in our hearts and revealed His glory to us in the face of Christ. . .

Our text serves as a word of caution to those waving the "seeker-friendly church" banners. Certainly there is no need or merit in being offensive in some non-critical area. Paul tells us he happily surrenders his rights when this enhances the gospel (**1 Corinthians 9**). But he is never willing to compromise the gospel to make it more appealing to the lost. Some disturbing tendencies exist in the "seeker-friendly" approach. The first is the assumption that there are "seekers" who might be won if only we remove some of the barriers to their belief. The Bible tells us that there are no seekers after God (**Romans 3:10-11**). Those who come to God are drawn to God by the Father, through the Spirit, to faith in the Son (**John 6:37, 44; 8:43-47**). None whom the Father chooses will fail to trust in Him. None whom the Father has rejected will come to Him. The seeker-friendly church places far too much emphasis on man's role in salvation and far too little on the sovereignty of God in salvation. Second, the "seeker-friendly" approach places too much emphasis on pleasing the unbeliever, as a kind of potential customer, rather than on pleasing God. I am not saying that this movement has nothing to commend it, but there is much we should question and challenge.

David Guzik: The *god of this age*: The title god of this age is not used of Satan anywhere else in Scripture, but the thought is expressed in passages like **John 12:31, 14:30**, and in **Ephesians 2:2; 6:12** and **1 John 5:19**.

i. There is a significant, and real sense in which Satan “rules” this world. Not in an ultimate sense, because, The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. (**Psalm 24:1**). Yet, Jesus did not contest Satan’s claim to rule over this present age (**Luke 4:5-8**), because there is a sense in which Satan is the “popularly elected” ruler of this age.

ii. “The satanic world sovereignty is in fact apparent rather than real; for God alone is the ‘King of the ages’ (**1 Timothy 1:17**, Greek), that is, of every age, past, present, and future” (**Hughes**). “It is the devil who is here called the god of this world, because he ruleth over the greatest part of the world, and they are his servants and slaves . . . though we no where else find him called the god of this world, yet our Saviour twice calls him the prince of this world.” (**Poole**)

iii. The Biblical truth that Satan is the god of this age can be understood in a wrong way. Some later Christians (like the Manichaeans) promoted a dualistic understanding of God and Satan, and emphasized this phrase the god of this age. Their idea was that God and Satan were “equal opponents,” instead of understanding that in no way is Satan the opposite of God. In reaction to these false doctrines, many early Christian commentators (like **Augustine, Origen, Chrysostem** and others) interpreted this verse strangely to “remove ammunition” from the heretics. But this is wrong. Just because someone twists a truth one way, it doesn’t mean we can twist it the other way to “compensate.” **Calvin** well remarks of this approach, “being hard pressed by their opponents they were more anxious to refute them than to expound Paul.”

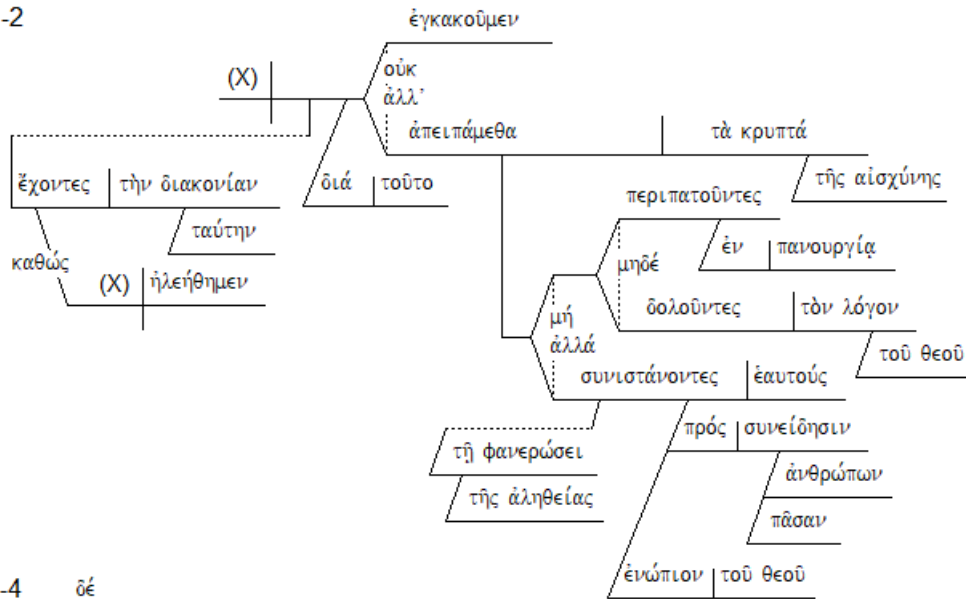
iv. Instead, **Calvin** gives a good sense of what we should understand by the phrase the god of this age: “The devil is called the god of this age in no other way than Baal was called the god of those who worshipped him or the dog the god of Egypt.”

Homer Kent: One can imagine that certain criticisms of Paul may be alluded to here. Had Judaizing teachers accused him of omitting certain teachings regarding compliance with Mosaic rites? Were they accusing him of enticing Gentiles with a watered-down message of salvation at the outset, with the scheme in mind of adding the other essentials later? Paul’s clear answer was that the Word of God had been handled in such a way as to display its truth to every open-minded listener. It had been taught not only for intellectual stimulation, but its moral and spiritual implications also had been clearly aimed at the conscience of each hearer. This in turn should have commended the preachers themselves to the conscience of every Corinthian as being faithful messengers of God. These words reflect no self-seeking on Paul’s part, but rather were his solemn recognition that his ministry was carried on “*in the sight of God*,” who not only was guiding his labors but also was enlightening the consciences of those who were open to His truth. How refreshing it would be if it could be said of every preacher

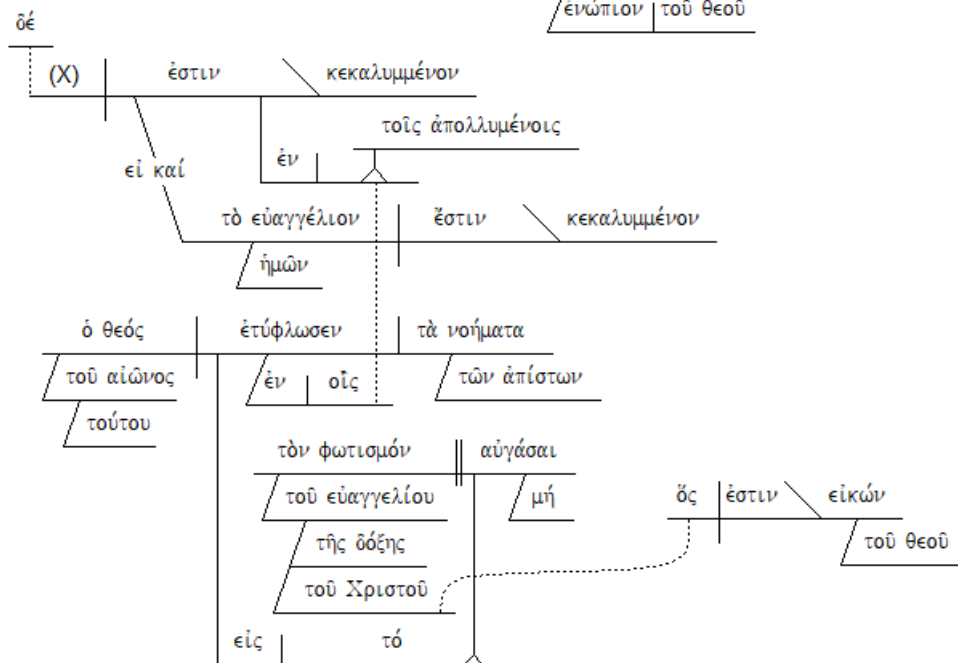
that his chief commendation is his fidelity to the truth of God's Word and the impact which he makes on the consciences of his hearers.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

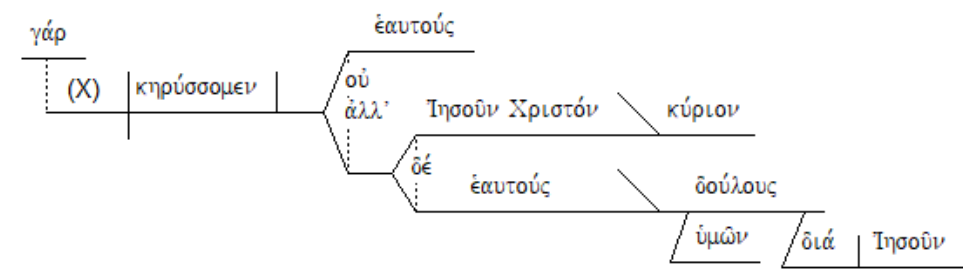
2Co 4:1-2



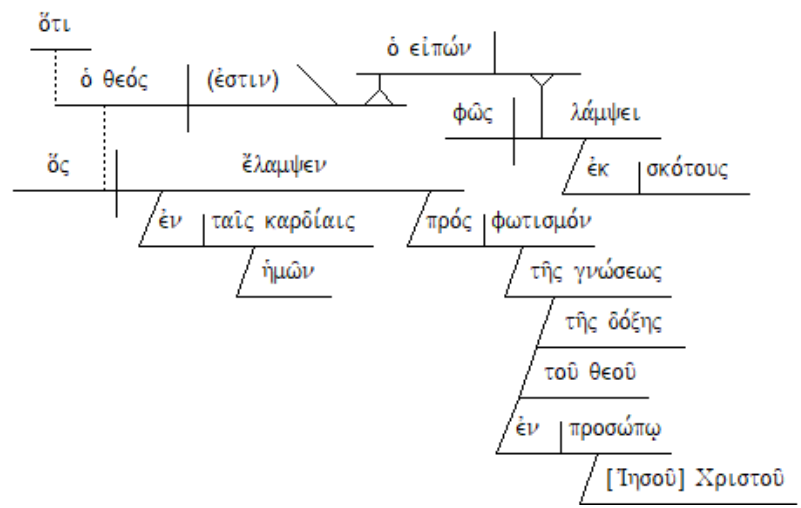
2Co 4:3-4



2Co 4:5



2Co 4:6



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

TITLE: *PHYSICAL CHALLENGES DON'T DISTRACT MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL FROM THEIR ETERNAL FOCUS*

BIG IDEA:

THE PROSPECT OF THE MINISTRY -- FUTURE RESURRECTION AND REWARD -- ENABLES US TO ENDURE PRESENT PHYSICAL SUFFERING IN THE MINISTRY WITHOUT LOSING HEART

INTRODUCTION:

In what ways are you physically challenged? Paul experienced such severe suffering that he could say that he was “*constantly being delivered over to death.*”

Paul Barnett: It is interesting to ask why Paul should have raised these matters immediately after the section in which he declared the old covenant to be outmoded, overtaken by the new. One possible answer is that because the apostle himself had so recently stared death in the face he could not help writing about it. Another is that for all their words about power, the new ministers in Corinth have nothing to say about **suffering, death and judgment**. Ultimately they are concerned with transient and superficial matters. But in the new covenant of righteousness and the Spirit, God meets humans in their suffering, death and judgment – at their points of deepest need.

Raymond Collins: Paul is a paradigm of God’s activity in Christ. As Christ died to bring life, so the apostle brings life through his own “dying.” The purpose of his apostolic suffering is so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our body. Unlike the Stoics, Paul has not rehearsed his sufferings in order to demonstrate his fortitude; rather, he wants the Corinthians to know that the reason for his suffering is so that the life and power of Jesus may be manifest. He does not separate the sufferings of the earthly Jesus from the resurrected life of Jesus. It is the dying and resurrection of Jesus that makes sense of Paul’s difficult life. Jesus was crucified from weakness but lives by the power of God, as he says in 13:4.

The power of God is likewise manifest in the multiple hardships of Paul (see 4:7). Paul’s sufferings do not deter him from his ministry; rather, they are an integral part of his ministry. They allow the power of God to shine forth through the fragility of his humanity. The power of God at work is the focus of the gospel message. It is not only the message itself but also the speaker of the message who must convey the message.

John MacArthur: The apostle declared that the priceless truth of the gospel was held in a humble container. In fact, his weaknesses, far from being reasons to reject him, were among his most convincing apostolic credentials. To express this, he used the analogy of a precious treasure kept in a clay pot. . .

Paul was merely another in a long line of clay pots that God has successfully used. The genuineness of his apostleship in spite of his humanity is evident not from his human abilities, skills, or achievements, but from his spiritual character. This passage unfolds seven spiritual characteristics that marked Paul as a very useful clay pot. He was humble, invincible, sacrificial, fruitful, faithful, hopeful, and worshipful. . .

God chooses humble people to proclaim the gospel message so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of Him. He alone reveals “*the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*” (4:6). By using frail, fallible people, God makes it clear that the power lies not in the human messenger but in the divine message. **God’s power transcends the limitations of the clay pot.** And it is precisely those limitations that allow Christians to experience the greatest demonstration of God’s power.

Frank Matera: Having explained that he is the minister of a new covenant of the Spirit, in which the glory of God is revealed on the face of Christ through the preaching of the gospel, Paul now turns to the **question of suffering and weakness** in the apostolic minister. If Paul is truly the minister of a new covenant that reveals the glory of God, where is the glory? Why is his ministry characterized by affliction and weakness? Aware of objections such as these, Paul must show the Corinthians the intimate relationship between his suffering and affliction and his new covenant ministry. He will argue that his apostolic sufferings on behalf of the Corinthians paradoxically reveal the eschatological power of Christ’s resurrection life in his mortal body (4:7–15). This is not to say that he and other apostolic ministers already experience the full power of the resurrection. Rather, he is affirming that God’s eschatological future is already making itself felt in the present. Consequently, while the world sees Paul’s “*outer self*,” which is in the process of decaying, his “*inner self*,” which cannot be seen, is in the process of being renewed day by day as it prepares to assume an eternal weight of glory (4:16–18).

Eric Mason: Main Idea: God wants you to be broken so you’ll depend on him and reflect Jesus.

If You’re Going to Be 100 Percent Broken, You Must Know This:

- I. God Puts Power in the Vessel (4:7).
- II. God Puts Pressure on the Vessel (4:8-9).
 - A. God loves to break up your plans.
 - B. God loves to break up your will.
- III. God Promotes Jesus through the Vessel (4:10).
- IV. God Has a Purpose for the Vessel (4:11-18).

George Shillington: Paul’s defense of the character of his ministry continues in 4:7-15, but from a different angle. Beginning in this text, he elaborates on three aspects of the ministry:

- (1) the relationship between the mortality of the minister and the substance of the ministry;
- (2) the necessity of adversity in relationship to the crucified-resurrected Christ;
- (3) the necessary connection of the minister to the congregation of converts (in this case the Corinthians).

Paul intertwines these three perspectives in his argument that extends to **5:10**.

I. (:7-12) SHOWCASING JESUS INSTEAD OF OURSELVES REQUIRES DYING SO OTHERS MAY LIVE

A. (:7) God is Our Power Source (made obvious by our Human Frailty)

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.”

Guthrie: Titles this section: **We are purposeful pots.**

Scott Hafemann: Within its context, the “*treasure*” in view in **4:7** refers most directly back to “*the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*” from **4:6**. But the link between **4:6** and **4:4**, where the glory of Christ is seen to be the content of the gospel, suggests that it can also refer to **Paul’s entire ministry** as this is embodied in his life of suffering.

Frank Matera: It is not necessary to be more precise about the treasure than is Paul himself (**Furnish**, 279). As the minister of a new covenant he presents himself as an inferior and fragile vessel that contains the treasure of the gospel through the new covenant ministry he exercises.

George Shillington: Clay jars are fragile, expendable, and cheap. As such they constitute an apt metaphor for the physical body, subject as it is to suffering, death, and decay. The metaphor is not new with Paul. The OT makes much of it (**Isa. 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1-11; 19:1-13**; cf. **Gen. 2:7**). Paul’s contemporary in Alexandria, **Philo**, also spoke of the body as “a vessel for the soul... It comes to maturity, wears out, grows old, dies, is dissolved” (On Dreams 1.26). Yet Paul exploits the metaphor in a way peculiar to his own Christian thought and situation in the ministry of Christ. Unlike Philo and the Stoics, Paul does not here consider the physical body a container for the soul. Instead, his mortal body, like that of Jesus, exists as a foil for the power of God in renewing human life.

Robert Gromacki: Gideon learned this lesson when his army, reduced to three hundred, besieged the Midianites with weapons of trumpets and burning lamps within clay pots (**Judg. 7:16**). Just as the pots had to be broken to let the lamps shine, so believers must be broken to manifest the light of God through them.

Paul Barnett: We come to appreciate **how powerful God is** only when we acknowledge the certainty of our own death. This, apparently, had been Paul's experience. Human life is short, its form easily defaced and its fabric destructible in a second. It is an earthen jar, a cheap clay pot. **Hughes** comments that "the immense discrepancy between the treasure and the vessel serves simply to attest that human weakness presents no barrier to the purposes of God, indeed, that God's power is made perfect in weakness".

David Garland: Paul continues his defense for exercising his apostolic right to criticize frankly the Corinthians by first pointing out that his all too conspicuous weakness that so annoys some of them is divinely intended to highlight God's strength. God houses this treasure in such lowly vessels so that others may see the true wellspring of the treasure and power and know that God can mightily use anyone. Paul has been talking of the sufficiency, glory, and boldness of his ministry, but the danger is that one (and particularly the Corinthians) might be tempted to reverence the conveyer of this spiritual power rather than the divine source. Putting this treasure in unremarkable household articles keeps "the pretensions and accomplishments" of the gospel's ministers from obscuring the fact that the power does not belong to them. Paul confesses that no one looking at him would mistake him for something grand or would be so taken by his grace and comeliness that they would then mistake the source of power that was working in and through him to reconcile the world. In this way he undercuts his showy, bombastic, and pretentious rivals, whose manner was so different from his.

B. (:8-10) Jesus is Our Resurrection Life

1. (:8-9) Four Contrasts Between Intense Suffering and Surprising Perseverance = Paradoxes of Power

a. *"we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed"*

R. Kent Hughes: best represented by the word **squeezed**. Any number of the catastrophes that befell Paul could have exerted intense compressions. But his pressured weakness was ever met with God's power, and he was "not crushed." **Merrill Tenney's** unpublished translation brilliantly expresses it: *"We are squeezed but not squashed."* Perfect! Paul, clay vessel that he was, was astonishingly resilient but never squashed.

b. *"perplexed, but not despairing"*

R. Kent Hughes: In Greek these words form a rhyming word play (*aporoúmenoi . . . exaporoúmenoi*) as the second word intensifies the first. Various attempts have been made to capture the word play in English — "at a loss, but not at a loss" (**Tasker**), "in despondency, yet not in despair" (**Plummer**), "confused but not con-founded" (**Hughes**). But again, **Dr. Tenney** seems to get it best: *"bewildered but not befuddled."* Fragile as Paul's humanity was when confronted with difficulties and loss, he was never befuddled and despairing.

c. *"persecuted, but not forsaken"*

John MacArthur: *Persecuted* is from *diōkō*, which means “to pursue,” or “to hunt.” Paul’s many enemies stalked him day in and day out (cf. Acts 9:23–24, 28–29; 14:5–6, 19; 20:3; 23:12). But despite that, Paul was not forsaken, deserted, or abandoned. His Lord never left him to face an impossible difficulty on his own.

d. “*struck down, but not destroyed*”

John MacArthur: *Struck down* is from *kataballō* and means “to strike down,” as with a weapon, or “to throw down,” as in a wrestling match. *Destroyed* is from *apollumi*, which could also be translated “ruined,” “lost,” or even “killed.” In modern boxing terms, Paul may have been knocked down, but he was not knocked out. He triumphed not by escaping adversity but by successfully enduring it.

Paul and the apostles suffered physically for the gospel in the extreme. In our circumstances these phrases might have a somewhat different application.

Ray Stedman:

Afflictions: These are the normal trials which everybody faces, Christian and non-Christian alike. . .

Perplexities: This refers to all the pressing calls for decisions, when we don't know what to decide. We are at a loss, we can't see the end, we don't know how it is going to turn out. We are afflicted with fears, anxieties, worries, and uncertainties, all gathered up in this word "*perplexities*."

Persecutions: These are the misunderstandings we all run up against, the ostracisms, the cold shoulders which are shown to us at times, the malicious actions and attitudes, deliberate slights, attacks on our character and our reputation, and oftentimes, the bigoted, prejudiced, unfair practices of members of society against one another, all part of the Christian's life as well as the non-Christian's.

And finally,

Catastrophes: "Struck down!" Stunning, shattering blows which drop out of the blue into our lives -- accidents, fatal illnesses, war, earthquake, famine, riot, insanity -- these terrible episodes which shatter a family or an individual, and leave us frightened and baffled. All these things are part of normal Christian experience. There is no change in the problems, the pressures.

2. (:10) Sharing in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

a. Sharing in the Death of Jesus

“*always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus*”

Richard Pratt: To *carry around* the death of Christ was to suffer repeatedly for his glory. Paul declared that these sufferings happen always. He and his company did not

experience their union with Christ's sufferings in one act. They endured the suffering repeatedly everywhere they went.

Even so, there was a purpose to all this suffering. The goal was that the life of Jesus might also be revealed in their body. Paul taught throughout his epistles that the reward for those who suffered for Christ was a resurrection body for eternal life (**Phil. 3:10–11**). This resurrection in the future will result from our union with the resurrection of Christ (**Rom. 6:5**). The troubles that believers experience in this world will result in the glory of the next world.

b. Sharing in the Resurrection of Jesus

“that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body”

Frank Matera: Having presented a list of his hardships in verses 8–9, Paul now interprets these hardships in relation to himself (**vv. 10–11**) and in relation to the Corinthians (**v. 12**). In regard to himself, he affirms that he bears “*the dying of Jesus*” (*tēn nekrosin tou Iēsou*) in his body so that “*the life of Jesus*” (*hē zōē tou Iēsou*) might be manifested in his body (**v. 10**). Then in **verse 11**, employing a clause that begins with *gar* (“for”), he explains that he is being handed over “to death” (*eis thanaton*) in order that “*the life of Jesus*” (*hē zōē tou Iēsou*) might be manifested in his mortal flesh. Finally, in **verse 12** Paul points to the result (“consequently,” *hōste*) of his suffering for the Corinthians: while “death” (*ho thanatos*) is at work in him, “life” (*hē zōē*) is at work in them.

C. (:11-12) Death is Our Ministry Calling (So Others May Live)

“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.”

Scott Hafemann: In **4:11** Paul gives the theological basis for his conviction that his suffering, like the “*death of Jesus*,” mediates the resurrection power of God, that is, the “*life of Jesus*.” By using the divine passive, “*we are always being given over to death*” (by God), Paul again asserts that his sufferings are not merely coincidental, but part of the divine plan for the spread of the gospel. Like Jesus, Paul too is delivered over to his own death (cf. **2:14**; for Jesus, see **Mark 10:33**; **Rom. 4:25**; **8:32**). In **verse 10**, Paul “*carries*” the death of Jesus in his own body; in **verse 11**, Paul himself is the living one who is given over to death by God. But this does not lead Paul to the conclusion that the “*life*” he mediates is his own—it remains the “*life of Jesus*” (**4:11b**).

Richard Pratt: Paul did not want the Corinthians to forget that they benefited from the sufferings of the ministers of the gospel. The pain and trials endured by Paul and others made it possible for the Corinthians to have eternal life in Christ. Those who suffered brought the gospel to the church, teaching and leading the church. The Corinthians should have realized that their new life in Christ came at the cost of suffering by those who ministered to them.

II. (:13-15) SPREADING GRACE TO THE GLORY OF GOD REQUIRES PROCLAIMING THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

Paul Barnett: Having stated that “*death is at work*” in him so that life may be at work in the Corinthians, Paul now proceeds to state two reasons or motives for his sacrificial lifestyle.

The first is that he has that **same spirit of faith (13)** as the writer of **Psalm 116** who thankfully testified to God’s deliverance of him from death. Paul’s recent and profound awareness of death (**1:8–10**) has led to an intensified understanding of the “all-surpassing power” of God to deliver him (7). In particular, his more deeply realized faith that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us (**14**) has led the apostle to say with the psalmist, we also believe and therefore speak (**13**). So far from having lost heart (**1, 16**), as his critics claim, the recent experience of deliverance from death has strengthened Paul’s resurrection faith, and because of this he writes, we . . . speak (the Greek implies “*continue to speak*”) the word of God.

The second reason for his missionary zeal was his **passion for the glory of God (15)**. Paul laboured in the ministry of the new covenant so that more and more people (**15**) would come to understand the grace of God and cause thanksgiving to overflow to him. Paul longed that men and women who “neither glorified [God] *as God nor gave thanks to him*” (**Rom. 1:21**) would, in increasing number, be converted through the gospel and express thankfulness to God, and so glorify him.

R. Kent Hughes: Now, beginning in **verse 13**, Paul explains what sustained him to continue preaching — his faith in God. Paul does this by citing a brief line from **Psalm 116:10**, the heart of **Psalm 116:1** “*Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak*” (**v. 13**). For Paul, a brief reference like this served as a pointer to the full context of the Psalm upon which he based his statement of faith. Significantly, **Psalm 116** describes a time when the writer (King David) almost died (cf. **vv. 3, 8, 15**), but God delivered him from death (cf. **vv. 8-10**). David “*believed*” that God had delivered him and therefore “*spoke*” of it (**v. 10**). As this statement in **verse 10** is the center and pivot of the Psalm, it places faith at its very heart.

The Apostle Paul felt a spiritual kinship with King David because, like him, Paul had been also delivered from death (cf. **2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 4:7-11; 11:23ff.**). Paul had likewise believed, and so he also spoke — as he preached “*God’s word*” (**4:2**), “*the gospel*” (**4:4**), and “*Jesus Christ as Lord*” (**4:5**). Thus Paul’s gospel ministry rested squarely on God’s Word and his experience of God’s deliverance from death, which was in grand continuity with the experience of the suffering righteous of the past. It is from this platform of faith that Paul spoke with unflinching certitude and power.

This said, we must understand that while **the foundation of Paul’s faith was in the past**, Paul now goes on to show that **the focus of his faith was on the future**. What

heartened him for the battle and fortified him to preach Christ Jesus in every circumstance was his dynamic certainty and confidence about the future. It will become ever so clear in this passage that what Paul longed for and believed about the future had everything to do with how he lived in the present. And it is exactly the same for us. Our beliefs and hopes for the future exert a control that dictates how we live our present lives. **Our “futures” determine the present.**

A. (:13) Testimony Springs From Faith

“But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore also we speak.”

Scott Hafemann: This is Paul’s response to God’s presence in his life. The power of God that sustains Paul in his weakness (4:7–12) causes him to remain confident in his proclamation (4:13) and in his suffering for the sake of others (4:16). All that God has done and is doing through the adversities of his life (4:1–15) leads him to focus on all that God will do (4:16–18), which in turn gives him confidence to endure the daily consequences of sin (4:1–15). This is the **cycle of faith**.

John MacArthur: The apostle declared that he had the **same spirit** or attitude of **faith**—in other words, he believed in the same thing—as **what is written**. That is, he agreed with the psalmist who wrote, *I believed, therefore I spoke* (Ps. 116:10). That was Paul’s response to the critics of his bold preaching. **His unwavering faith compelled him to preach** (cf. Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 9:16); it was impossible for him to believe the gospel truth but not long to proclaim it. Those who lack conviction in their preaching do so because they lack conviction in their hearts. Because they have weak confidence in the truth of God, they seek the comfort, prestige, and popularity that come from muting the message. True belief impels strong, consistent, unwavering testimony to the truth. On trial for his faith before the Diet of Worms, **Martin Luther** defiantly declared,

“Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning— and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

Those who genuinely believe the truth cannot help but speak that truth.

B. (:14) Testimony Springs From Confidence in the Resurrection

“knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.”

Scott Hafemann: No matter what the circumstance, Paul’s commitment to preach derives from his assurance for the future, the initial fulfillment of which he has already experienced in the Spirit.

C. (:15) Testimony Springs From the Ultimate Desire to See God Glorified

“For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

Scott Hafemann: Paul keeps preaching, no matter what, because he knows that the purpose of his life is exhibited in the lives of others. As in **1:3, 11** and **2:14**, here too Paul reminds his readers that the purpose of his ministry is to display God’s glory through the thanksgiving that has increased among many as a result of Paul’s ministry. The specific cause and object of this thanksgiving is the grace of God experienced in Christ through Paul. The more people who experience grace, the greater the thanksgiving. A life rescued by God produces a heart filled with gratitude, thereby reversing the fundamental sin of self-glorifying ingratitude that lies at the root of all sins (cf. **Rom. 1:21; 3:23**).

Thus, Paul keeps preaching because he is confident that this very redemption is now taking place through his ministry of the Spirit under the new covenant (**3:3–6**). Through his unveiled boldness (**3:12**), an unveiled encounter with God’s “surpassing glory” is transforming God’s people into those who praise his glory (cf. **3:10, 16–18; 4:6, 15**)

III. (:16-18) SUFFERING AFFLICTION WITH PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES FOCUSING ON THE ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

William Barclay: Here Paul sets out for us the **secret of endurance**.

All through life it must happen that a man’s bodily strength fades away, but all through life it ought to happen that a man’s soul keeps growing. The very sufferings which may leave a man with a weakened body may be the very things which strengthen the sinews of his soul. It was the prayer of the poet, “Let me grow lovely growing old.” The years which take away physical beauty should add spiritual beauty. From the physical point of view life may be a slow but inevitable slipping down the slope that leads to death and ends in the grave. But from the spiritual point of view life is a climbing up the hill that leads to the peak of the presence of God. No man need fear the years, for they bring him nearer, not to death, but to God.

Frank Matera: These verses are **transitional** in nature (**Thrall**, 1:347). On the one hand, they draw a conclusion from what Paul has said in **4:7–15**, as the opening phrase indicates: “*therefore, we are not discouraged*” (*dio ouk enkakoumen*). On the other hand, they are the basis for the argument that will follow in **5:1–10**, as the first words of that unit indicate, “*for we know*” (*oidamen gar*). Consequently, it is not surprising that whereas some commentators view **4:7–18** (**Barrett**) as a single unit, others see **4:16 – 5:5** (**Furnish**) or **4:16 – 5:10** (**Lambrecht**) as a unit. This commentary treats these verses as a **discrete unit** because **4:16–18** describes the **present transformation** that Paul is already experiencing, whereas **4:7–15** focuses on his **daily apostolic sufferings** and **5:1–10** on the **final transformation** that he will enjoy when he is clothed with a heavenly habitation.

A. (:16a) Main Application = Don't Lose Heart

"Therefore we do not lose heart"

**B. (:16b) Battleground: Physical vs. Spiritual –
Maturing Spiritual Life More Than Compensates for Deteriorating Physical Life**

*"but though our outer man is decaying,
yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."*

R. Kent Hughes: It is easy to misread what Paul says here so that we interpret it as the means of enhancing our power. Thus we may imagine that as we embrace our weakness God will pour his power into us so that we become powerful. The natural equation is: My weakness plus God's power equals my power.

But that is not what Paul is saying. Rather, he teaches that as we embrace our weakness, God fills us with his power so that his power is manifested through us. We do not become powerful. We remain weak. We do not grow in power. We grow in weakness. We go from weakness to weakness, which is to remain vessels of his power — ever weak and ever strong.

C. (:17) Eternal Reward -- When it Comes to Eternity – No Comparison

*"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us
an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison"*

D. (:18) Eternal Focus

*"while we look not 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."*

Robert Hughes: He also had a world view that linked affliction to eternal glory. According to Paul's view, the one who loses heart is the one who sees suffering as an end in itself, rather than as a means to glory. He did not look at *"things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen"* (4:18). That was the very perspective he labored to instill in the Corinthians throughout this section (see 5:12). The various strands of Paul's thoughts were controlled by the central concept of what is unseen and eternal: the glory of the Spirit (chap. 3), the pledge of resurrection (1:22; 5:5), and the new creation of the believer in Christ (5:17).

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) We need to be intimately connected daily to the dying of Jesus. This is the aspect of taking up our cross daily and following after Christ as a genuine disciple.
- 2) We access spiritual power when we are intimately connected moment by moment to

the indwelling life of Christ so that “*the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*”

3) Our resurrection will be patterned after that of Christ’s. Therefore, our resurrection is certain and glorious and yields an eternal result.

4) Christ is our connection to the realm of ultimate reality = the realm of the spiritual unseen and the realm of eternity.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do you consider your body to be a *treasure* chest? Are you hoarding God’s riches or proclaiming His glory?

2) Where have you experienced God’s power operating as “*surpassing greatness*” in the context of your human frailty?

3) In what ways have you found *death to be working* in you?

4) How does the prospect of eternal glory and reward truly motivate you to persevere?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: There is widespread confusion today in the matter of defining Christians and Christianity. There is a common stereotype of Christianity, accepted everywhere, which is completely and demonstrably false. This stereotype runs something like this: (This perhaps may come as a surprise to some who do not really understand how others see us.) In the eyes of the world,

"Christians are men and women who have, by dint of their own self-will, achieved a certain level of morality, i.e., they don't do certain secular things, while they do do certain religious things. They have come to regard themselves as members of a very exclusive club which is especially favored by God, so that they get (or should get, anyway) many special divine favors extended to them. They gather together weekly to perform certain rather meaningless religious rituals. They believe a number of unprovable claims, but take them by blind faith. The result of all this is the production of men and women who are essentially smug, bigoted, and narrow-minded, who, as the course of history has run on, have become responsible for terrible wars, bloodshed, cruelty, and prejudice; who are the ones largely responsible for creating and preserving the

ghettos which are such a problem in our own day; and who, in self-righteous priggishness, think of themselves as especially holy people because they don't smoke, drink, gamble, play cards, or go to movies (some of them, at least), etc."

I have tried to be as realistic as possible in describing what I feel is a very commonplace image, which is, for the most part, regarded as genuine by a majority of people in the world today. Of course, we immediately recognize it as a phony, fake Christianity, produced by the attempt of religious people to imitate the genuine product. In Second Corinthians 4:7 we have set forth for us the essence of the true Christian position, a genuine Christianity. That is why I appreciate this seventh verse so much. "*We have this treasure,*" says the apostle, "*in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not of us.*"

There are two particularly important factors about this verse: One is its description of genuine humanity -- humanity as God intended it to be. You will notice that it consists of two elements.

First, mankind is described as "*vessels*." This is not the only place this figure occurs in the Scriptures, and it is a most significant figure. I do not know if you have ever thought of yourself as a vessel, but it is a fundamental and essential concept of the Scriptures with regard to the human race.

What are vessels for? We would all agree that vessels are made to contain something. That is their sole purpose. They are made to hold something. They are designed and shaped to be filled with something. That is why this verse is so significant. It reminds us that we human beings were intended to contain something. We are made to be vessels, pots, if you like, made to contain something, to hold something.

The vessels in your own home (pots, cups, or bowls) are made to contain something and if they do not have that substance in them, they are, of course, empty. It is no accident that we describe lives without Jesus Christ as empty lives, because that is exactly what they are. It is no accident that the world today is suffering from what Dr. Carl Jung calls "a neurosis of emptiness." He says, "When goal goes, meaning goes; when meaning goes, purpose goes; when purpose goes, life goes dead on our hands." This is what is happening in many hearts and lives today, both young and old alike – a great wave of emptiness, of despair. The result is hollow men and women, who have a facade of interest, attention and activity, but within whom there is nothing but emptiness. That emptiness is what is creating the restlessness which is so characteristic of our age and which is breaking out on every side in rebellion and reaction. See how accurately the Scriptures indicate the significant element about humanity: We are made to be vessels, made to hold something, and if we do not have that something in there, our lives are inevitably empty and meaningless.

But, secondly, mankind is not only vessels, but "*earthen vessels*," i.e., made out of dirt, made from clay, from very common material which has nothing in itself of any value, nothing pretentious. Something is there, yes, but nothing of any real value in itself.

Here, of course, is the concept with which so many struggle today and which the humanist vigorously rejects. He says that man is the substance of all things. But the Word of God takes a very humbling and realistic approach to mankind and says that we are nothing but insignificant bits of clay.

Of course, there are all kinds and grades of clay. Some of you are rather fine china -- you crack easily -- still you have a very fine texture, though it is nothing more than clay. Others of us are more like sun-dried mud, and we crumble at the first knock which comes along. But at any rate the matter is gathered up in this one phrase -- earthen vessels. We are all made of common clay and that is why we all have the same problems. As someone has well put it, "We're all made in the same mold -- only some are moldier than others!"

That is a wonderfully realistic view of human life. Pots we are, made to hold something, but of little value in and of ourselves. This corresponds so exactly with the words of Paul when he warns the Galatians not to think of themselves more highly than they ought, "*For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself,*" (Gal 6:3 RSV). This is the biblical picture of man.

But notice how the picture is completed here. In the Christian life, the apostle says, we have a treasure in those earthen vessels. And he describes it as "transcendent power." That is the glory of the Christian life, of humanity as God intended it to be. The vessel is not much in itself, but it holds an inestimable treasure, a treasure beyond price. Now, these are glowing words. They speak of a reality, of something genuine. It is indeed a treasure, a treasure so valuable that the world would give everything it has to get it. Throughout the rest of this week there will be money expended in large amounts to try to discover the secret of this treasure, what might be called "the lost secret of humanity." Billions are poured out every week in a vain effort to identify this treasure and to channel it into the normal affairs of human life.

It is a treasure because it is a power, a transcendent power. Do you know what transcendent means? "Something beyond the ordinary, something above ourselves, something wholly other, something different, unusual." It is not like the ordinary kind of power, which tears things apart, destroys, blasts, or breaks. This is a strange kind, a kind which unites, which harmonizes, gathers, breaks down barriers and middle walls of partition. In other words, here is the power to change a life or a society from within, not from without. It does not make superficial, external adjustments, changing the outward face of things, but a genuine transformation which arises from within, which completely and permanently changes an individual. As individuals become changed, the society of which they are a part likewise becomes changed. . .

This is real Christianity -- Christ in you, not merely to take you home to heaven when you die, but to manifest his life anew in you right now, to live again his life in you in terms of your situation and circumstances. This is the treasure. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, and designedly so. God put it in failing, faulty, weak, sinful men and women in order that it might be evident that the power does not originate in us. It is not

a result of a strong personality, or an extroverted nature, or a highly honed and trained mind. No, it is not a result of any of these things. It is something which arises from the presence of God in the heart. That is why God so delights to call people like us -- the stupid, the weak, the faulty, the failing -- and to manifest his life and grace through us.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Distinguishing the Contents from the Container --

The true treasure is the glory of God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as presented and proclaimed by the gospel. In contrast to this glorious treasure are the vessels which contain the treasure. Christians are merely “clay pots,” while the gospel is the treasure. Earthen vessels (clay pots) are common and cheap, ones like those red flowerpots we can buy today for very little money. Earthen vessels are also fragile and easily broken. I have broken a significant number of clay pots. Earthen vessels are “earthy” and “earthly”; they are of this world. (Remember that we were made of the dust of the earth—see **Genesis 2:7**.) Earthen vessels are fashioned by the potter, who creates them for his own purposes (see **Romans 9:20-21**). Clay pots have nothing in which to boast; they have no basis for feeling superior. The treasure gains nothing from the pots; if anything, the pots gain from the glory of the treasure. . .

I believe Paul’s argument in this passage may be summarized in this way: As Christians die daily, by living righteously and boldly speaking forth the truth of the gospel, we live out the death and life of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the consternation of those who reject the gospel, to the benefit and blessing of those who believe, and ultimately to the glory of God.

Steve Zeisler: Christians are very ordinary clay pots. There is nothing intrinsically beautiful or powerful about us; there is nothing to commend us. We are fragile, temporary, functional, ordinary. But such pots were made to contain a great treasure—the life of God himself. He is beautiful beyond description, and powerful beyond measure. The surpassing greatness of the power is of God, and we find that our lives have a quality that is unexplained. We learn these lessons by suffering when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances; and we learn by the grace of God to accept them and not resist them. The surpassing greatness of the power of God does its work.

David Garland: Many labor under the enormous burden of trying to be wonderful in the eyes of others rather than simply trying to minister to them. We can learn from Paul’s example that ministers do not have to be wonderful, just **faithful**. Many a minister suffers burnout from trying to run a sparkling program, keeping up attendance while keeping down conflict, and preaching catchy sermons instead of preaching Christ. Paul experienced suffering beyond the imagination of many but endured because he also experienced the power of the resurrection (**13:4**). Most persons of average piety would be broken by such adversity. Yet piety does not rally Paul. It is the power of God at work within him. The task of ministry demands all he can give. When he has given his all and finds that it is not enough, God’s power carries him through. This truth prevented Paul from thinking he could do it all alone. It also prevented him from avoiding doing anything except what was cautiously safe to avoid looking weak or

might make him look like a failure. He knew that God works even through his limitations and failures. As one controlled by the love of Christ, he dared to reach beyond his limits because he trusted God's power to bless and redeem all that he does.

Homer Kent: Paul and the other apostles were constantly under threat of physical death just as Jesus was. Now the hatred of men for the Son of God was being directed against Paul and others as they attempted to carry out their Christian ministry. The word “dying” (*nekrosin*) does not mean simply death but the process of dying. Paul chose this term to emphasize not just one act, but the repeated sufferings which were directed against his life in order to put him to death.

Nevertheless Paul could look beyond the trials to the grander purpose which was being served. God's suffering servants not only showed their identification with Christ by their willingness to suffer as He did, but they also displayed His life in their bodies. Christ living in them enabled them not to be crushed, be despairing, feel forsaken, or be destroyed. They ran the risk of death in order to proclaim the new life in Christ, and they did this by personal demonstration of Christ's life in their own lives.

Raymond Collins: The Contrasts

Anthropology: outer person (*ho exō hēmōn*, a hapax construction in Paul) and inner person (*ho esō hēmōn*, **4:16**)

Weight: light (*elaphron*, hapax in Paul) and heavy (*baros*, **v. 17**)

Time: momentary (*parautika*, hapax in NT) and eternal (*aiōnion*, **v. 17**)
transitory (*proskaira*, hapax in Paul) and eternal (*aiōnia*, **v. 18**)

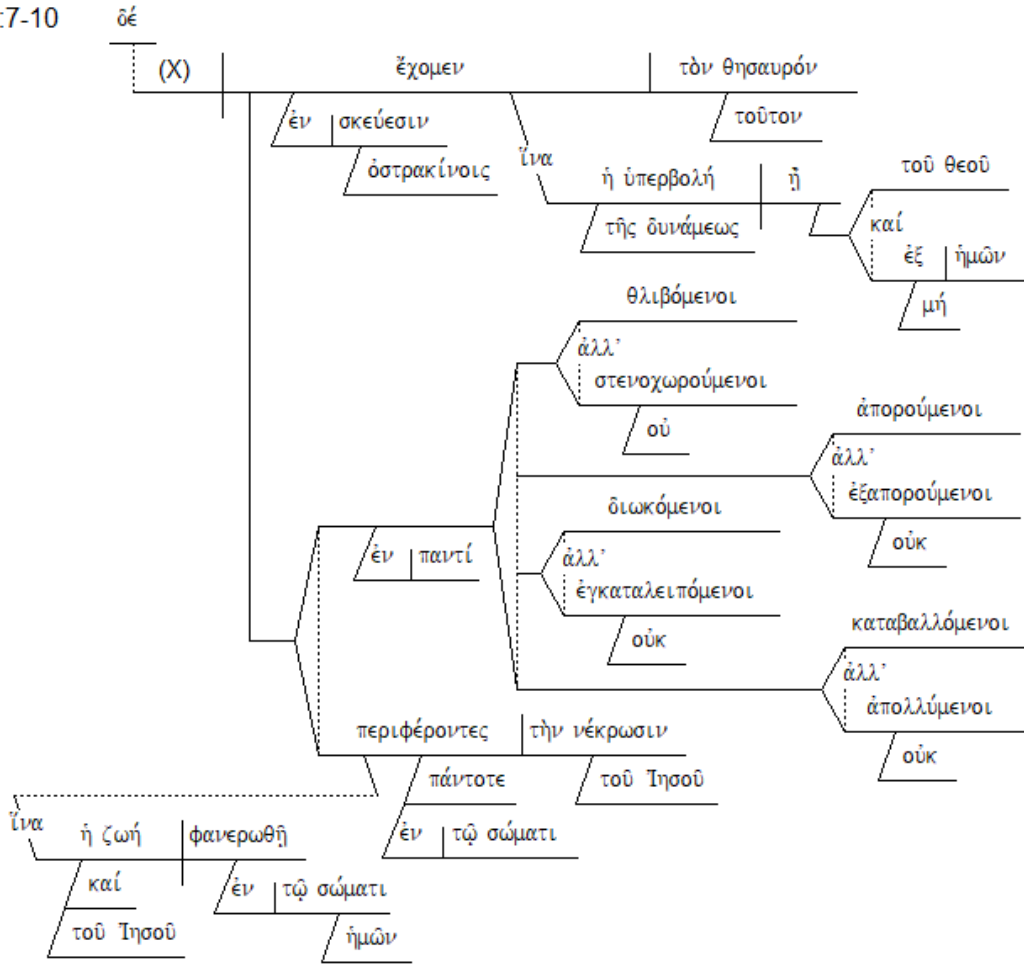
Sight: seen (*ta blepomena*) and unseen (*ta mē blepomena*) seen (*ta blepomena*) and unseen (*ta mē blepomena*, **v. 18**)

Process: wasting away (*diaphtheiretai*, hapax in Paul) and renewal (*anakainoutai*, hapax in Paul, **v. 16**)

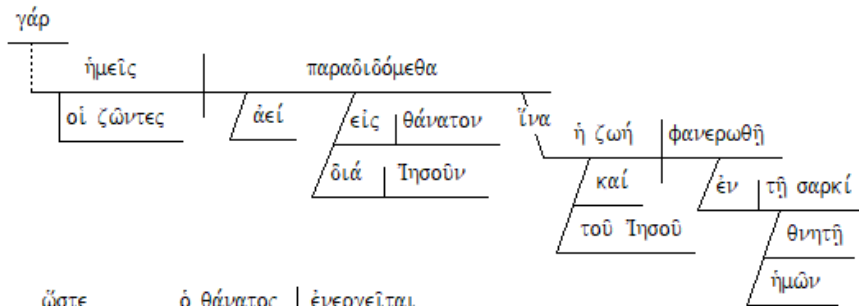
Experience: tribulation (*thlipseōs*) and glory (*doxēs*, **v. 17**)

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

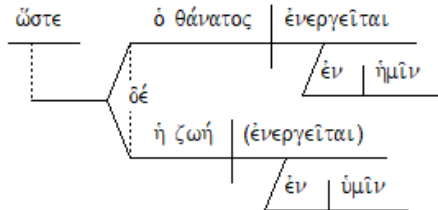
2Co 4:7-10



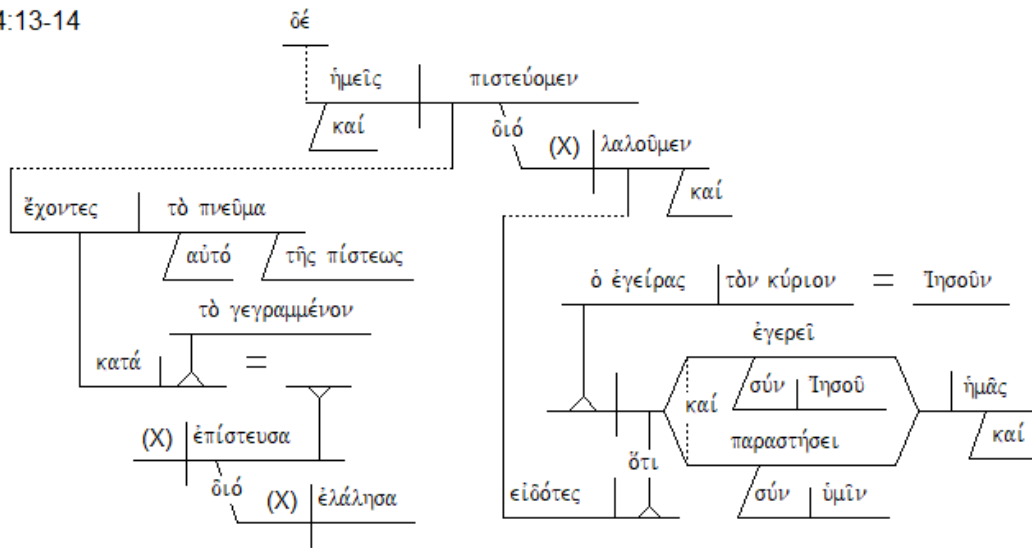
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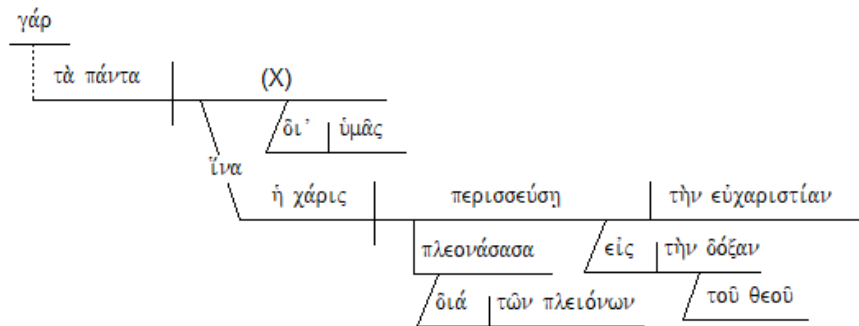
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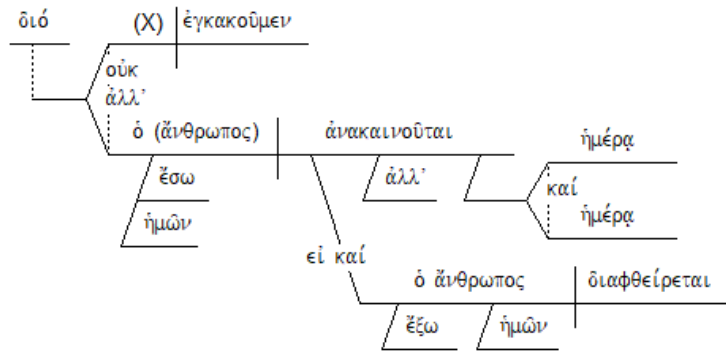
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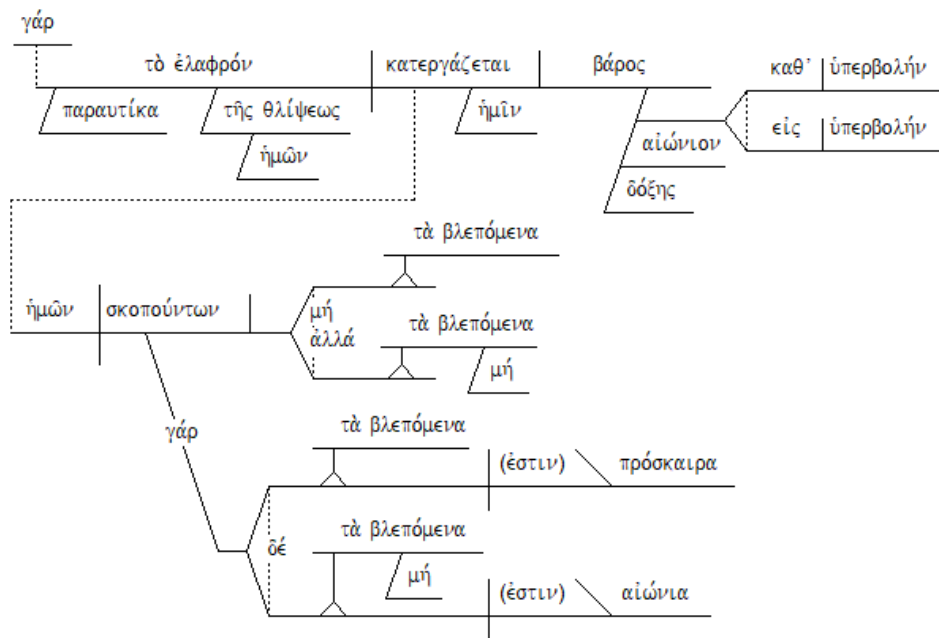
2Co 4:15



2Co 4:16



2Co 4:17-18



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

TITLE: *EARTHLY TENT VS HEAVENLY HOME*

BIG IDEA:

**THE LONGING FOR THE RESURRECTION BODY MOTIVATES US TO
FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL MINISTRY EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF PHYSICAL
SUFFERING –
FUTURE GLORY INSPIRES COURAGE AND COMMITMENT IN LIVING
TO PLEASE OUR LORD**

INTRODUCTION:

This passage has taken on **special significance** for me. When my Mom passed away Sept. 3, 2024, this was the Scripture text I was scheduled to study that day. I felt like God was giving a personal message to my family. I officiated at the graveside service Sept. 5 and used this for the basis for my brief reflections.

Richard Pratt: It is so easy to forget how **temporary** this life is. We tend to live as if nothing will ever change, as if life will keep going as it always has. We think we'll always have tomorrow. But every now and then, reality breaks through and we see our lives for what they are: **a fleeting moment**. . .

The Christian gospel tells us that this fleeting life on earth is not our final end. If we are in Christ, we have a **glorious destiny**. Our descendants may forget us in this life, but God will not forget us in the world to come. Followers of Christ receive the hope of eternal life. This future hope gives us **perspective on this life** and its frailties and suffering. It gives us a destiny beyond imagination that empowers us to move forward in the service of Christ.

MAIN IDEA: As Christians, we should balance a realistic assessment of our human frailties with the honor that Christ gives us now and after death. When we do this, we will hold fast to faith in Christ and receive the salvation that God has offered in him.

John MacArthur: As he penned this letter, Paul was facing death on a daily basis. Hostility swirled around him, animosity was constant, and so was the reality and threat of opposition and terminal persecution. Both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles sought to take his life, viewing him as a danger to their religion (cf. **Acts 13:50; 18:13**), their economic prosperity (cf. **Acts 19:23–27**), and even to their political stability (cf. **Acts 17:6**). The apostle's **sense of imminent death** comes through repeatedly in this epistle:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who

delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. (2 Cor. 1:8–10)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you. (4:7–12)

He described his life as “*dying yet behold, we live; punished yet not put to death*” (6:9), and “*often in danger of death*” (11:23). How did he face the reality that he, like a soldier in the front lines, constantly lived on the brink of death?

Some might have expected Paul to tone down his fearless heralding of the gospel, since it was that preaching that enraged his enemies and thus jeopardized his life. Being less confrontive would have mitigated the threat he faced. But the more the hostility and persecution escalated, the bolder Paul became. **He never wavered in courageously proclaiming the truth.** Because he faced death confidently, even gladly, that triumphant perspective caused him to write, “[I] *prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord*” (5:8), and “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. . . . “I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better” (Phil. 1:21, 23).* And because he did not fear death, Paul did not fear persecution, pain, or suffering; he was able always to be “*of good courage*” (2 Cor. 5:6, 8). . .

Christians should not fear death. They should long “*to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better*” (Phil. 1:23). That does not mean, of course, that they are to be foolishly reckless or careless with their lives; their bodies belong to God (1 Cor. 6:19–20). But an obsessive concern for one’s physical well-being or a morbid fear of death is inconsistent with a Christian perspective. Believers should long for heaven like a prisoner longs for freedom, like a sick man longs for health, like a hungry man longs for food, like a thirsty man longs for a drink, like a poor man longs for a payday, and like a soldier longs for peace. Hope and courage in facing death is the last opportunity for Christians to exhibit their faith in God, to prove their hope of heaven is genuine and to adorn their confidence in the promises of God.

From this passage four motives for facing death confidently emerge:

- The next body is the best,
- the next life is perfect,
- the next existence fulfills God’s purpose,
- and the next dwelling is with the Lord.

R. Kent Hughes: In fact, the image that Paul appears to have had in mind was the tabernacle tent that was superseded by the temple building. Just as the tabernacle was the temporary dwelling of God until the building of a permanent temple in Jerusalem, so also Paul's mortal body is merely temporary and will be replaced by an imperishable resurrection body.

And more, just as there was **continuity** between the tabernacle and the temple, there is continuity between the mortal body and the imperishable body of the resurrection. This is Paul's explicit teaching in **Philippians 3:20, 21**.

Frank Matera: In terms of structure, this unit consists of two parts.

- The first (vv. 1–5) deals most directly with the issue of the resurrection body for which the believer sighs. It can be divided into a number of subunits: a thematic statement that contrasts the present body with the resurrection body (v. 1), a description of Paul's longing to be clothed with the resurrection body (vv. 2–4), and an affirmation that God has prepared this resurrection body for the believer (v. 5).
- The second part of the unit (vv. 6–10) describes the situation of believers as they long to be with the Lord, aware that they must stand before his judgment seat. It can also be divided into two subunits: the present situation of not yet being at home with the Lord (vv. 6–8); and the judgment that everyone must face (vv. 9–10).

I. (5:1-5) PRESENT SUFFERING SHOULD INTENSIFY THE LONGING FOR FUTURE GLORY (THE RESURRECTION BODY)

Context = extreme physical suffering in the ministry

Understood from previous section in **Chapter 4**

A. (:1) The Superiority of the Resurrection Body

1. Prospect of Physical Death -- Limitations of Our Physical Body

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down”

For all of you campers out there, what are some of the drawbacks of living in a tent?

John MacArthur: Paul's confident assertion *for we know* indicates that believers' glorified bodies are not a remote possibility or a vague wish. They are a fixed reality, a settled fact based on the promise of God (**Rom. 8:18, 23; 1 Cor. 15:35–49; Phil. 3:21**), not philosophical speculation or mystical fantasy. . .

The phrase *if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down* refers metaphorically to death (cf. **Isa. 38:12**). As a tentmaker himself (**Acts 18:3**), Paul chose to use the analogy of an earthly tent (the physical body) to describe the soul's temporary house in this world (cf. **2 Peter 1:13–14**). Speaking of the incarnation of Christ, the apostle John used the verb *skēnoō*, (lit., “to live in a tent”) to depict the eternal God coming into the world and taking a human body (**John 1:14**). A tent is an apt metaphor for the human

body, which is a temporary home for the eternal souls of those whose real home is in heaven (**Phil. 3:20**) and who are aliens and strangers in this world (**Gen. 47:9; 1 Chron. 29:15; Ps. 119:19; Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11**). Just as the tabernacle of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness was replaced with a permanent building when Israel entered the Promised Land, so the temporary tent in which believers now dwell will be replaced one day in heaven with an eternal, imperishable body (**1 Cor. 15:42, 53–54**).

David Garland: Tent life is a ready metaphor for humankind's brief sojourn in this world, and it depicts "the instability, and thus the vulnerability, of one's mortal existence."

The verb translated "*is destroyed*" also means "*to tear down*," and is particularly appropriate for the image of striking a tent. It refers to our physical death. **Death remains a feared enemy**, and the fear of death could deaden exercising boldness in ministry. Paul explains why, then, he does not recoil in the face of daily danger but continues to speak boldly. . .

If we want to learn from this passage specific details about what happens when we die, Paul will disappoint us. He does not give us a "blueprint of the next life but only hints about its nature." Paul gives no systematic answers to such questions as when we receive the resurrection body (at death or at the Parousia), what the nature of an intermediate state is, if it exists, or how God transforms the earthly body and what it is like. Paul did not write this passage to answer questions we might have but only **affirms his confidence in the Christian's transformation in the life after death.**

Charles Swindoll: Don't forget that Paul himself was a tent-maker who had worked for a time in the very city of Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, making and selling tents (**Acts 18:1-3**). . .

I have spent enough time in a tent to know it is not the best place for a **permanent dwelling** (no offense to my Bedouin readers!). In fact, if you have ever been on a camping trip that lasted long enough to encounter cold or rainy weather, you will agree that tents are no match for a strong brick home built on a sure foundation. Tents are **temporary dwellings**—fun to sleep in with the kids in the woods or at the lake, but you and I know that it gets cold in the winter and it gets hot in the summer. Tents begin to sag. They start to leak. Tent pegs get loose. Holes form, critters invite themselves in, and a strong wind blows them away. Before very long, you are groaning for something more permanent. . .

our future, incorruptible resurrection bodies will be like a permanent building, not constructed of perishable materials from this world, but conformed to the building code for heavenly existence—untainted perfection, spiritual immortality, heavenly glory.

"*torn down*" seems to suggest more than just death by old age

2. Promise of Permanent Dwelling

a. Superstructure

“we have a building from God”

not from Bob the Builder or Bob Vila

b. Spiritual

“a house not made with hands”

c. Eternal

“eternal in the heavens”

Richard Pratt: Paul referred to the future resurrected bodies of believers, focusing on the eternal state without differentiating it from the intermediate state. According to this view, Paul did not address our heavenly experience before Christ's return. Because the intermediate state is not the goal that believers are to keep in mind, it is overshadowed by the **permanent state** after Christ's return.

B. (:2-4) The Preference for the Resurrection Body

1. (:2a) The Groaning Associated with this Present Body

“For indeed in this house we groan”

Charles Ryrie: in this earthly body we groan because of the burdens of life (cf. **Rom. 8:23**).

Eric Mason: Paul says, *“We groan”*—meaning **we vocally express pain, discomfort, or displeasure**, which is even inarticulate at times. You make an involuntary facial sign or a groan that shows you're not okay with being here. . .

We're here on earth like the deer and antelope in the wilderness. I don't know if you watch the National Geographic channel. The antelope go to the water hole to drink, and it's real quiet. We are just like them. They go down, they drink, but their eyes continue looking all around. Behind them are lions, and coming toward them are alligators. So you can't even drink—the alligator is trying to get you, and the lions are trying to get you, and you've got to run off. You should be like the antelope. You should be saying, “I'm sick of this. I can't even drink water in peace. Can't have a baby in peace. Can't move the herd in peace.” Now I'm not speaking about complaining all the time, but every now and then you need to acknowledge your **discomfort with earth**.

John MacArthur: Paul was weary of the frustrations, disappointments, limitations, weaknesses, and sins of this present life and longed *“for the revealing of the sons of God”* (**Rom. 8:19**). The apostle passionately longed to be clothed with his dwelling from heaven. Paul's mixed metaphor (putting on a building as if it were clothing) refers to his resurrection body and the perfections of eternal life, which would replace forever the debilitating, sin-caused corruptions of life in this world and set him free from his fallen humanness.

2. (:2b-3) The Longing for Permanent Glorious Clothing

*“longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;
inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked”*

John MacArthur: Repeating his disdain for **soul nakedness**, Paul emphasized again that he did not want to be unclothed as a **disembodied spirit**, but to be **clothed with his glorified body**.

Alternate Interpretation:

George Shillington: The prefix (epi) in this case, as in so many similar instances in the NT, probably carries what is called a **perfective force**. That is, the prefix signifies being “really clothed,” “finally clothed,” clothed in a way that will not require any further exchange of clothing. The resurrection body is the ultimate form of identity for the person “*baptized into Christ*” and “*clothed...with Christ*” (**Gal. 3:27**). . .

A period of waiting in nakedness for the new body is a projection of history onto the eternal. “In the consciousness of the departed believer, there is no interval between dissolution and investiture, however long the interval may be by the calendar of earth-bound human history” (**Bruce:** 204).

Frank Matera: In light of what Paul has already said about his apostolic sufferings (**4:7–15**) and his inner person wasting away (**4:16–18**), the “*nakedness*” to which he refers here is best understood in terms of **death**, which is the ultimate destruction of the “*earthen vessel*” and the “*outer person.*” In the face of this threat Paul affirms that he will not be found “*naked,*” for he will be “*covered over*” with the resurrection body. In affirming this, Paul is not so much making a statement about what happens to people “*between*” the moment of death and resurrection, as he is affirming his hope in the resurrection (**4:14**) that **God will not leave him naked** (conquered by death), because God has prepared him for this heavenly building, his resurrection body.

3. (:4) Summary: Preference for Immortality (clothed in Resurrection Body)

*“For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened,
because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed,
in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”*

C. (:5) The Assurance of the Resurrection Body

1. God's Purpose -- It Cannot Be Defeated

“Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God”

2. God's Pledge -- The Indwelling Holy Spirit

“who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”

Charles Swindoll: The full realization of salvation is not to be naked but to be clothed in new, immortal bodies at the time of the Resurrection. As Paul says in **Philippians 3:20-21**, “*For our citizenship is [present tense] in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state*

into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

We await the fulfillment of this promise because we know with **certainty** that it will one day come to pass. How? Because God gave us His Holy Spirit as a “*pledge*,” a priceless deposit that guarantees what has been promised will come to pass (**2 Cor. 5:5**). Though our present, earthly body is wasting away, we can count on a new, glorious body to replace it one day.

Scott Hafemann: The NIV obscures the fact that the same verb used in **5:5** to refer to God’s having prepared Paul for the future by granting him the Spirit (*katergazomai*) is used in **4:17** to describe his “*achieving ... an eternal glory*” through his present afflictions. Here too, as in **2:14 – 3:3**, suffering and the Spirit come together. Without the Spirit, the adversities of **4:17** would not seem temporary and slight. But without the adversities, the hope generated by the reception of the Spirit would lose its force. So God prepares his people by giving them a foretaste of the glory to come, in order that the suffering of this present age might be put into its proper perspective. And he gives them suffering so that the glory to come might be put into its proper perspective as well.

David Garland: He finds great joy and comfort in this life, despite its sufferings, because of the Spirit. The Spirit’s presence in the lives of believers betokens that some of the splendor of the world to come has already broken into this present evil age. The writer of Hebrews recognizes this truth when he speaks of those “who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted God’s good word and the powers of the coming age” (**Heb 6:4–5**).

How do Christians know that the promise of a heavenly existence is real? Paul’s answer is that the experience of the transforming and uplifting power of the Holy Spirit now in their lives is the one piece of empirical evidence that shows God’s promises are real. Paul had no need to convince the Corinthians of the Spirit’s transforming power, and he appeals to it to make his case for the amazing transformation that awaits Christians at death.

II. (5:6-10) TWO RESULTS OF THIS LONGING FOR FUTURE GLORY

A. (:6-8) Future Glory Inspires Courage

“Therefore, being always of good courage”

1. Because We Recognize the Limitations of This Earthly Life

“and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord”

David Guzik: As it is true that to be absent from the body means we will be present with the Lord, it proves two false doctrines to be false. It refutes the false doctrine of “soul sleep,” (saying that the believing dead are held in some sort of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs) and the false doctrine of “purgatory” (saying

that the believing dead must be “cleaned up” through their own suffering before coming into the presence of God).

2. Because We Walk by Faith Not by Sight
“for we walk by faith, not by sight”

Scott Hafemann: Verses 8–9 restate verses 6–7, unpacking the implications of what it means to know that one is still “away from the Lord” and of what living by faith looks like. In regard to the former, viewing the present from the perspective of the future means that our values and desires are radically altered. Instead of desiring a prolonged life on earth, we prefer to be “at home with the Lord” (cf. **Phil. 1:23**). Concerning the latter, living by faith is being confident that the eternal glory of “*what is unseen*” is certain and secure for believers and that it “*far outweighs*” any suffering of this world (**4:17–18**), so that the believer would trade this world for the world to come in a moment (**5:8**). Hence, to live by faith also means that, “*whether we are at home in the body or away from it*”—that is, whether we live or die—we aim to please the Lord, not ourselves (**5:9**; cf. **5:15**; **Phil. 3:1–13**; cf. **Rom. 12:1–2**; **14:17–18**; **Eph. 5:10**; **Phil. 4:18**; **Col. 3:20**). . .

The main point of **5:1–10**, therefore, is Paul’s ambition to please the Lord in walking by faith (**5:7a, 9**). This ambition is rooted in his courage during this life (**5:6a, 8a**) because of his confidence in the resurrection of the righteous (**5:1–5**) and his awareness of the universal judgment to come (**5:10**). He is thus motivated both by the positive appeal of God’s promises and by the negative prospect of Christ’s judgment against all that is “bad.” . . .

We often hear people say or imply that they have no trouble believing God, just obeying him. For Paul, such a dichotomy is nonsense, a self-contradiction. Any attempt to separate faith from works runs aground on the fact that in one and the same passage Paul can speak of living by faith (**5:7**) and of being judged by deeds (**5:10**). Indeed, the goal of Paul’s entire life as the apostle to the Gentiles is to bring them to “*the obedience that comes from faith*” (**Rom. 1:5**; cf. **15:18**; **16:26**; **1 Thess. 1:3**; **2 Thess. 1:11**), since only this kind of faith in God’s promises glorifies God (cf. **Rom. 4:18–25**). . .

Love, as the fulfillment of the law, is the manifestation of genuine faith and hope (cf. **Rom. 13:8–10**; **Gal. 5:6, 13–14**; **6:2**; **1 Thess. 1:3**). For this reason, judgment takes place according to works, in order to vindicate publicly God’s work in the hearts of those who have been changed by the power of the Spirit. Deeds are the means of evaluation in the courtroom of God’s judgment, since they establish the genuine nature of the claim to trust God. In short, rather than being added to faith, obedience to God’s will is the visible manifestation of faith.

In order to bring this passage into our context, we must consequently be careful never to call into question the most fundamental fact of all reality: God in Christ is the one who saves (cf. **5:16–21**). Nothing we do has or ever will earn or purchase our salvation. Salvation, including our trusting God for it, is the gift of God made possible by Christ

(**Rom. 4:1–8; 5:8–9; 6:23; Eph. 2:8–9**). We must reject all attempts to consider our works our contribution to God’s saving work on our behalf. This is true whether they are the “bad works” that we think make us special or deserving in God’s sight before we are saved (cf. **Rom. 4:2–4**), or the “good works” that God himself brings about in our lives through his Spirit (cf. **Eph. 2:10**). All we bring to God is our desperate need for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. All our acts in Christ are the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22**) and of his own righteousness (**Phil. 1:11**), which therefore rebound to God’s glory, not ours (cf. **Matt. 5:16**).

3. Because We Prefer Our Eternal Home

*“we are of good courage, I say,
and prefer rather to be absent from the body
and to be at home with the Lord.”*

Ray Stedman: I love that phrasing. Notice how it is put here. The word is used both for our life in the body and our coming presence with the Lord. They are both said to be an experience of being “*at home*.” What does that mean? Well, you feel “*at home*” in your body, don’t you, right now? You do not feel strange in it. You do not feel unnatural. You feel relaxed. You would feel very strained and unnatural if you did not have your body. You feel at home in it. That is what it means. Now, using the same language, the apostle says when you leave this earthly body and are given the body of glory that is awaiting you, you will be at home there too. It will be an experience not of strain or difference, but natural. In fact, later on in this letter, in Chapter 12, he speaks of being caught up into the third heaven into the very presence of God. He says, “*I didn’t know whether I was in the body or out of it. I couldn’t tell. I felt so much at home it didn’t make any difference,*” (cf., **2 Cor, 12:3**).

That is an encouragement to us that what we are headed toward is not something dreadful or so terribly different that we need to be afraid. We will be at home with the Lord, in his very presence, seeing him no longer only with the Spirit within, but face to face. If it is true, as Peter puts it, that “*Without having seen him you love him*” (cf., **1 Pet 1:8**), how much more will that be true when we see him face to face? So we are nerved to go through the difficulty of these days and to be of good courage because we are heading into light instead of darkness.

Charles Swindoll: Yes, to be absent from this mortal body is to be present with the Lord, just as Jesus promised the thief on the cross, “*Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise*” (**Luke 23:43**). There is no hint of “soul sleep,” an unconscious hiatus before resurrection in which we rest until Christ returns. Also, the idea of a purgatorial cleansing in some intermediate state does not fit this passage. To depart this earthly life through physical death—to be absent from the body—means to be present with the Lord. Paul is not suggesting, however, that this is the final experience of our resurrection. Those who die before Christ returns, then, will be with Him, awaiting the time of His return to resurrect their bodies and rapture the church, when all of us will be rewarded for our faithful service in the glories of His kingdom (**Matt. 19:28-29; Rev. 3:21**).

In fact, it may be that when Paul says God will “bring with Him [Jesus] those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (1 Thes. 4:14), he is referring to Christ descending from heaven with the disembodied souls of the saints that had died prior to His second coming. These souls would then be reunited with their resurrected, glorified bodies (1 Thes. 4:16) and caught up with the transformed living saints (1 Thes. 4:17).

George Shillington: For Paul, the fulfillment is to be exiled from the mortal body and thus to be at home with the Lord. To be at home with the Lord **requires a body** like that of the Lord, a resurrection body (see again 1 Cor. 15:42-57). His preference is to live in full vision of his Lord in a body like the Lord’s. The point is not that “Paul prefers nakedness to present life” (R. Martin, 1986:112; cf. Kruse: 117). **Nakedness is not at issue in this paragraph. The comparison, rather, is between the imperfect experience of Christ while at home in a tentlike body, and the full glory of being at home with Christ in a building from God, a resurrection body.**

John MacArthur: The **reality of death** faces every believer who dies before the Lord raptures the church. Those who look forward to receiving their glorified bodies, to the perfections of life in heaven, to the fulfillment of God’s purpose for them, and to living forever in His presence will be able to say triumphantly with Paul, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

R. Kent Hughes: Paul desired ultimate fellowship with the Lord. Certainly in his earthly body he knew the Lord, as does every believer. But to be “at home with the Lord” encompasses warmth of fellowship that is wholly active and reciprocal with live face-to-face exchange. Paul sees this in his future and thus longs assuredly for his resurrection body in which he will be at home with the Lord.

We must not fail to miss a telling implication — which is that Paul does not desire a prolonged life on earth!

B. (:9-10) Future Glory Inspires Commitment

1. (:9) Single-minded Ambition

“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.”

Jason Meyer: Paul aims only to please the Lord because he will answer only to the Lord.

2. (:10) Sobering Accountability

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Charles Swindoll: Christ will not judge believers to determine innocence or guilt. That judgment of “not guilty” already was rendered when God declared us righteous at our conversion because of the saving death of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of the finished work of Christ, received as our own by faith in Him, our resurrection is guaranteed and our place in the kingdom of heaven is permanently assured (Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 1:22;

5:5). At the judgment seat of Christ, however, our future reward in the kingdom of God will be determined by the quality of our deeds and the motives behind them (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:4-5).

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Our eternal home is with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We live as pilgrims in this world and in the tent of this temporary body. Our permanent dwelling is a building from God.
- 2) Presently we *walk by faith* in Jesus Christ, complete dependence upon His guidance and strength.
- 3) We measure everything we do up against the one motive of striving to *please Jesus*. That is the focus of all of our ambition. (cf. the movement: What Would Jesus Do?)
- 4) We live soberly in light of the absolute accountability we will face before the *judgment seat of Christ*.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of resurrection body and heavenly home are you anticipating?
- 2) What are some of your groanings associated with this present earthly body?
- 3) How does this passage argue against some type of permanent bodiless existence?
- 4) How does the concept of the judgment seat of Christ reconcile with the truth that Christ has delivered us from all condemnation and completely forgiven us of our sins?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Homer Kent: What about the intermediate state of the believer between death and resurrection?

A third view sees here a possible reference to an intermediate body which the believer has until the resurrection. One should not be dogmatic about this because the biblical evidence is not certain; however, this passage could be interpreted in this manner. To see here a reference to an intermediate body would answer Paul's concern that the loss

of his physical body by death would leave him naked. If the “*building from God*” is the resurrection body, then he would be naked until the resurrection. Furthermore, there is some biblical evidence for intermediate bodies between death and resurrection. Moses and Elijah were not disembodied spirits at the transfiguration, but did possess visible bodies (**Matt. 17:3**, et. al.). The martyrs of the tribulation wore white robes after their deaths but prior to their resurrection (**Rev. 6:9-11**). If anyone questions that an intermediate body would by definition not be “*eternal*” as this verse states, the answer could be found in the similar terminology used regarding the kingdom. It is described as lasting one thousand years (**Rev. 20:1-5**), and at other times as being eternal (**Rev. 11:15**). Apparently, it merges into the eternal state and yet its basic character is not significantly changed.

William Barclay: He [Paul] is not looking for a Nirvana with the peace of extinction; he is not looking for absorption in the divine; he is not looking for the freedom of a disembodied spirit; he is waiting for the day when God will give him a new body, a spiritual body, in which he will still be able, even in the heavenly places, to serve and adore God. . . He saw eternity not as escape into nothingness, not as release into permanent inaction, but as the entry into life and into a body in which service could be complete.

Bob Deffinbaugh: There is something wrong with the world in which we live. There is something temporary and incomplete about these bodies in which we dwell. Our earthly groaning reminds us that we live in a fallen world, and that these bodies and this earth are to be replaced by something far better. Do we groan? We should. This groaning will be replaced by constant rejoicing, as we inhabit our new bodies in the eternal presence of our God.

For this reason, destruction of the earthly body does not distress Paul. Our earthly body will be replaced by a vastly superior body. And we come to possess our new bodies by the death of our old ones. It is something like the old Opel Kadett I once owned. Since I had a replacement for it, literally the old one was headed for the metal rendering plant. After removing all the parts I wanted to keep, I let the kids go out in the driveway with hammers and pound on it. They loved that, and I enjoyed watching them destroy it. Why should I care, when I had something better to take its place? And so Paul is not hesitant to boldly preach Christ, even though men will persecute him, and his lifestyle in ministry will take a heavy toll on his body. This only hastens the day when his better body will be given to him.

David Garland: Three premises guide the interpretation of the following verses.

- (1) The burning conviction that radiates from Paul’s discussion of Jesus’s death and resurrection is that those who are conformed to his death and suffer with him will assuredly be glorified with him (**Rom 8:17**).
- (2) Death does not shatter the Christian’s intimate union with Christ in this life, even for a moment. On the contrary, death perfects that union (**Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 4:17; 5:10**).
- (3) Paul’s declaration that we have a building from God clearly implies that

“man is not immortal because he possesses or is a soul. He becomes immortal because God transforms him by raising him from the dead.”

Ray Stedman: How could those people who died receive a resurrection body when their bodies are still lying unresurrected in the grave?" Many explanations have been offered for this, but there are basically three of them: One says, "We really are disembodied. When we die we go to be with the Lord in spirit, but our bodies are buried in the grave so we have to wait incomplete until the body is raised. It may take centuries, but we are just waiting around in bodiless existence." In the light of this passage, that teaching cannot be accepted. Paul says he does not want to be disembodied, he does not expect to be, and he who has prepared him for the very opposite is God himself. Then there is another suggestion that what happens when we die is that both our soul and our spirit go to sleep within the body, and there is no sense of communication or experience. As often happens when we physically go to sleep, we wake up and we do not know how long we have been asleep. Time is eclipsed, and that this is what happens. We may sleep for centuries in the body and when we are wakened at the resurrection it is to us as though nothing has happened in the meantime. But the problem with that suggestion is that it does not do justice to the expressions in scripture that speak of being with the Lord immediately. "*While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord,*" Paul says in the very next verse. But to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. In Philippians he speaks of departing and "*being with Christ; which is far better,*" (**Phil 1:23** KJV). Every suggestion is one of an immediate access to that. There are some who propose still a third alternative. They say that God gives us in the meantime an intermediate, a temporary body to use in eternity until our real one gets there -- a kind of heavenly bathrobe which we wait around in while our real one is getting back from the cleaners. But once again there is not a vestige of Scripture to support that. There is no reference to an intermediate body.

What Paul means, of course, is that when we leave this body we also leave time. Our problem comes because we do not do that in our thinking. We project time into eternity and say it is the same thing going on forever, but it is not. Anyone who studies carefully in this area has to distinguish sharply between the conditions of eternity and those of time. The characteristic of time is that we are all locked into the same rigid sequence of events. We all experience 24-hour days because on this earth it takes that long for the earth to rotate on its axis and nobody can speed it up. Some of you cannot by choice live 12 hour days while the rest of us have to make out with 24.

But in eternity there is no past or future, there is simply one great present moment. Therefore, the events we experience in eternity are never anything we have to wait for, they are always what we are ready for, what we are spiritually prepared for. This passage says that God has been spiritually preparing us for something, and that event is the coming of the Lord for his own, the return of Christ for his church, for each individual believer. Therefore, the Scriptures clearly teach that when a believer dies, what he experiences immediately is the coming of the Lord for his own. Paul describes that event in **First Thessalonians 4**, "*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,*" (**1 Th 4:16a** KJV). With him will come all those who have been dead in Christ so that it will appear to

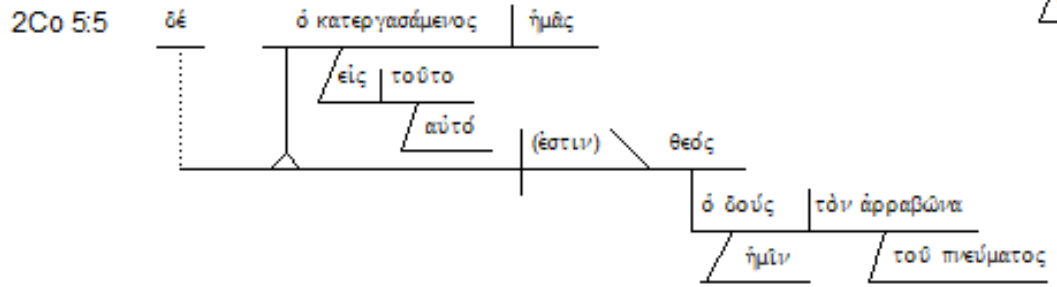
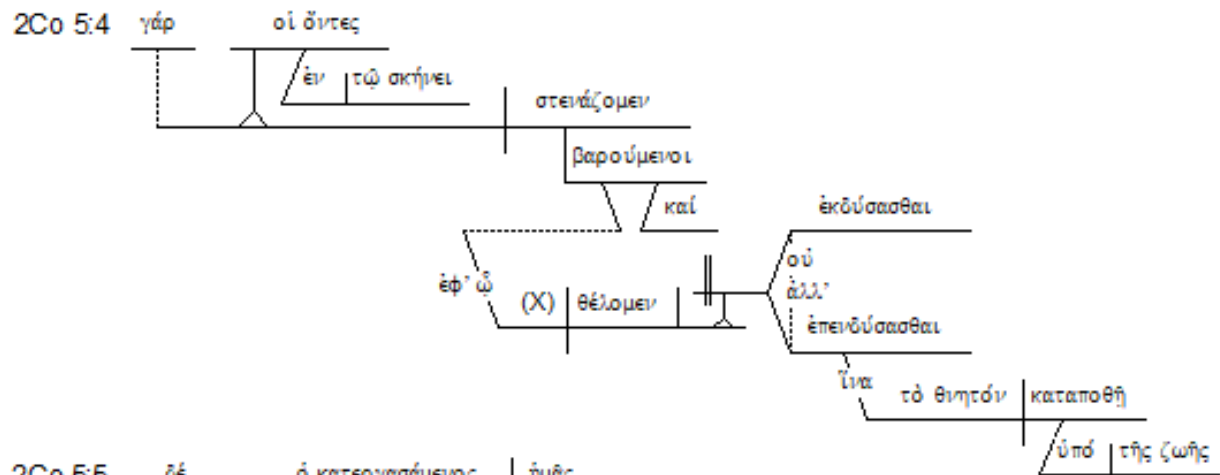
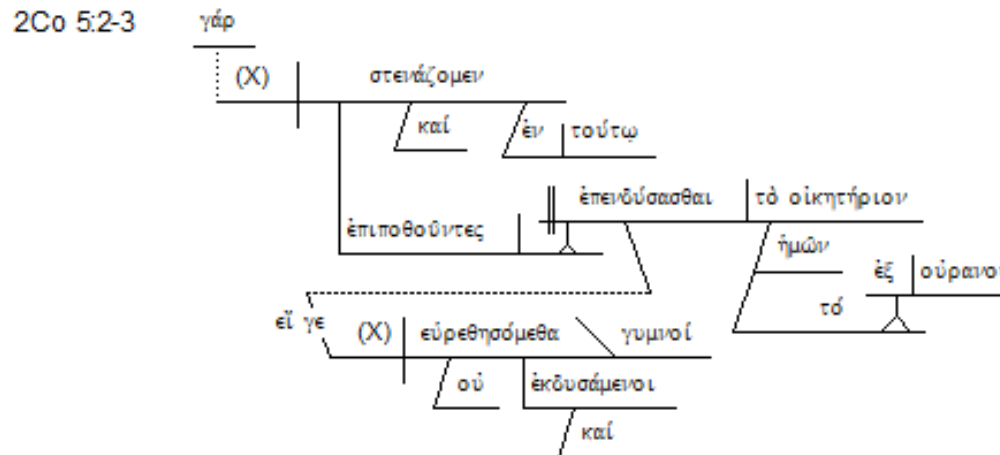
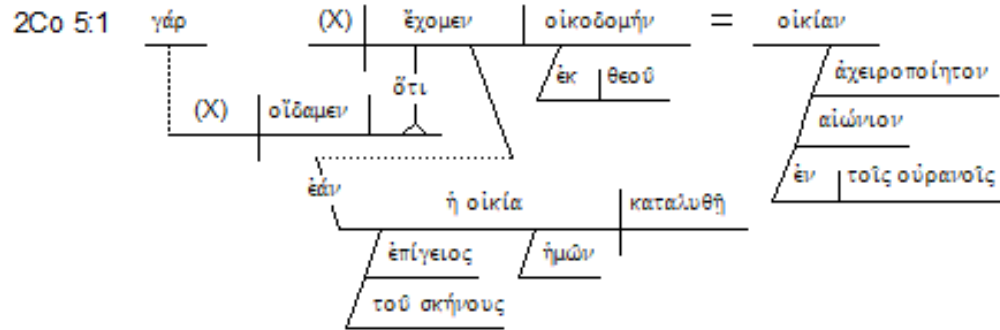
those left on earth as though they had already been raised first when in actuality we are all raised together, "*and so shall we ever be with the Lord,*" (1 Th 4:17b KJV). This is the experience that awaits us immediately.

Guzik: i. The Greek philosophers thought that to be a bodiless spirit was the highest level of existence. They thought of the body as a prison for the soul, and saw no advantage in being resurrected in another body.

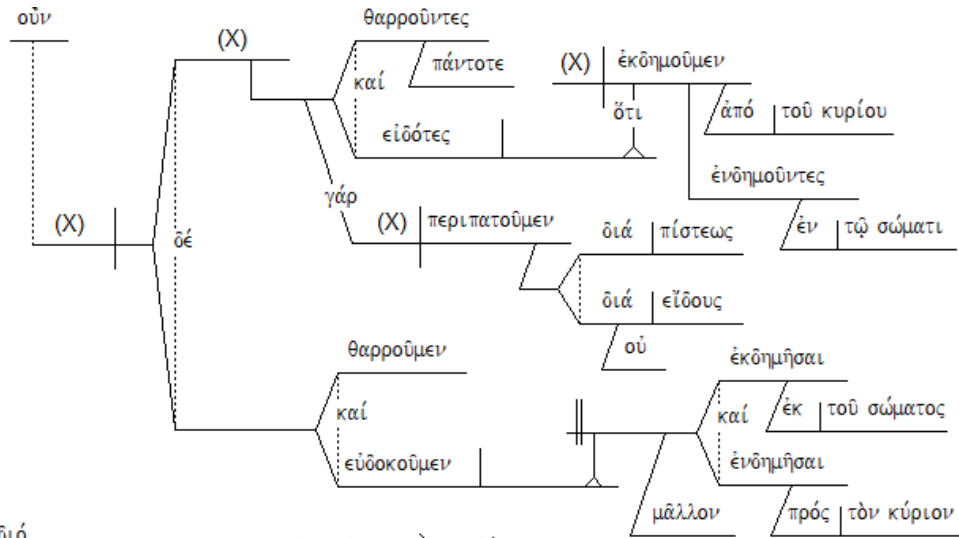
ii. But to God, the body itself is not a negative. The problem isn't in the body itself, but in these sin corrupted, fallen bodies that we live in. Jesus approved the essential goodness of the body by becoming a man. If there was something inherently evil in the body, Jesus could never have added humanity to His deity.

Harris: Appearance before Christ's tribunal is the privilege of Christians. It is concerned with the assessment of works and, indirectly, of character, not with the determination of destiny; with reward, not status. Judgment on the basis of works is not opposed to justification on the basis of faith. Delivered from "*the works of the law*" (Rom 3:28), the Christian is presently committed to "the work of faith," "action stemming from faith" (1 Thess 1:3), that will be assessed and rewarded at the *bema* ("tribunal"). Yet not all verdicts will be comforting. The believer may "*suffer loss*" (1 Cor 3:15) by forfeiting Christ's praise or losing a reward that might have been his.

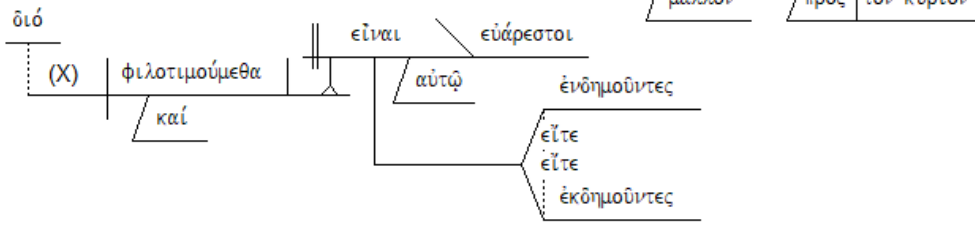
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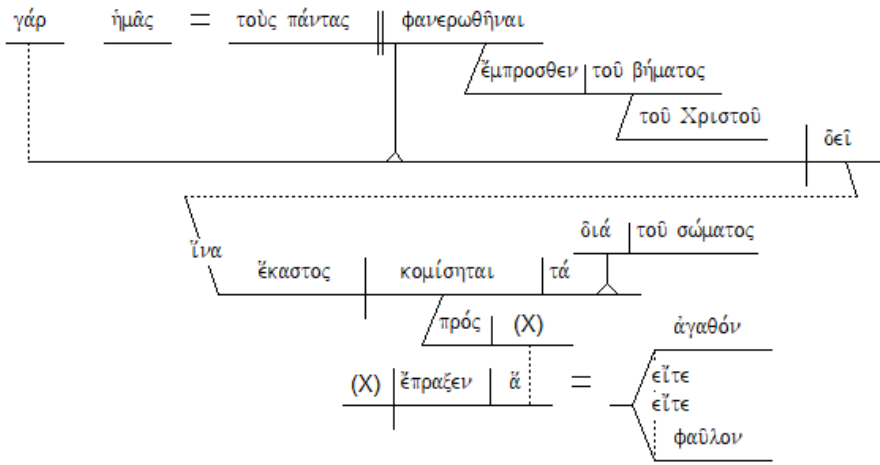
2Co 5:6-8



2Co 5:9



2Co 5:10



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:2

TITLE: *THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION*

BIG IDEA:

GOD’S WORK OF RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST MOTIVATES US TO PURSUE A MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION WITH INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION:

Talking both about reconciliation of the unsaved (many of Paul’s opponents who were putting themselves forwards as teachers were actually unsaved) as well as the Corinthian believers putting aside whatever sin was affecting their relationship with the Apostle Paul and hence with God.

Scott Hafemann: In **5:6–10**, Paul drew the first conclusion that comes from knowing that his eternal home was secure with Christ, the sovereign judge of all humanity. From such knowledge comes his own **courageous ambition to please the Lord** through walking by faith (**5:7a, 9**). In **5:11 – 6:2**, this same awareness leads to an equally **courageous commitment to persuade others** to join him in living in a way that pleases God (**5:11a, 14–15, 21**). In view of Paul’s self-defense (**5:11b–13**) and his self-understanding as “*Christ’s ambassador*” (**5:18 – 6:2**), this persuasion has as its goal the acceptance of the gospel as it is proclaimed and embodied in Paul’s ministry.

Frank Matera: The material of the unit, as noted above, can be divided into three subunits.

1. In the first (vv. **11–13**) Paul defends his personal integrity.
2. In the second (vv. **14–17**), he explains how the death of Christ undergirds his ministry. These verses fall into two parts: **verses 14–15**, which appear to be indebted to traditional material about the significance of Christ’s death, and **verses 16–17**, each of which begins with *hōste* (“so”), thereby providing supporting arguments for what Paul says in **verses 14–15**.
3. In the third subunit (vv. **18–21**) Paul introduces the theme of reconciliation, which provides him with yet another way to describe his ministry: as the minister of a new covenant, his ministry is one of **reconciliation**.

These verses can also be divided into two parts.

1. In the first (vv. **18–19**) there is a remarkable focus on the role of God in reconciling humanity to himself through Christ.
2. In the second (vv. **20–21**) Paul presents himself as Christ’s ambassador, who calls people to the reconciliation that God has initiated (v. **20**), and concludes with a remarkable description of the divine interchange that God has effected in Christ (v. **21**).

Thus the whole unit moves from an affirmation of Paul’s apostolic integrity to a description of him as Christ’s ambassador, who exercises the ministry of reconciliation.

John MacArthur: Though there is variety in **leadership styles**, several common qualities are indispensable, especially for effective spiritual leaders.

First, leaders who make an impact are **focused**. They have a clearly defined mission, which they pursue with unrelenting clarity of purpose.

Second, leaders who have an impact are **internally motivated**. They do not usually depend on favorable external factors to achieve.

Third, leaders who impact are **courageous**. They are usually so dedicated to their tasks and goals that they refuse to back down in the face of adversity or be stopped by hindrances or obstacles.

Fourth, leaders who succeed are **knowledgeable**. They understand what they need to know, are sure of what they believe, and are eager to learn more.

Fifth, leaders who make an impact are **strong**. They have the strength to endure the arduous, difficult labor that achievement demands.

Sixth, for leaders to have an impact they need to be **optimistic**, to believe the best about their plans and their people.

Seventh, leaders who ennoble others are **enthusiastic and persuasive**. They generate a contagious excitement about their visions and ministries that enables them to enlist the eager support of others.

Eighth, effective leaders are **willing to take risks**. They put everything on the line for what they believe must be done.

Ninth, leaders who have an impact are **skilled communicators**. They can articulate their visions, ideas, and plans effectively so as to motivate those with them.

Tenth, leaders who impact are **imaginative**. They are usually not content with maintaining the status quo but pursue greater things.

Finally, impactful leaders tend to be **independent**, strong enough to stand and survive on their own.

Tying all those essential qualities together is **consistency** or **integrity**. Without it, the rest of the above-mentioned leadership qualities add up to nothing more than superficiality. Integrity solidifies and unites all the other qualities; it is the glue that holds all attitudes and actions together.

Integrity (from the Latin word *integer*, “entire”) may be defined as the condition or quality of being **undivided**. It describes those who adhere to their ethical or moral

standards without hypocrisy or duplicity. People with integrity lead lives that are one with their stated convictions; they “practice what they preach.” They are honest, sincere, and incorruptible. In biblical terms, those with integrity are “*above reproach*”—a quality that is to characterize all believers (**Phil. 2:15; 1 Tim. 5:7**), but especially elders (**1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6–7**).

The Bible stresses the value of integrity by **condemning hypocrisy**. Jesus repeatedly denounced the religious leaders of His day as hypocrites (**Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 22:18; Luke 12:1, 56; 13:15**). . .

Leaders must also **protect their integrity against the false accusations** that could destroy it. It is this second aspect of guarding integrity that prompted Paul to write. He knew the importance not only of guarding his life against sin but also of guarding his reputation against lies. As has been noted in previous chapters of this volume, the theme of this epistle is Paul’s defense of his integrity (cf. **2 Cor. 1:12–13; 2:17; 3:5; 4:2, 5; 5:9–10; 6:3–4, 11; 7:2; 8:20–21; 10:7; 11:5–6, 30; 12:11–12; 13:5–6**). The apostle’s credibility was under attack from false teachers who had infiltrated the church at Corinth (cf. **6:8**). Before they could get a hearing for their lies, they first had to tear down Paul’s credibility in the minds of the people. Though their accusations were false, they were nonetheless dangerous; if the Corinthians believed the allegations, confidence in the Word of God through Paul would be destroyed.

Sadly, the false teacher’s slanderous lies had convinced many in the Corinthian assembly that Paul was not a man of integrity. His usefulness as an authoritative messenger of divine truth hung in the balance. It was that danger that motivated Paul to defend himself for the sake of the truth and the God of truth.

But Paul faced a dilemma. If he did not defend himself, the Corinthians might abandon him in favor of the false teachers. Yet if he did defend himself, he left himself open to the charge that he was pridefully commending himself. To refute the false accusation that he was guilty of self-commendation, Paul was forced to give a defense of himself.

The key to understanding this passage lies in the meaning of the verb *peithō* (*persuade*). Some commentators believe that it refers to persuading people of the truth of the gospel, as it does in **Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28**; and **28:23–24**. But the gospel is not the issue in 2 Corinthians; this is not primarily an evangelistic epistle. Paul was not trying to persuade the Corinthian believers of the truth of the gospel, but rather of the **truth of his integrity**. Therefore, *peithō* could be better rendered “*seek the favor of*,” as it is in **Galatians 1:10**. Paul sought a **favorable judgment** from the Corinthians on his integrity.

(:10) Context: Judgment Seat of Christ

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

5 MOTIVATIONS TO PURSUE RECONCILIATION

I. (5:11-13) **CONSTRAINED BY THE FEAR OF GOD – ACCOUNTABILITY DRIVES OUR MINISTRY URGENCY AND INTEGRITY**

A. (:11a) **Motivation Stated = Fear of God**

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord”

Raymond Collins: As a wise man, Paul conducts his life and his activity in **awe** of the ever-present Lord. The judicial imagery of the previous verse (5:10) suggests that Paul has evoked the biblical notion with a particularly Pauline nuance. First of all, the “*Lord*” to whom his phrase makes reference is none other than Christ, who was mentioned in the preceding verse. In addition, 5:10’s mention of the judgment seat suggests that, for Paul, the biblical concept is not without some sense that the Lord in whose presence a person stands in awe is a judge. The Lord’s judgment might well provoke fear in those who do not follow his ways.

The “*fear of the LORD*” is a well-known biblical idea that refers to the awe that human beings experience in the presence of God (cf. **Pss. 34:11; 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26; 15:16, 33; 19:23; Sir. 1:12; Eccles. 8:12–13; 12:13**; etc.). The fear of the Lord is a way of speaking about a person’s profound reverence in the presence of God.

David Garland: Fear refers to a religious consciousness, a reverential awe of God, that directs the way one lives. Paul does not live in unhealthy dread of God’s judgment because he knows the love of Christ who gave himself for him. His extraordinary experience of God’s love and forgiveness, however, does not deaden his consciousness that God remains a holy and righteous God. The “*fear of the Lord*” reappears in 7:1 (see 7:11). . .

The rich fool is a classic example of one who did not fear the Lord. He forgot to factor God into his successful business spreadsheet, and God calls him a fool (**Luke 12:20**). The epithet recalls the words of the psalmist who says, “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There’s no God’*” (**Ps 14:1**; see **Ps 36:1** cited in **Rom 3:18**). Persons may never say anything like this out loud, but they live as if there were no God, fooling themselves into believing that earthly realities such as money and power will somehow protect them from their tottering finitude as they plan how to make their futures more happy and secure. Others may try to anesthetize themselves from any perturbing fear of God. They contrive a sugary theology with an indulgent and permissive God who winks at all we do or have become. By contrast, Paul works knowing that God will scrutinize all he says and does.

B. (:11b) **Fear of God Makes Us Urgent Transparent Persuaders**

*“we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God;
and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”*

Nothing worse than persuasion that is crafty manipulation and exploitation.

Raymond Collins: Adding a complementary thought, *and I hope to be well known in your consciences*, Paul expresses the hope that in the depths of their consciences the Corinthians will be as convinced of Paul's apostolic integrity as God is. He hopes that they will fully appreciate what he has done among them and what he continues to do even as he writes to them. Paul wants them to know that his motivation and intentions are upright, despite the tensions that have arisen between him and some members of the Corinthian community.

Scott Hafemann: Paul does not reject the need to persuade (**5:11**), but he does reject relying on the persuasive techniques of rhetoric to do so, since his own reputation is not on the line, but the eternal destiny of God's people (cf. **1 Cor. 2:1–5**). It is not the power of human eloquence that persuades, but the presence of God's Spirit. Conversely, it is not the desire for recognition from others, but the fear of God that motivates Paul's persuasion.

C. (:12-13) Our Testimony of Integrity Not Self Serving

“We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”

Paul could defend himself with a clear conscience because he was innocent of the charges leveled against him by his opponents in Corinth.

When we have done something wrong there is a need for repentance as the foundation for reconciliation.

Charles Ryrie: Lit., *we went mad*, probably referring to some specific occasion when Paul's critics charged him with madness.

Paul Barnett: Paul's allusion to *those who take pride* (**12**) brings the newcomers into focus once more. In what do they take pride? It is *in what is seen*, their position (literally, 'face', *prosōpon*, **12**), which Paul explains as being out of their mind (**13**; cf. **Mark 3:21**), a reference to their **ecstatic behaviour**. It seems that the new ministers were seeking recognition on the basis of bizarre religious trances or gibberish, doubtless as a sign of their inspiration by God. . .

What matters is that the would-be minister is active in '*persuading*' others to become Christians and that he or she does so in a '**self-controlled**' way in the public exercise of ministry.

David Garland: Whoever they are, **they boast in appearances** — what is external, superficial, and transitory — instead of the heart — what is internal, essential, and eternal. Paul knows that what he is has been made plain to God. **First Samuel 16:7**

could provide a theological basis for his confidence. There the Lord warns Samuel that Eliab, Jesse's firstborn son, was not the one who was to be anointed by the prophet: "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.'" God chose the least expected one, the youngest of the sons. When humans make judgments based on appearances and normal expectations, they are likely to make false judgments. The visible realm is incomplete, illusive, and subject to the ravages of decay. Worldly primacy and power, even ecclesiastical power, does not always equate with success in God's eyes. The eternal realm provides the only definitive and lasting values from which to make sound spiritual judgments. The Corinthians are inclined to be biased by fleshly appearances and consequently have fallen for Paul's opponents and have failed to look at Paul's heart as God does. They should be making their judgments from the Spirit's vantage point rather than looking at such things as earthly status, worldly honor, and physical appearance.

R. Kent Hughes: Paul's healthy fear of the judgment seat of Christ induced him to place the public persuasion of people far above the pursuit of personal ecstasies. Knowing the fear of the Lord, Paul's consuming passion was to persuade others through the Scriptures about the truth of the gospel and the authenticity of his ministry, as they were inseparable. He did not need to persuade God, as God knew his heart and, likewise, the Corinthians would know it if they listened to their consciences. Paul argued his case so that the Corinthians would have a basis to boast about his apostolic heart.

II. (:14-15) CONSTRAINED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST -- CHRIST'S LOVE MAKES US MINISTER UNSELFISHLY

A. (:14a) Motivation Stated = Love of Christ

"For the love of Christ controls us"

Translation here could be "*holds us together*"; we have a desperate need for unity in the truth; not a bunch of separate cliques within one fellowship.

Paul Barnett: How is it possible to be motivated by the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ? Are not fear and love irreconcilable? It all depends on a proper understanding of fear and love, which, it should be noted, are not opposites. The opposite of love is hate. In the Bible 'fear' is not cringing terror but holy reverence, and 'love' is not romantic feelings but sacrificial care. The two words are consistent and reconcilable. Indeed, the fear of the Lord and awareness of the love of Christ fit perfectly together to provide the true motivation for Christian ministry.

Raymond Collins: The *love of Christ* about which he writes is not his love for Christ; rather, it is the love that Christ has for him. The genitive is a **subjective genitive** (*hē agapē tou Christou*), indicating that the love comes from Christ. The love that Christ has for the apostle overpowers him. It takes control of him and directs him to do what he does. Paul's verb can be translated in different ways, but in the context of this letter,

the connotation of the verb (*synechei*) is “taking control of and directing.” Essentially Paul is saying that the love of Christ provides direction and energy for his apostolic activity.

John MacArthur: It controlled him. *Synechei*? (*controls*) describes **pressure that produces action**. The magnitude of Christ’s love for believers like Paul compelled him to serve Him wholeheartedly, as an act of grateful worship. If he were to be discredited and his ministry lost, he would lose that opportunity to express his gratitude to Christ through his ministry. That threat was a key factor that constrained the apostle to defend his integrity.

B. (:14b) Love of Christ Manifested in the Significance of His Death

“having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died”

We do not have to judge whether a specific Christian is worthy of our reconciliation; Christ died for him as well and he is worthy!

Scott Hafemann: Christ’s death “*for all*” brings about the “*death*” of “*all*” for whom he died (cf. the “*therefore*” of v. 14c). Together with Christ’s death as a model for his own behavior, this accomplished fact concerning the consequences of Christ’s death “*compels*” Paul in his ministry. The “*all died*” of 5:14 must therefore be limited to God’s people, otherwise Christ’s death would mean that all people are now a new creation in Christ, living for him rather than themselves (5:15–17). For Christ’s love-motivated death for all is not merely an example of what his people should do, but also the very means by which his followers are impelled and enabled to do it. Nor is the death of all in 5:14c merely a potential to be actualized by all people, but the compelling cause that leads those for whom Christ has died to follow him in their lives. Thus, the striking feature of Paul’s statement is that all those who died in 5:14 are then identified in 5:15 as those who now live, which is surely limited to those who actually participate in God’s salvation in Christ (cf. 5:21 – 6:1). Christ died for his people.

C. (:15) Love of Christ Manifested in the Significance of His Resurrection

“and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

Raymond Collins: One and many was the dominant antithesis in Paul’s speaking about the death of Christ; dying and living is the dominant antithesis as he writes about Christians. Believers have died to sin because of Christ; now they live for the sake of Christ, who died and was raised for them (1 Cor. 15:4–5; 1 Thess. 4:14).

David Garland: The gift of redemption that comes through Christ’s death and resurrection requires that we change the way we live. We are no longer to allow our selfish desires to twist the way we regard or treat others. To accept death with Christ so that our own longings, purposes, and securities are also put to death requires the risky venture of faith. Paul insists, however, that Christ controls the reins of his life so that he

no longer is driven to kick against the goads. He instead lives to serve others, particularly the Corinthians (4:12, 15; 5:13).

Scott Hafemann: This, then, is the **gospel** in a nutshell:

- (1) The basis of the gospel is Christ's love for his people (not his people's love for Christ or any other human characteristic, act, or distinctive);
- (2) as a result, Christ died for them (to atone for their sin and to free them from its power);
- (3) therefore, they too died (to their old way of life under the power of sin);
- (4) the consequence of Christ's death for them and their death in Christ is a new life lived out for others.

III. (:16-17) CONSTRAINED BY A RADICALLY NEW PERSPECTIVE -- WE EVALUATE MEN FROM A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

George Shillington: Of all the celebrated statements in Paul's letters, none surpasses that of **2 Corinthians 5:16 - 6:2** in lyrical grandeur, cosmic scope, theological depth, and emotional appeal. These elements combine to make it one of the more **complex** of Paul's arguments in this letter. . .

A closer examination of the whole argument (**5:16 - 6:2**) reveals how Paul employs reconciliation language and thought to convince the Corinthians to act accordingly.

OUTLINE

- New Creation out of the Old, **5:16-17**
- Reconciliation in Principle, **5:18-19**
- Reconciliation in Practice, **5:20-21**
- Transitional Word of Appeal, **6:1-2**

A. (:16a) Motivation Stated = Radically New Perspective

"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh"

B. (:16b) New Perspective Towards Christ Contrasted with the Old

"even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer."

Paul had made himself the standard and the judge; he was the one who decided what personality types he liked; etc. But now he (and we) must allow the Spirit to be the standard. We are to view others as a new creation in Christ.

Charles Ryrie: Before his conversion, Paul regarded Christ as merely another man.

Ray Stedman: What did he think of him? Why, he thought he was a lowdown, worthless rabble-rouser, a tub-thumping street preacher from a dirty little obscure town that nobody thought anything good could come out of. He thought because Jesus had no

political standing, no family position, no training and no education that he was worthless. He tried his best to exterminate the religion that gathered about him because he regarded him as an imposter and a phony.

Paul Barnett: Before the Damascus Road event Paul's knowledge of Jesus had also been '*according to the flesh*', not in the sense of having known the historical Jesus, but of having a false and superficial view of him. For Paul, Jesus had been a dangerous messianic pretender whose crucifixion was proof that he was indeed the accursed of God – for the Scriptures said, '*anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse*'.

But *from now on*, he writes, *he regarded Christ in this way . . . no longer* (16). At and since Damascus he became convinced (14) that in reality '*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*' (19, nasb). It became clear, in an instant, that the glorified, crucified one could only be the Son of God who in death received God's curse; not a false Messiah, but the divinely appointed agent through whom forgiveness and reconciliation would be mediated to sinful humanity. How shallow and erroneous Paul's earlier views of Jesus were compared with the new and profound appreciation of the unique figure who alone was qualified to '*die for all*'! Paul's stern opposition to the new ministers arose out of his conviction that Christianity stood or fell depending on one's view of the person and work of Jesus. False views of Jesus have been promoted throughout history, including in these present times. Such views must be as firmly opposed in our generation as they were then by Paul if the true gospel is to have its power to mediate salvation.

Raymond Collins: At one time Paul viewed Christ in a merely human fashion, specifically, perhaps, as a violator of the law and a deluded preacher whose disciples departed from what Paul believed to be the canons of Jewish orthodoxy. Consequently Paul persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13). Now Paul has a different idea about Christ; he no longer understands Christ as he did in the days when, as a zealous Pharisee, he persecuted the church of God.

C. (:17) New Perspective Towards Believers (and Self) Contrasted with the Old
*"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;
the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."*

Allows us to easily forgive one another and pursue reconciliation.

Paul Barnett: While Paul's reference to a *new creation* (17) summarizes the changes which occur within the life of any believer (*if anyone*), these changes are dramatically focused within his own life. Love was now the controlling motive (14) in place of hate. Serving the one who died for him had taken the place of selfishness (15). True understanding of Jesus, his identity and achievement have replaced ignorance and error (16).

David Garland: In this next verse Paul makes four crisp, antithetical statements. They are launched by a condition, "*If anyone is in Christ.*" This phrase, "*in Christ,*" can mean

several things that are not mutually exclusive: that one belongs to Christ, that one lives in the sphere of Christ's power, that one is united with Christ, and that one is part of the body of Christ, the believing community. Paul's assumption is that the new creation depends entirely upon being in Christ and that being in Christ brings about a radical change in a person's life. **Campbell** concludes that a believer's union with Christ involves the following:

- (1) Believers are situated in the realm of Christ rather than in the realm of sin and death (p. 408).
- (2) Believers are identified with Christ in the sense of belonging to and being under the lordship of Christ as opposed to belonging to fallen Adam and being committed to all that is opposed to God (p. 408).
- (3) Believers participate "in the events of Christ's narrative, including his death and burial, resurrection, ascension and glorification." Believers have been crucified with Christ, have been buried with Christ in baptism, and will be raised with Christ (**Rom 6:3–11**). Since they have participated in his fate, they will participate in his glorious destiny.
- (4) Believers are incorporated into Christ's mystical body and temple, the community that is "founded, shaped, and directed by Christ" (p. 409).
- (5) Believers receive the effects of God's will toward them through the instrumentality of Christ. They are saved "*through Christ*" because they are "*in Christ*."
- (6) Believers become immersed in the inner life of the Trinity and not simply limited to the relationship with Christ. "The Father's will is enacted through the Son, by the Spirit and for the glory of Christ and the benefit of humanity" (p. 409).

In other words, "In Christ are found redemption, forgiveness, election, salvation, reconciliation, peace, grace, vocation and holiness."

Philip Hughes: The expression "*in Christ*" sums up as briefly and as profoundly as possible the inexhaustible significance of man's redemption. It speaks of security *in Him* who has Himself borne in his own body the judgment of God against our sin; it speaks of acceptance *in Him* with whom alone God is well pleased; it speaks of assurance for the future *in Him* who is the Resurrection and the Life; it speaks of the inheritance of glory *in Him* who, as the only-begotten Son, is the sole heir of God; it speaks of participation in the divine nature *in Him* who is the everlasting Word; it speaks of knowing the truth, and being free in that truth, *in Him* who Himself is the Truth. All this, and very much more than can ever be expressed in human language, is meant by being "*in Christ*."

IV. (:18-21) CONSTRAINED BY A HEART FOR RECONCILIATION -- OUR CHANGED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THE BASIS FOR OUR RECONCILIATION WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS

A. (:18) Motivation Stated = Changed Heart

*“Now all these things are from God,
who reconciled us to Himself through Christ
and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”*

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s understanding of salvation as reconciliation most likely derives from his own conversion-call experience on the road to Damascus. In revealing to Paul his glory in Christ (cf. **4:4–6**), God reconciled the rebellious Paul to himself and gave him a ministry of reconciliation among the Gentiles (cf. **2:14; 5:16, 18–19** with **Gal. 1:12–16**).

John MacArthur: The glorious good news of the gospel is that the sin-devastated relationship between lost sinners and the holy God can be restored. That at first glance seems impossible. God’s perfect, infinite, righteous justice demands the punishment of all who violate His law. Standing before the bar of His justice are helpless, guilty sinners, unable either to satisfy God or to change their condition. But through God’s plan of reconciliation all the hostility, animosity, and alienation separating the Holy One and sinners vanishes, and those who were once His enemies become His friends. The high calling and noble privilege of preaching this message of reconciliation is the most important duty in the world, since it deals with eternal destinations.

B. (:19a) God’s Global Work of Reconciliation in Christ

*“namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,
not counting their trespasses against them,”*

David Garland: Paul is the only NT author to use the noun “reconciliation” (*katallagē*) and the verb “to reconcile” (*katallassein*). When the verb is used in the active voice, Christ or God is always the subject. When it is used in the passive voice, humans are the subject. In other words, “God reconciles; man is reconciled.” Reconciliation assumes broken relationships, alienation, and disaffection. The problem is not with God, as if God were some cruel taskmaster from whom humans rebelled. Human sinfulness created the problem, and this sinful condition had to be dealt with before there could be any reconciliation. Sin incurs God’s holy wrath, so it could not be treated lightly or swept under the rug. God can never be reconciled to sin, but God does not turn away from sinners in disgust and leave them to their just desserts. Instead, while humans were still in open revolt, God acted in love (**Rom 5:8**) to bring the hostility to an end and to bring about peace (see **Rom 5:1**; see **Isa 32:17**). This peace is not simply a cessation of hostilities or an uneasy truce. It refers to the mending of the broken relationship that results from God justifying us (making us right) through faith and changing us from enemies to friends. It is important to recognize that sinful humans do not reconcile themselves to an angry God. Instead, a loving God has taken the initiative in reconciliation, and our reconciliation and being put right comes through Christ’s death and our being in Christ (**5:21**).

John MacArthur: Sinners cannot be reconciled to Him on their own terms. Unregenerate people have no ability to appease God’s anger against sin, satisfy His

holy justice, or conform to His standard of righteousness. They are guilty of fatally violating God's law and face eternal banishment from His presence. The deadly, deceptive premise of all false religion is that sinners, based on their own moral and religious efforts and achievements, can reconcile themselves to God. But God alone designed the way of reconciliation, and only He can initiate the reconciliation of sinners; that God ... reconciled us to Himself is precisely the good news of the gospel.

God so loved the world that He made the way of reconciliation. He desired to reconcile sinners to Himself—to make them His children. Such a desire is not foreign to God's holy character but consistent with it. One of the glorious realities of God's person is that He is a Savior by nature.

From before the foundation of the world, God freely and apart from outside influence determined to save sinners in order to eternally display the glory of His grace. He chose those He would rescue from His own wrath on sin and wrote their names in the Book of Life. He is no reluctant Savior; in fact, Scripture frequently gives Him that title (**Ps. 106:21; Isa. 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; Hos. 13:4; Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6; Jude 25**).

From **Genesis 3:8–9** where God said, "*Where are you?*" He has been seeking to save sinners. **Ezekiel 34:16** says, "*I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick.*" He Himself is the eager reconciler, as Paul wrote to the Romans:

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:9–11)

It is to God's plan through Jesus Christ that we owe the gratitude for our reconciliation.

The phrase *reconciling the world* must not be understood as teaching **universalism**, the false doctrine that all people will be saved. If God has reconciled the world, universalists simplistically argue, then the barrier between God and man has been removed for all, and everyone will be saved. . .

the universal language (e.g., "*world*," "*all*," "*everyone*") in the above-mentioned passages must be understood as referring to **mankind in general. Christ did not die for all men without exception, but for all men without distinction.** World, in this context, indicates the sphere in which reconciliation takes place; it denotes the class of beings with whom God seeks reconciliation—**people from every national, racial, and ethnic group.**

R. Kent Hughes: Reconciliation is not something we do — it is something God has accomplished. The ministry of reconciliation is not telling people to make peace with God, but telling them that God has made peace with the world.

C. (:19b-20) Our Ministry of Reconciliation to Others

*“and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation;
Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ,
as though God were entreating through us;
we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

Raymond Collins: Being an **ambassador** entails being named or commissioned to serve in that capacity, speaking on behalf of the commissioning authority, and expecting to receive the respect that is owed to the authority. Conveying a message on behalf of the sending individual or group, an ambassador represents that authority. Paul’s ministry of reconciliation is a function of his ambassadorial role.

Ray Stedman: Why do we send ambassadors? Well, because countries do not always relate to each other very well. Things need to be explained, need to be approached with diplomacy and caution and carefulness. That is what an ambassador is to do. He is to be a representative of a government, handling himself with such care and confidence that the message that his government seeks to convey is given in the most painless and least offensive way possible. Now that is dangerous. You can get yourself killed or taken captive as an ambassador in this world today.

Charles Swindoll: The first obvious sign of our **transformed life** is to fulfill our **ministries of reconciliation** (*katallagē* [2643]; **2 Cor. 5:18-19**). God has commissioned each of us to show others that Jesus’ death on the cross paid for our sin, appeasing God’s wrath and bringing about forgiveness. His resurrection from the dead opened us up to a new life in relationship with Him through the powerful indwelling of the Spirit of resurrection (**Rom. 8:11**). To us, then, who have personally experienced this reconciliation with God, Christ has committed the message of reconciliation —the gospel of the person and work of Jesus Christ (**2 Cor. 5:19**). . .

Ambassadors represent their homeland and its messages, promoting its policies to the people among whom they live. Their country is often judged by their actions as their deeds are watched and their words scrutinized. The same is true for us. Our true home is in heaven; our true sovereign is the Lord Jesus Christ. As His ambassadors, we represent King Jesus to those around us, even though they do not acknowledge Him as their own sovereign Lord. **R. V. G. Tasker** gives a succinct description of our unusual role as ambassadors for Christ:

Ambassadors engaged upon human affairs are chosen especially for their tact, their dignity and their courtesy, and because they are gifted with persuasive powers. The ambassadors for Christ should show the same characteristics. They must never try to bludgeon men and women into the kingdom of God, but must speak the truth in love . . . by the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

Our task as ambassadors is simple: to “beg” others on behalf of Christ to “*be reconciled to God*” (5:20). The simple content of this message of reconciliation is succinctly stated: “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (5:21). This verse is the heart and soul of the saving power of the gospel. Jesus, the perfect God-man, the spotless Lamb of God, was made a sin offering in our place, just as Isaiah had prophesied centuries earlier, “*But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, if he would render Himself as a guilt offering*” (Isa. 53:10).

Through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we become the righteousness of God. A real transfer occurs at the Cross: We trade our guilt for His innocence. Having been declared righteous (justified), we are completely free of guilt and shame and have become full heirs of a glorious promise.

David Garland: For divine reconciliation to be complete, they need to be reconciled to the one who first preached the gospel of divine reconciliation to them.

The fundamental problem behind the Corinthians’ misunderstanding of Paul and the resulting friction is that they are not fully reconciled to God. It explains why the values of the pagan society with its hyperfactionalism, enmity, and power plays to gain supremacy and influence over others continue to influence their lives and to interfere with their obedience to God. It explains why they are so easily beguiled by false apostles. Paul tells them to be reconciled to God because they have fallen short on account of their bickering, sinful behavior, and participation with idols, all of which necessitate his frank reproof. Paul has made known his eagerness to be reconciled with the Corinthians and the provocateur who abused him (2:5–11), and later in the letter he rejoices at their repentance (7:12). He will not retract his bold criticism that caused the hard feelings just to win them back and gain an uncertain peace. The breach was caused by serious transgressions, and it is not enough to let bygones be bygones. He wants to purge them of all animosity and misgivings toward him so that he can then build on the reconciliation and strengthen the bonds between them and strengthen their Christian commitment, hence the renewed plea to be reconciled to God.

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s argument in 5:18–20 has made it clear that to be reconciled to God entails aligning oneself with Paul and his message. The Corinthians cannot claim to have received God’s grace while at the same time rejecting Paul’s ministry, since Paul is the one through whom God is making his appeal (5:20). As a result, Paul is concerned in 6:1 that those Corinthians who are still siding with his opponents, with their “*other*” Jesus, “*different spirit*,” and “*different gospel*” (11:4), may have accepted God’s grace “*in vain*.” He therefore urges them “*not to receive God’s grace in vain*” by returning to Paul’s gospel.

D. (:21) Substitutionary Atonement = Grounds for Reconciliation

*“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,
that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

Steve Zeisler: This word, "*righteousness*," is a magnificent term. Every desire you have for beauty, wholeness, value, purity; every time your heart calls to you to be something worth being, you are longing for the righteousness of God. "*Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'*" Our bodies were made for physical sustenance and call out for it when deprived even for a short time. Our souls were made to know righteousness, and a sensitive conscience implores us to be made right with God. "Be all that you can be," says the Army recruiting slogan, referring, of course, to this life. In some ways (on a much more profound level) this is the message of the Bible: "Be all that you can be." Be the righteousness of God himself in Christ. Jesus became sin so that we might become in him the righteousness of God. What a wonderful truth!

Raymond Collins: "*Righteousness*" is not a static concept. It is a matter of a relationship, of being in a proper relationship with God. Transformed by the righteousness of God, we express our righteousness by the way we behave in relationship to God and to those with whom God is in relationship, meaning all those who constitute humankind.

David Garland: The next question is whether Paul's sees this death as representative ("on behalf of us," "for our benefit") or substitutionary ("in our place"). **Hooker** argues for the representative position: "It is as man's representative, rather than as his substitute, that Christ suffers, and it is only as one who is fully human that he is able to do anything effective for mankind, by lifting man, as it were, into an obedient relationship with God." Widespread evidence, however, exists for the use of the preposition *hyper* in a substitutionary sense to mean "instead of another" or "in the place of another." **McLean** argues that "Christ does not become human in order to stand in solidarity with humanity but to stand in its place and to participate in a twofold imputation: he receives the burden of humanity's sin while humanity receives God's righteousness."

R. Kent Hughes: As to **how** God made him to be sin, we must first understand that it does not say that God made him to be a "sinner." This would do away with the ground of redemption. So then, how did God make Jesus, who never ceased being sinless, sin? Some would suggest that Jesus' being made sin means a "sin offering," which, of course, he was as the Lamb of God who fulfilled the Old Testament's vast promises. But I think that **Dr. Murray Harris** gets to the true depth of Christ's being made sin, as he explains:

It seems Paul's intent to say more than that Christ was made a sin offering and yet less than he became a sinner. So complete was the identification of the sinless Christ with the sin of the sinner, including its dire guilt and its dread consequences of separation from God, that Paul could say profoundly, "*God made him . . . to be sin for us.*"

Thus Christ became sin while remaining inwardly and outwardly impeccable. He became sin as our substitute and sacrifice.

John MacArthur: When repentant sinners acknowledge their sin (**Ps. 32:5**), affirm Jesus as Lord (**Rom. 10:9**), and trust solely in His completed work on their behalf (**Acts 4:12; 16:31**), God credits His righteousness to their account. On the cross God treated Jesus as if He had lived our lives with all our sin, so that God could then treat us as if we lived Christ's life of pure holiness. Our iniquitous life was legally charged to Him on the cross, as if He had lived it, so that His righteous life could be credited to us, as if we lived it. That is the doctrine of justification by imputation—the high point of the gospel. That truth, expressed so concisely and powerfully in this text, is the only cure for the sin plague.

V. (:6:1-2) CONSTRAINED BY URGENCY -- PROFITABLE CHRISTIAN SERVICE DEPENDS UPON IMMEDIATE RECONCILIATION

A. (6:2b) Motivation Stated = Urgency

“Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation”

R. Kent Hughes: The **urgency** with which Paul feels this is indicated by his twin repetitions of “*behold*” or “*look*.” Earlier he had said, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come*” (**5:17**). Here he passionately declares, “*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*” In other words, don't receive the grace of God in vain! Don't put it off! I implore you on behalf of Christ.

B. (6:1) Profitable Christian Service at Risk

*“And working together with Him,
we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain”*

Paul was working together with God because he was striving for the same goal; Christians should not be working against one another – **Deut. 22:10** “*You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together*” – sometimes God must marvel at what kind of animals we manifest ourselves to be.

Don't act like a donkey!

Danger of losing one's reward at judgment seat of Christ

Frank Matera: Since the Corinthians have called into question the apostolic integrity of the one who exercises this new covenant ministry of reconciliation among them, they will have received the grace of God in vain if they are not fully reconciled with Christ's ambassador; for one cannot be at enmity with the ambassador through whom God makes the appeal for reconciliation and still be reconciled with God. The appeal “*not to receive the grace of God in vain,*” then, is an appeal to be reconciled with Christ's ambassador.

Paul grounds this appeal in a quotation from **Isa 49:8** that reproduces the text of the Septuagint exactly. The text is part of the **Servant Song (Isa 49:1–13)** in which God calls the servant (**vv. 1–7**) and then announces the salvation that the servant will effect (**vv. 8–11**). Paul, however, interprets the text christologically and eschatologically. The “*favorable time*” and “*the day of salvation*” have occurred in the Christ event, by which God has reconciled humanity to himself (**5:14–21**). Consequently in commenting on this text Paul emphatically writes “*now*” is the favorable time and “*now*” is the day of salvation. Since God’s eschatological act of salvation has occurred in Christ, in whom God’s new creation has made its appearance, the Corinthians must respond to Christ’s ambassador “*now*”; otherwise they will have received the grace of God in vain.

C. (6:2a) God Stands Ready to Do His Part

“for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’”

Must deal with the conflict immediately; it takes priority; no time to try to schedule something for weeks down the road.

Murray Harris: In its original context the quotation belongs to a section of **Isaiah 49 (vv. 7-9)** where Yahweh directly addresses his Servant who has been “*deeply despised, abhorred by the nations*” (**Isa 49:7**, RSV), promising him vindication before men in due time and calling on him to carry out the work of restoration after the return from exile.

Richard Pratt: We are in the **day of great opportunity** because the final saving work of God has come to earth. Yet, we are in a day of great danger because failing to receive this salvation through enduring faith will bring a severe judgment. The New Testament age is the climax of history. There will be no possibility of salvation beyond the New Testament. Paul wanted the Corinthians to prove faithful because of the critical moment in history that they occupied.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) The “*fear of the Lord*” is not just an OT doctrine. Christ’s work as Judge of believers makes us sober-minded and circumspect in ordering our motivations and action to be pleasing to Him. The prospect of reward is very great.
- 2) The supreme love of Christ for us as shown in being made sin for us and dying for us should control all that we do and mortify our selfishness.
- 3) He rose again “*on our behalf*” so that we might live in right relationship with the Father and with one another with the power of a changed heart.

4) Christ is carrying out His present ministry through us ... so that the exhortations we make are actually coming from Him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we taking the initiative to perform the difficult work of confrontation in exhorting and persuading our Christian brothers and sisters to be reconciled where necessary?
- 2) Do we look at other believers through eyes of prejudice (or from a worldly external frame of evaluation such as status) or do we see believers as new creatures whose heart has been changed by God and who have become “*the righteousness of God in Him*”? Do we ever write somebody off? We do not have that right!
- 3) Are we living for ourselves or “*for Him who died and rose again on our behalf*”?
- 4) How well are we representing Christ as His ambassadors?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Murray Harris: As the “*therefore*” shows, this verse must be interpreted in close connection with what has immediately preceded, namely, the teaching concerning the judgment-seat of Christ before which all believes will be made manifest. . . Accordingly, when Paul speaks of “*persuading men*” here he is not referring to the evangelical duty of warning the ungodly of the wrath to come and pleading with them . . . but rather to the necessity which has regrettably been laid upon him of persuading certain members of the Corinthian church of the integrity of his personal character (see **1:12ff., 4:1f, 6:3ff., 7:2ff.**) and of the authenticity of his status as their apostle (see **3:1ff., 10:1ff.**). There is, indeed, a sense in which this whole epistle may be described as a vindication of his genuineness in face of the false reports and calumnies that were being circulated about him.

Robert Gromacki: To whom was the command given (“*be ye reconciled*”)? It may have been stated to the unbelieving element within the church. But it seems more plausible that Paul was addressing genuine Christians. They had already experienced spiritual reconciliation to God at their conversion. Now Paul wants them to be reconciled to God as dissident believers by accepting him as God’s representative. Thus, this is reconciliation within the family structure.

Ray Stedman: The primary characteristic of the “*judgment seat*” is that it is a time of disclosure to us of what has been hidden in the silent, inner reaches of our own hearts.

And not only a disclosure to us, but also to others. In fact, the word that is used here is a very interesting one. It says, "*we shall all appear.*" Literally it is, "we shall all be manifested," "we shall all be unveiled," in a sense, at the judgment seat of Christ, in the eyes of everyone. That is the point. This is the moment Jesus spoke of when he said, "Whatever is spoken in the secret places shall be shouted from the housetops." And it is described for us in the First Corinthian letter, Chapter 4, where Paul says, "*Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart,*" (1 Cor 4:5 RSV). That is what he is talking about. . .

Now many people ask the question, "Well, what about the rewards here? I'm interested in those." Let me tell you something. I have had to review and revise some of my concepts along this line. I was taught when I was a growing young Christian that all of those crowns, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, etc., that are mentioned in Scripture are the rewards you get at the judgment seat, if you deserve any rewards at all.

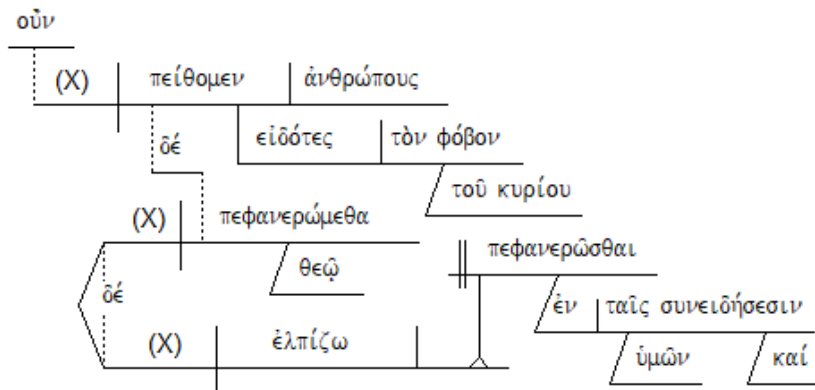
But I have come to see that is not true. A crown is a symbol, basically, of the gift of God to us, which is eternal life. Life in its various capacities, its various emphases and aspects are symbolized by crowns and they are always gifts in Scripture. You never earn a crown of glory. You never earn the crown of life. You cannot earn the crown of righteousness. Righteousness is a gift which none of us can earn. These are symbols, therefore, of the gift of eternal life which God gives us freely in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Well, then, what is it that you can win or lose at the judgment seat of Christ? The answer is, the opportunity to display the nature of the life that has been given to you. The degree to which you can manifest that is what we are determining by our faithfulness here, the degree to which you can display the glory of God, the opportunity that will be given you to manifest it. That differs according to the individual.

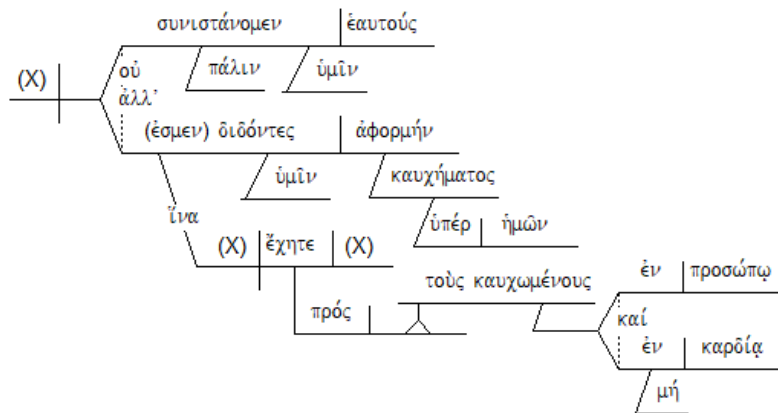
Steve Zeisler: We don't trick people into a false allegiance to Christ. We don't try to get them to change outwardly, ignoring any change in their hearts. This is just what the false teachers in Corinth were attempting to do as they sought to undermine Paul's ministry: they were trying to "*take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart*" (verse 12b). Certain religious leaders attempt to create a false agreement, either by browbeating their listeners or by watering down the message. We won't do that, says Paul. This may very well be why we are misunderstood. Nevertheless, our efforts are based on persuasion---"*we try to persuade men.*" We long for people to see what God has done in Christ. We exalt the cross of Jesus, therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus so that it might be clearly seen for what it is. And then, having been seen, believed, and having been believed, men and women are never the same.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

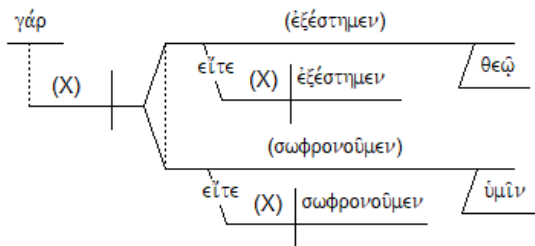
2Co 5:11



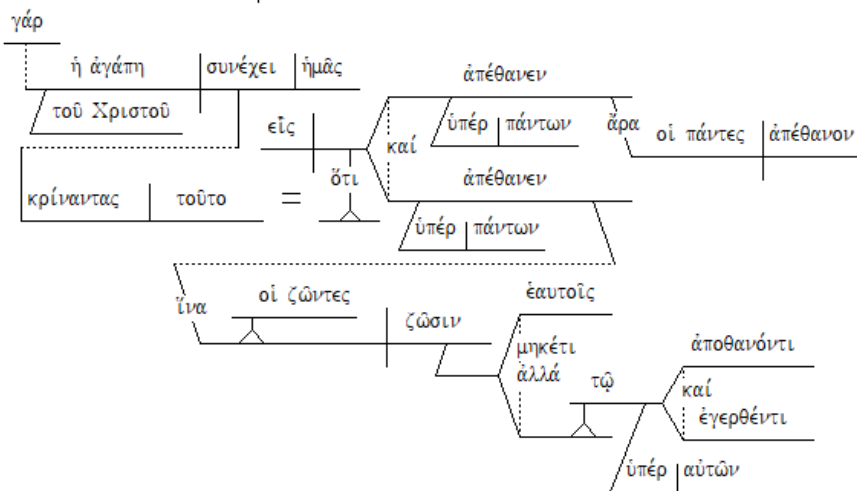
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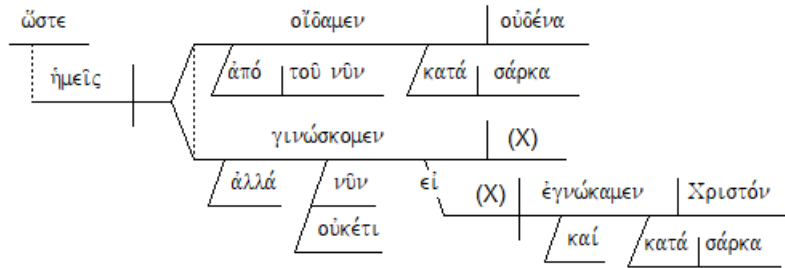
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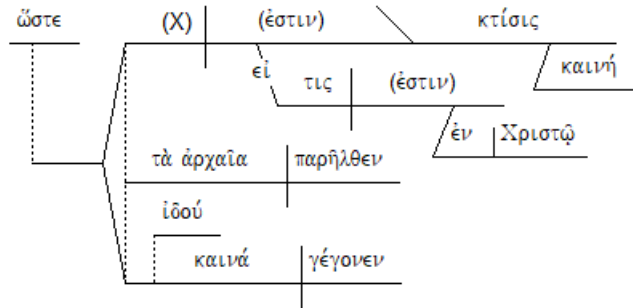
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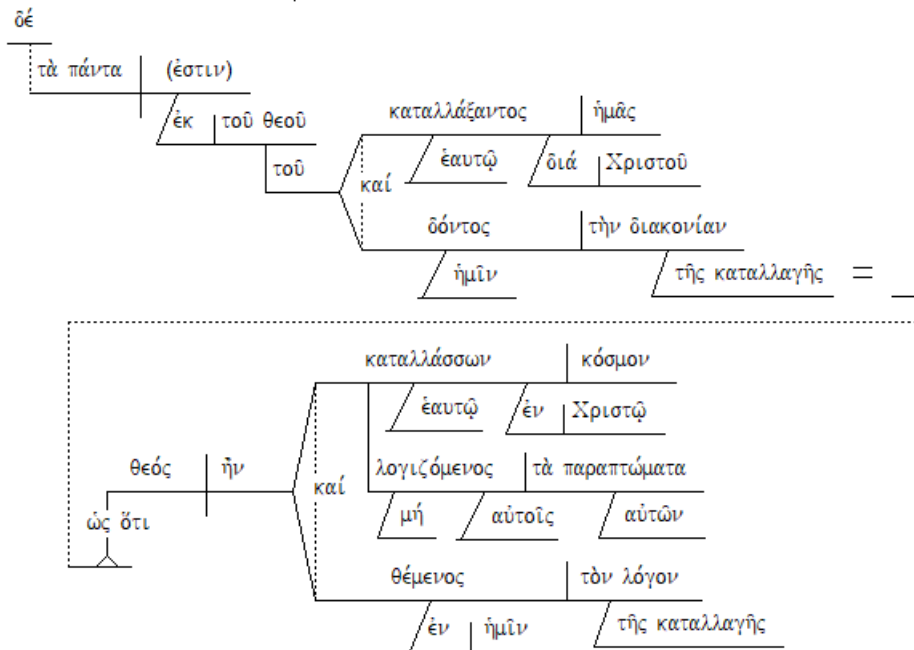
2Co 5:16



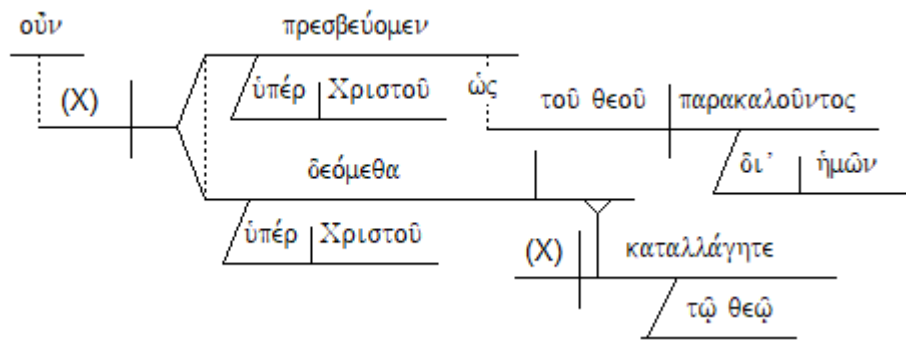
2Co 5:17



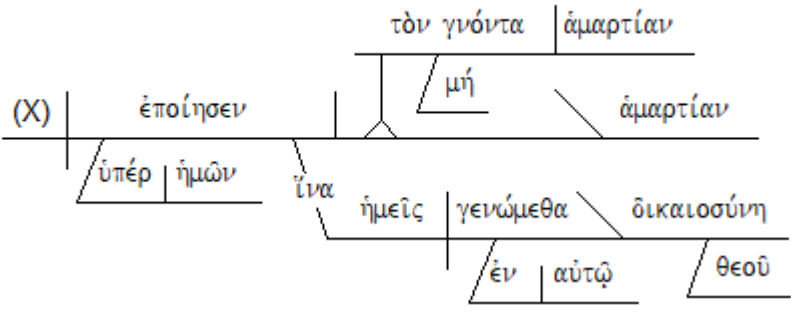
2Co 5:18-19

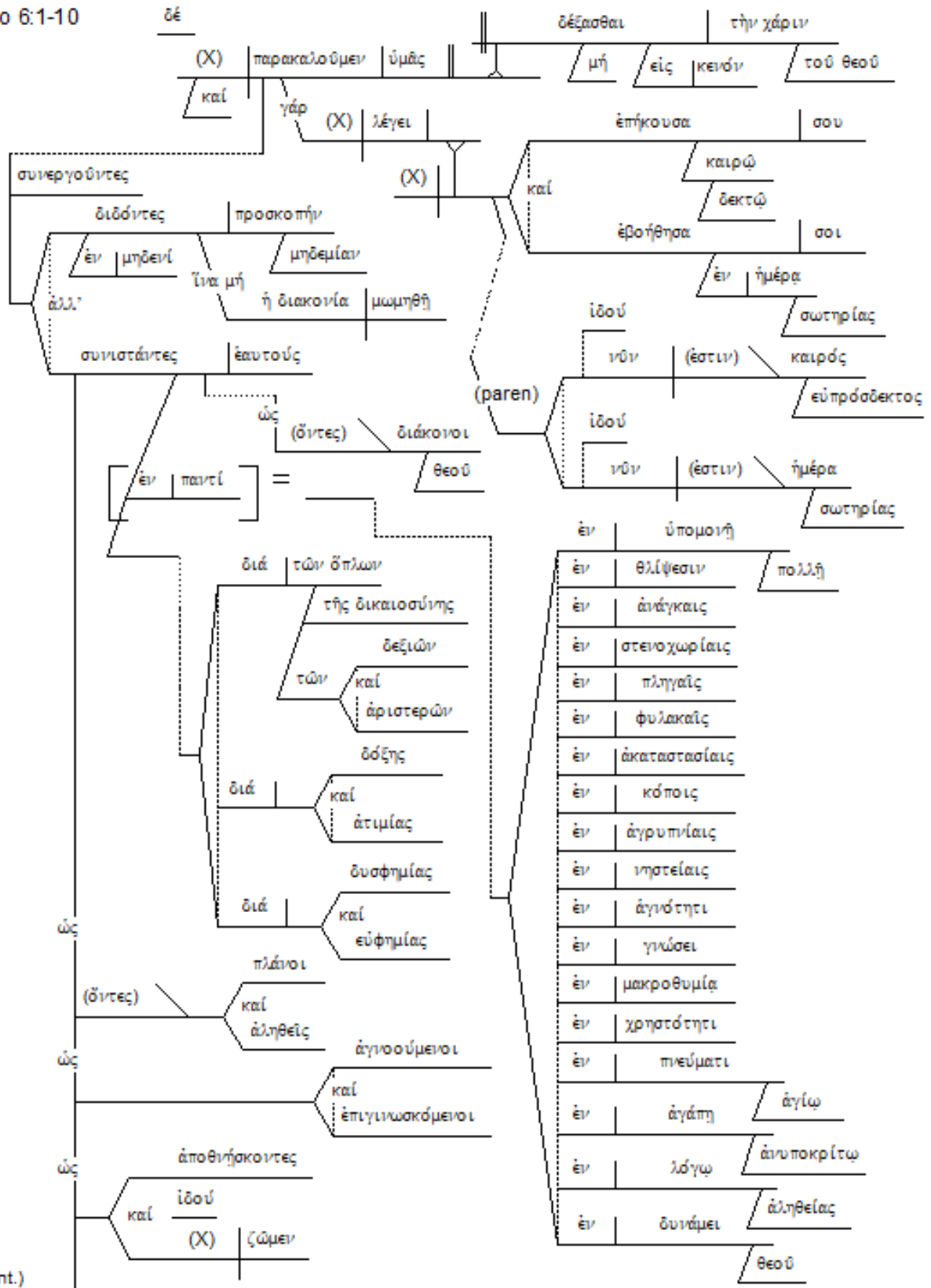


2Co 5:20



2Co 5:21





TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

TITLE: PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:

TRANSPARENT INTEGRITY OF MINISTRY REMOVES ALL OBSTACLES TO PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: The most difficult, painful experience for a faithful minister is to be misrepresented, to be falsely accused, to have one's integrity unfairly attacked. Such assaults have the potential, by destroying people's trust and confidence in the minister, of devastating his ministry. Such **slanderous attacks** are hard to retrieve and correct, because those who make them are not interested in the truth. Nor are they motivated by virtue, love, or righteousness, but rather by hatred, revenge, bitterness, jealousy, and self-promotion. Purveyors of such falsehoods do not seek the unity and blessing of the church, the glory of the Lord, or the good of those they attack.

Throughout history, God's faithful servants have endured such slanderous false accusations. The whole early church was wrongly accused of atheism (because Christians rejected the Roman gods), cannibalism (based on a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper), and immorality (based on a misunderstanding of the "holy kiss" [**Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14**]). The papal bull excommunicating Martin Luther said of him, "This Luther favors the Bohemians and the Turks, deplores the punishment of heretics, spurns the writings of the holy doctors, the decrees of the ecumenical councils, and the ordinances of the Roman pontiffs, and gives credence to the opinions of none save himself alone, which no heretic before ever presumed to do" (**Roland H. Bainton**, *Here I Stand* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1950], 148).

Charles Spurgeon's unwavering defense of biblical truth earned him many enemies. Speaking of the vicious attacks he endured, **Spurgeon** said, "Scarce a day rolls over my head in which the most villainous abuse, the most fearful slander is not uttered against me both privately and by the public press; every engine is employed to put down God's minister—every lie that man can invent is hurled at me" (cited in **Iain Murray**, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986], 60).

But no one endured more vicious, relentless, and unjust attacks than the patriarch of ministerial pain, the apostle Paul. The kingdom of darkness—Satan, the demons, and ungodly people—constantly assaulted him. At Corinth, as noted in previous chapters of this volume, that assault came from false apostles, who attacked his character and spread lies about him. They sought power, money, prominence, and the opportunity to supplant the truth with their demon doctrines. To accomplish those goals, they first had to destroy trust in Paul's character and teachings by **falsely accusing him of being a lying, self-serving hypocrite**. The confidence of many of the Corinthians was affected, and they were doubting Paul.

Profoundly concerned, the apostle vigorously **defended his integrity**, not for his sake, but for the Corinthians'. He was the Lord's personally chosen channel through which divine truth flowed to them. To allow the false teachers' lies to go unchallenged would allow that flow of divine truth to be blocked. Worse, it would allow it to be replaced with false doctrine. Again, here, he reminded them of the integrity he had manifested during his long stay in their city (cf. **Acts 18:11**), in this text defending his love for them.

Eric Mason: Many of you struggle with wanting the Christian life to be the TV Christian life that's communicated by false teachers. However, if you continue to allow yourself to be put on an unredeemed trajectory of the Christian life, you will find yourself frustrated and moving toward apostasy. But if you recognize the **beauty of the tension** you can never get rid of, the beauty of the brokenness you can't shake off, the beauty of the ailments you can't pray off, you will find that God sometimes delivers, God sometimes doesn't, but most of the time—as a matter of fact, all the time—he's up to something.

So **Paul challenges the Corinthians**. This is nothing new. They believe they deserve their best life now. They believe they deserve to be rich. They believe they deserve no sickness. They believe they deserve no suffering. They really believe Paul is an irritation when he starts to talk to them about the reason they reject his apostleship. They reject his apostleship because his apostleship doesn't look like the Christianity they believe. Yet when opposition arises, the encouragement we discover as believers is the gospel's power in every challenge.

Scott Hafemann: The prophetic exhortation to be reconciled to God in **5:20** and **6:1** is paralleled by the personal appeal in **6:11–13** to be reconciled to Paul himself as God's spokesman and Christ's ambassador. . .

Our passage is thus structured in five parts:

- (1) an indicative statement of Paul's general point (**6:3–4a**), which is then supported by
- (2) **6:4b–10a** specific delineation of his apostolic lifestyle and manner of ministry (), which in turn leads to
- (3) a conclusion concerning the legitimacy of his relationship to the Corinthians (**6:11**) and
- (4) a conclusion concerning the illegitimacy of the Corinthians' relationship to Paul (**6:12**), followed by
- (5) the imperative implications that derive from them (**6:13**).

Having "*commended himself*" as a "*servant*" of God by reminding his readers in **verses 4–10** of the evidence in support of his apostolic claim, in **verses 11–13** Paul draws out for them the **implications of his ministry**. Far from calling his legitimacy into question, Paul's suffering is the vehicle through which God is making himself known among the Corinthians.

As such, Paul's suffering is also the evidence of the integrity of his message, of the purity of his motives, and of the true nature of his love for his spiritual "*children*" (6:11). The problem in Corinth is therefore not in Paul but in the Corinthians themselves (6:12). Paul therefore addresses them as a whole in order to give everyone the benefit of the doubt concerning the genuine nature of their faith, while at the same time calling those who are still rebelling against him to respond with the same love he has already shown to them (6:13).

I. (:1-2) CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

Frank Matera: At the end of the previous unit, Paul presented himself as Christ's ambassador through whom God "*appeals*" to humanity to be reconciled to God, that is, to accept the reconciliation that God offers through Christ's saving death (5:20). In these two verses Paul resumes that appeal. But whereas in 5:20 God made the appeal through the apostle, here Paul makes the appeal in his capacity as one who "*works with*" God, that is, as God's "*coworker*." Paul roots this appeal in a passage from the prophet Isaiah that he interprets christologically: the eschatological day of salvation that the prophet foresaw has arrived with Christ. Commenting on this, he twice employs the adverb "*now*" in order to remind the Corinthians of the **urgency of his appeal**.

A. (:1a) Example of Paul Working in Fellowship with Christ

"And working together with Him"

B. (:1b) Exhortation to be a Profitable Servant

"we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain"

Frank Matera: Paul appeals to the Corinthians "*not to receive the grace of God in vain*" (v. 1). The concept of "*grace*" (*charis*) plays an important role in the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters. According to **BDAG** *charis* is a "beneficent disposition towards someone"; thus it is "favor," "grace," "graciousness," "good will" on the part of one party toward another. The *charis* with which Paul is concerned is "*the grace of God*," by which Paul means the gracious act of God in Christ whereby God reconciled humanity to himself. Deeply aware that he was called as a result of God's graciousness (**Gal 1:15**) and that he is who he is by "*the grace of God*," Paul emphatically notes that God's grace toward him has not been in vain (**1 Cor 15:10**). But why does Paul appeal to the Corinthians "*not to receive the grace of God in vain*"?

Paul's initial proclamation of the gospel at Corinth undoubtedly stressed the gospel of reconciliation, and one can assume that the Corinthians responded favorably to this message, as the thanksgiving of **1 Cor 1:3-9** indicates. But since the Corinthians have called into question the apostolic integrity of the one who exercises this new covenant ministry of reconciliation among them, they will have received the grace of God in vain if they are not fully reconciled with Christ's ambassador; for one cannot be at enmity with the ambassador through whom God makes the appeal for reconciliation and still be

reconciled with God. The appeal “*not to receive the grace of God in vain,*” then, is an appeal to be reconciled with Christ’s ambassador.

Robert Hughes: To receive the grace of God in vain means to deflect God’s grace from its intended goals—in this case, the ongoing control of the love of Christ (**5:14-15**), the one who became sin for us (**5:21**). This concept involves much more than simple personal piety and appreciation of God’s grace for internal needs. It broadens to include God’s entire desire for world redemption.

This exhortation receives scriptural support from **Isaiah 49:8 (6:2)**. Paul quotes verbatim from the mainstream of the Greek Old Testament texts. He selects a passage whose context includes Isaiah’s frustration in ministering to Israel (**Isa. 49:4**; perhaps a hint at Paul’s own frustrations with the Corinthians?). Paul interprets and applies the passage spoken so long ago by the prophet: “*Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time.’*” The prophet promised that God would hear and help His people on a certain day.

Paul applies this passage to his own day, a time when God was offering to aid His own. If God had chosen a time to bring aid, who was man to disregard the offer or be tardy in making full use of it? Indeed, it was the thought of receiving the grace of God in vain (**6:1**) that prompted Paul’s mention of the Old Testament passage in the first place. Therefore, he urges his readers not to turn a deaf ear to God and ignore their redemption in Christ, or receive the grace of God in vain. Having delivered this urgent plea, in the rest of this paragraph he deals with the theme of apostolic commendation.

C. (:2) Enlistment of Urgent Response to Call for Reconciliation

*“for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you,
and on the day of salvation I helped you;’
behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’
behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’--”*

Eric Mason: As Paul quotes Isaiah, he challenges us to consider an **authentic Christian life**. He works through this day of salvation, what it looks like, and how God has helped us.

Raymond Collins: “*Lo*” (the demonstrative particle *idou*), the command that introduces both parts of Paul’s scriptural commentary, summons the Corinthians to pay attention to the “*now*” in which they live. Their “*now*” is a time of salvation. Their “*now*” is qualitatively different from the time in which they have previously lived. Their “*now*” is the eschatological present, the **era of salvation** that has been inaugurated with Christ’s redemptive death and resurrection. Their *now* is the time in which they must live **in accordance with the empowering gift of God’s righteousness**.

John MacArthur: Repeating *behold* and *now* to emphasize his point, Paul declared that now is “*the acceptable time,*” “*the day of salvation*” when God will listen to repentant sinners. Now, when the fields are ripe for the harvest (**John 4:35**), is not the time to waste gospel opportunity, or to be feeble, vacillating, or deceived by false teachers. It is

the time to hold fast to the truth and faithfully proclaim it. “*We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day,*” Jesus admonished. “*Night is coming when no one can work*” (**John 9:4**). Knowing the urgency of the times Paul, true to the urgency of his calling, passionately pleaded with the Corinthians not to let God’s grace in their lives be in vain.

II. (:3-10) COMMENDABLE CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY PAVES THE WAY FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

A. (:3-4a) Summary of Commendable Conduct

1. Stated Negatively – No Black Marks in the Ministry

*“giving no cause for offense in anything,
in order that the ministry be not discredited”*

Richard Pratt: Paul knew that many people will distrust the truth, even the truth of the gospel, when a minister's life does not conform to that truth. Christian ministry is not just a matter of speaking the truth; it also consists of living the truth. Paul was careful not to live hypocritically.

Frank Matera: Having appealed to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain, Paul asserts that he conducts himself in such a way that nobody can fault the ministry he exercises. The argument proceeds in two steps:

- a strong negative clause (**v. 3**) begun with alliteration (*mēdemian en mēdeni*)
- and a positive adversative clause (**v. 4a**) in which Paul commends himself.

2. Stated Positively – Sacrificial Servant Leadership

“but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God”

Others might call this fanaticism ... but it is godly zeal at work.

B. (:4b-10) Specific List of Ministry Hardships & Corresponding Godly Character

- What has Paul been through?
- What type of person has he proven himself to be?

Charles Swindoll: As he sets out to paint a brutally honest picture of authentic Christian ministry, Paul lays aside the pastel palette that would naturally attract people to ministry. Instead, he reaches for darker hues that shock the senses and present a realistic picture of the life of those who have commended themselves as servants of God. . .

This ministry, however, did not come with competitive compensation, a great benefits package, or a comfortable retirement plan. Paul’s description demolishes every false image of Christian ministry. Under its weight, the ivory-tower image collapses, the perfect-saint portrayal fades, and the in-it-for-the-money idea loses credibility. Look at how Paul describes the **brutal reality** of Christian ministry . . .

George Shillington: The phrases are selected, arranged, and linked together to create a persuasive effect in the mind and emotion of the readers. Taken as a whole, the list of hardships is meant to prove that Paul has the quality of endurance that marks the true apostle. The words are his own, not a prepared list that apostles carry with them as credentials (Collange: 294), and the experiences represented in the phrases were really his.

1. (:4b-5) Enduring Hardship and Physical Suffering
- "*in much endurance*"

Ray Stedman: **Endurance** is the key there. God, looking upon Paul's life, is pleased and glorified by the fact that no matter what happens to him he sticks with it. He endures; that is the point. This word literally means to "stay under the pressure." We all feel pressure -- pressure to give in here, to give up there, pressure to go along with something. But the mark of a Christian who has learned how to walk with God is that he stays under the pressure; he does not quit. The modern term, "hang in there," expresses exactly what this verse means -- "Just hang in there and don't quit until you are triumphant."

Eric Mason: He says, "*By great endurance*" (v. 4). Guess what that assumes? Hard times. Hard trials. He's not bragging about his ability to endure. If you understand God's Word, you know endurance is done by faith in what Christ has done, and the Spirit gives you gospel perseverance to stand in difficult times.

John MacArthur: Ultimately, what commends faithful servants of God is their **endurance**. *Hupomone* (endurance) is one of the most magnificent New Testament virtues. No single English word can fully express its rich meaning, which encompasses bearing up under hard labor, surviving the shock of battle, and remaining steadfast in the face of death. The New Testament uses it in conjunction with several other words, such as "*tribulation*" (**Rom. 5:3**), "*faith*" (**James 1:3**), "*hope*" (**1 Thess. 1:3**), and "*joy*" (**Col. 1:11**). *Hupomone* is also associated with the idea of future glory (**Rom. 2:7; 8:25**); thus, it does not describe the grim, stoic, weary acceptance of trials, but rather faith, hope, and joy in anticipation of future glory. The word might best be rendered "**triumphant patience.**" **Hebrews 11** commends God's Old Testament servants for their ability to endure hostility and remain faithful.

Endurance marked Paul's life. He endured faithfully to his death despite continual temptation, threats from his enemies, and trouble in the churches, continually serving God with all his strength and providing a protective influence on the church.

R. Kent Hughes: What a man Paul was — perpetually in the dust of the arena, beaten, bloody, mocked by the crowds, sweating, exhausted, hungry, sleepless — but always enduring.

In point of fact, Paul's sufferings did not disqualify him. Rather, they proved the authenticity of his faith and commitment. The fact that he didn't quit or curse God for

his miseries as so many have done but endured testified to his genuine faith. In effect, his endurance declared that the gospel is true and that Jesus is worth it.

So often our words are ignored by others, including our nearest and dearest. But when they observe endurance for Christ in the midst of showers of troubles, they cannot deny the reality of our faith in Christ.

- a. Enduring Persevering Hardship = Inner Personal Struggles
 - “in afflictions”
 - “in hardships”
 - “in distresses”

Frank Matera: Having commended himself “in great endurance,” Paul introduces his first group of three hardships (v. 4b): “afflictions” (*thlipsis*), “troubles” (*anankē*), “calamities” (*stenochōria*). The three words characterize in a general way the difficulties Paul must endure as God’s minister. *Thlipsis* occurs frequently in **2 Corinthians (1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 7:4; 8:2, 13)**, and the participial form of the verb heads the hardship list of **4:7–12**. Its placement at the beginning of that list and at the head of this triad suggests that it best characterizes the hardships that Paul endures. *Anankē* indicates “a state of distress or trouble” (BDAG) and *stenochōria* “a set of stressful circumstances” from which there seems to be no escape (BDAG). Both words are found in the brief hardship list of **12:10**. Taken together, these three terms provide a **general portrait of Paul’s apostolic suffering**. As God’s minister he is under constant duress and pressure, hemmed in on every side by stressful and distressing circumstances.

- b. Enduring Physical Suffering = External Troubles Caused by Others
 - “in beatings”
 - “in imprisonments”
 - “in tumults”

John MacArthur: The second three elements are external threats. **Beatings** can refer to blows from fists (**Luke 10:30**), rods (**Acts 16:22–23**), or whips (**Luke 12:48**). Paul also was no stranger to **imprisonments** (**2 Cor. 11:23** cf. **Acts 16:24; 24:23–27; 28:16, 30; 2 Tim. 1:8, 16; 2:9**) nor to the **tumults** (riots; civil disturbances; mob violence) that constantly attended his ministry (cf. **Acts 13:45; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12–17; 19:29; 21:30; 22:22–23; 23:10**).

- c. Enduring Personal Deprivation = Self-Inflicted Physical Challenges
 - “in labors”
 - “in sleeplessness”
 - “in hunger”

Frank Matera: In his third group of three, Paul moves from afflictions that others have imposed upon him to those that he has imposed upon himself in order to carry out his ministry (v. 5b): “labors” (*kopos*), “sleepless nights” (*agrypnia*), “going hungry” (*nēsteia*), all three of which occur in the hardship list of **11:23–32**; see **verses 23, 27**.

Although *kopos* can also be construed as “trouble” or “difficulty,” Paul is probably referring to the burdensome work and toil that he has endured in order to support himself, resulting in “*sleepless nights*” and “*going hungry*,” as he labored by day at his trade and preached whenever possible.

2. (:6) Exhibiting the Fruit of the Holy Spirit

- “*in purity*”
- “*in knowledge*”
- “*in patience*”
- “*in kindness*”
- “*in the Holy Spirit*”
- “*in genuine love*”

Anthony Thiselton: Guthrie writes about vv. 6–7a, “If the first ten phrases in Paul’s description present a picture of the **challenges** surrounding authentic ministry, the next eight delineate the first **manner** in which Paul’s mission has been carried out (6:6 a) and then the **means** (6:6b) by which his ministry has been enabled.” In purity, in knowledge, in patience, and in kindness, denote the **manner**; in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, and in the power of God, denote the **means**. The Greek *hagnotēs* may denote purity of behavior or sincerity of motive. In 11:3, the word functions as the opposite of corruption. Three of the terms (Greek, *makrothymia* (patience), *agapē* (love), and *chrēstotēs* (kindness) appear in Gal 5:22 as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul insists on the purity of his intentions. “*Knowledge*” (*gnosis*) is generally used unfavorably in Paul, e.g., in 1 Cor 8:1. Thrall therefore argues that it refers to “charismatic gnosis.” But in 1 Corinthians it refers to a claim to complete or static knowledge, whereas Paul approves of growing or dynamic knowledge as a process, in which the Holy Spirit is active. “*Truthful speech*” (v. 4a) is repeated in this letter (cf. 4:2). In v. 7b, “*weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left*” may well mean offensive and defensive weapons, for the sword was carried in the right hand, and a shield in the left. “*Righteousness*” may well refer to human moral righteousness in contrast to manipulative tactics.

George Shillington: *Purity* signifies a person who has nothing to hide, whose behavior is consonant with thought and feeling (Louw, 1:746). *Knowledge* is the insightful ability to understand and grasp truth; the Corinthians (some at least) apparently delight in their possession of this gift (1 Cor. 8:1-3; 13:2, 8). *Patience* is “a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation” (Louw, 1:307). *Kindness*, in tandem with *patience*, is “the sympathetic kindness or sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain” (Plummer: 196).

Genuine love acts sincerely, not for show (cf. 1 Cor. 13), like the love of God in Jesus Christ crucified for the sake of estranged humankind. The adjective *genuine* may be aimed at opponents whose claims lack a basis in reality. Similarly, the next quality, *truthful speech* (2 Cor. 6:7), is probably so framed to distinguish Paul’s preaching from other would-be missionaries whose words are leading the Corinthians astray. The list is then capped by the *power of God*. Paul highlights the power of God at various points in

2 Corinthians, paradoxically in the presence of human weakness (**4:7; 12:9; 13:4**; cf. **1 Cor. 1:18-25**). The gospel which Paul preaches is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (**Rom. 1:16**). Hence, it belongs at this place of emphasis in the list of credentials.

Eric Mason: Patience is not expecting everything to come quickly but settling into the fact that some things take time. Now there are some things I've been wanting God to do, and God just keeps taking his time. What I'm finding is that God is showing me something, and he's using patience as a form of suffering to build enduring patience. His purpose is basically to show me what I neglect in the now because I'm living in the future.

See, sometimes we are living in a mental future, when God wants you to be faithful in the now. And when you're living in a mental future, you can't focus and nurture now. That's why **Psalm 37:3** says, "*Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness*" (NASB 1995). The psalmist is frustrated because God isn't doing some stuff quickly, and God tells him through the Spirit, "Sit yourself down, dwell in the land, and take care of where you are. I'll take care of the future." The key to patience is that God won't move you on until you begin the process of nurturing where you are. I don't care what you want to do; it's going to take some time.

Patience and contentment are key components of our life. We must honor God in whatever season he places us. See, patience says, "God, I'm not going to look at where I want things to be. What I'm going to do is focus on where you've placed me and what you've placed before me." If you always focus on the future, you can't appreciate the Lord. Your appreciation is not some big feature film of your life. You must be able to appreciate the grime and the grit of where God placed you and be faithful there. So I told myself, anything worth building takes time; therefore, patience is needed. . .

Let's look at where the **Holy Spirit** is. The Holy Spirit is between two things: kindness and sincere love. The Holy Spirit is there because kindness and sincere love are the two most difficult characteristics to offer others when you're facing difficulty. The Holy Spirit supplies us with the power to execute because he's the superintendent of our sanctification. He's the superintendent who oversees and even applies the gospel to our spiritual growth, and he's there to help throttle us up in that particular area to develop us. Paul is saying, "This is the **empowerment**." Paul says what has marked his apostolic ministry is the power of the Spirit. Nothing he does will work unless the Spirit is blowing on it. Nothing in your life will work, family of God, unless the Spirit is blowing on it. So Paul is nurturing us and helping us understand what biblical commendation looks like.

David Garland: Walking in the Spirit is the foremost requirement for effective ministry that will not be discredited before God. It is a mandatory credential of ministerial character because it ensures that ministry will be carried out in purity. The work of the Spirit as a divine power emanating from the Father to carry out God's purposes in the lives of believers is not characterized so much by the extraordinariness

of the way he operates in our lives but by the fact that he enables believers to become believers and to live as such. The Spirit gives the Christian the power to live the life of faith, which is more important than the experience of ecstatic trances or spells or other miraculous phenomena the Corinthians seem to prize (see **1 Cor 12; 14**). Likewise, Paul insists that the qualifications for apostleship are not found in grand, external displays. Genuine manifestations of the Spirit are exhibited in the apostle's spiritual character. The Spirit fosters the virtues Paul lists, overcomes the desires of the flesh, and creates fruit in our lives (**Gal 5:16–23**). Living these virtues gives evidence of the Holy Spirit's "indwelling presence."

Richard Pratt: Paul frequently exercised much **kindness** as he spread the gospel of Christ. This term is closely associated with other concepts that suggest a pleasing, tender, and compassionate demeanor (**Rom. 2:4; Col. 3:12**). There were certainly times when Paul knew that kindness required harsh insistence, but even at these times his motivation was to demonstrate kindness.

Paul also insisted that his ministry was conducted *in the Holy Spirit*. He added that he also served in difficulties with a motivation of *sincere love*. The apostle considered love to be the greatest gift of the Spirit. Even so, Paul knew that it was easy to pretend to love others. So he added that his love was sincere. His love was not a cover for other detrimental motivations.

3. (:7) Engaging the Weapons of Spiritual Warfare

- "in the word of truth"
- "in the power of God"
- "by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left"

John MacArthur: *The word of truth* is the Bible (**2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18**). Specifically in this passage, Paul has in mind **the gospel (Col. 1:5)** message that God reconciles sinners to Himself through the substitutionary death of His Son. The apostle faithfully preached that message without wavering until the day of his death (**2 Tim. 4:7–8**). Believers must follow his example, for the Enemy viciously attacks the gospel. Satan knows that by sowing confusion over the doctrine of salvation he can reap a deadly harvest of damned souls. Paul preached the gospel in the power of God, not his own cleverness. The gospel "*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*" (**Rom. 1:16**). In **1 Corinthians 1:18** he added, "*The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" Paul did not water down, redefine, or simplify the gospel. He did not shrink from proclaiming its difficult demands, or seek to avoid making sinners feel uncomfortable. He preached the gospel clearly and unambiguously "*so that,*" as he wrote earlier to the Corinthians, "*your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God*" (**1 Cor. 2:5**).

Homer Kent: Spiritual weapons are adequate for protection on all sides"

4. (:8-10) Eliciting (But Ignoring) the Contradictory Evaluations of Men

a. Praised or Slandered

- *“by glory and dishonor”*
- *“by evil report and good report”*

Eric Mason: We defend ourselves based on God’s empowerment *“through glory and dishonor”* (v. 8). Glory is when people want to magnify you, and dishonor is when they want to minimize you. Paul says a commendable life doesn’t let situational ups and downs impact our identity in Christ. That’s powerful. Whether *“through glory,”* when people are praising us and we’re feeling good about ourselves, or in the midst of dishonor, we have been empowered to live a commendable life. In other words, we must not use our fluctuating feelings and circumstances as an open door to walk away from our responsibility as believers.

Paul goes on, *“Through slander and good report”* (v. 8). Slander is when people say untrue things about you and it hurts you, but you have to keep going. Slander is one of the primary tools of the devil. The way he got kicked out of heaven was slandering God’s throne. And if you look through the Bible, you’ll see how he has constantly used slander as a way to direct God’s people away from where they’re supposed to be. So they use slander to say untrue things and praise to say true things. Paul says, I stand in all of this.

David Garland: Paul suffered insults and also basked in praise for the benefits he brought to others through the gospel. The Lycaonians, for example, worshiped Barnabas and Paul as gods in one moment and stoned them and left them for dead in the next (**Acts 14:8–19**). Paul was indifferent to fame and abuse because he had a divine, internal gyroscope to help maintain his equilibrium when the swings in the responses to him, from respect to shame, were so dramatic. Insults did not devastate him. Praise did not puff him up. God’s power kept him in the fight, and his desire to please only God kept him on an even keel.

b. Paradoxical Perception of Apostolic Ministry

- *“regarded as deceivers and yet true”*
- *“as unknown yet well-known”*
- *“as dying yet behold, we live”*
- *“as punished yet not put to death”*
- *“as sorrowful yet always rejoicing”*
- *“as poor yet making many rich”*
- *“as having nothing yet possessing all things”*

Frank Matera: Paul completes his list of hardships with a series of seven antithetical-like phrases, each of which begins with *hōs* (“as”). The first part of each phrase lists one aspect of Paul’s life that one would normally view as negative (*“as deceitful,” “as unknown” “as dying,” “as punished,” “as grieving,” “as poor,” “as having nothing”*), and the second states its opposite (*“we are truthful,” “we are known,” “we live,” “we are not put to death,” “we are always rejoicing,” “enriching many,” “we possess everything”*). The contrast that Paul establishes points to the paradoxical nature of his

apostolic sufferings. For whereas the first part of each phrase portrays his actual circumstances, or how people perceive those circumstances, the second describes the deeper reality of Paul's life, which others do not perceive or simply deny.

Richard Pratt: Finally, Paul reflected in broad terms on the **paradoxical character of his life**, saying that he was *having nothing, and yet possessing everything*. From the preceding context, his meaning is plain. In terms of this world, Paul had practically nothing. He had lost his home, family, friends, religious standing, and livelihood. Those things of this world were of little importance to him. Even so, Paul had his eyes set on the wondrous future promised to every believer. Paul applied to himself what he had already said about other believers. He was a coheir with Christ as well (**Rom. 8:17**).

John MacArthur: People burn out in ministry not because of overwork, but because of unmet expectations. But those who do not have unrealistic expectations will not become frustrated when they are not met. To have proper expectations in the ministry, one must view it from the proper perspective. Understanding the privilege of ministry, maintaining its passion, carefully protecting it, and expecting paradoxical reactions to it keep one's vision clear.

III. (:11-13) COMMUNICATION THAT IS OPEN AND AFFECTIONATE SOLICITS RECIPROCATION THAT FACILITATES PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

Anthony Thiselton: Paul expresses his warm affection for the church in Corinth in **6:11–13**. He has opened his heart to them as well as speaking frankly. He tells them that he has kept back nothing; there has been no restraint whatever on his side, and he says that if there has been any restraint it must have been in their hearts. His phrase "*our heart is wide*" renders the Greek *hē kardia hēmōn peplatuntai*, the perfect passive indicative of *platonō*, *to broaden* from *platus*, *broad*. The vocative "*Corinthians*" is unusual in Paul but may serve to include the whole Corinthian church. Whether Paul is referring to what he has said so far in **2 Corinthians** or includes his earlier utterances is debated. His "catalogue of hardships" may suggest that his frankness about the supposedly negative side of his ministry could have gone further than he had intended.

Richard Pratt: Paul explained why he had described his difficult but exemplary ministry. He was appealing to their hearts, their affections for him and his company. The tenderness of this section appears in the way the apostle addressed his readers, first by name (*you, Corinthians*) and second as *my children*. He hoped the reminder of his sacrificial ministry would draw out the Corinthians' affection for him.

Paul appealed to his readers to consider a **fair exchange**. On the one hand, he and his company had just *spoken freely* without self-protection, had *opened wide* their *hearts* in full exposure of the positives and negatives of their ministry, and had not withheld their *affection* toward the Corinthians. Paul had been more than honest; he had entrusted the

Corinthians with a precious gift: an honest and frank assessment of the good and bad of his life.

On the other hand, Paul felt that the Corinthians were *withholding* their affections from him and his company. They had not admitted their weaknesses as he had; they had not displayed their lives for examination as he had. So he appealed to them to *open wide their hearts also*.

Frank Matera: Having explained that he is “*the minister of a new covenant*” (2:14 – 4:6), whose apostolic sufferings paradoxically manifest and anticipate resurrection life (4:7 – 5:10), and having declared that God has given him “*the ministry of reconciliation*” and made him “*Christ’s ambassador*” through whom God now appeals to humanity (5:11 – 6:10), **Paul explicitly appeals to the Corinthians to be reconciled to him.**

A. (:11) Opportunity for Affectionate Open Dialogue

“Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.”

Paul has taken the initiative to open up his heart and communicate openly with the Corinthian church.

B. (:12) Obstacles to Affectionate Open Dialogue

“you are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections.”

Charles Swindoll: The Corinthians, however, did not respond in kind—at least, not with the same level of intensity or the same outward manifestation. Instead, they were restrained in their affections (2 Cor. 6:12). The term “*affections*,” from the almost impossible-to-pronounce Greek word *splanchnon* [4698], literally means “*bowels*”—the internal organs of heart, liver, and lungs. In the ancient world, it was believed that human emotions emanated from these organs because when a person would feel happy, sad, frightened, or courageous, the individual would feel a physical sensation churning in this part of the anatomy. Therefore, the term “*bowels*” came to refer metaphorically to deep, sincere, heartfelt feelings. With this word Paul implies that his relationship with the Corinthians had been one-sided. To play on Paul’s imagery, he had “*spilled his guts*” to them, but they had guarded their hearts. This is why Paul speaks to them in the same way a loving father, yearning for a tender relationship with his children, might plead with them: “*Now in a like exchange . . . open wide to us also*” (6:13).

Eric Mason: Look at what Paul says: “*We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us*” (v. 12). “*Withholding*” means to be emotionally narrow—not narrow in the good biblical sense but narrow in a sense of being almost fully closed off and emotionally unavailable to the body of Christ. So he is calling them to **emotional availability**.

John MacArthur: The Corinthians’ rejection hurt Paul deeply. Yet despite that, he never lost his affection for them, because genuine love “*bears all things*” and “*endures all*”

things” (1 Cor. 13:7). That does not mean, of course, that Paul tolerated their sin and error. He disciplined and corrected them when necessary, but that reflected his true affection for them. Love and discipline are inseparable even with the Lord; “for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6).

C. (:13) Obligation to Reciprocate with Affectionate Open Dialogue

“Now in a like exchange – I speak as to children – open wide to us also.”

John MacArthur: Few things in life are more painful than **unrequited love**, because love longs for a response. Paul’s plaintive words express the penetrating sadness he felt over the Corinthians’ failure to return his love. Though they broke his heart, Paul’s love for the Corinthians would not allow him to abandon them. Instead, he pleaded with them, using the phrase in a like exchange; literally, “*in an exchange that is exact.*” Paul begged them to love him as he loved them—sacrificially, consistently, and permanently. He could speak to them as to children because they were his spiritual children (1 Cor. 4:14–15; cf. Gal. 4:19; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4; Philem. 10), which made their rejection of him all the more painful.

Here is a tender, almost melancholy scene. The noble apostle did not hesitate to plead for the love of the most troubled of his churches. He was not too proud to open his heart and let them see that he was hurting. Even the discussion of separation that follows (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1) reveals Paul’s longing for the Corinthians to break away from the false teachers and return to him.

Then he reached out to them again, pleading, *Make room for us in your hearts*. The translators rightly added the phrase *in your hearts*, which does not appear in the Greek text, because it fits the context (cf. v. 3; 6:11, 13). Having reminded them that his heart was wide open to them, Paul begged the Corinthians to open wide their hearts and *make room* for him. The apostle knew that as long as they clung to their sinful associations with his enemies, their love relationship with him could not be restored. That made it all the more urgent for the Corinthians to follow his instructions in 6:14 – 7:1 and sever all ties with the false teachers.

Ray Stedman: As I travel around the country, I find this is probably the number one problem in churches today. Christians actually think it is right for them to be closed in on themselves, to be private persons, unwilling to communicate who they are and how they feel and where they are in their lives. . . Here is the problem with many churches in this country. They are filled with Christians who will not open up, will not communicate their needs and struggles to one another. Their mouths are not open. . . This is what concerns Paul here. So he urges the Corinthians, "Open up, communicate, show acceptance. It is basic to all else." That is Problem #1. If you do not respond to love, then do not wonder if your life remains cold, barren, lonely, empty and meaningless. When you are loved, deliberately love back and life will begin to expand.

Steve Zeisler: The Corinthians' love was restricted and reserved--and that is also a stumbling block. They withheld affection from Paul as they grew enamored of his opponents. A competition for status between Paul's apostleship and the one claimed by those who came later to Corinth had left him devalued and loved less as a result. The apostle's point here is that a love that must meet certain standards, that imposes rules and regulations, that must be earned before it expresses itself, is a stumbling block. "*Open wide your hearts,*" says Paul. The love that ought to be apparent in the Christian community is one that takes no regard for its own advantage, that no longer views anybody "*according to the flesh,*" as he pointed out in **chapter 5**.

David Garland: They are his children, and he brings up this filial relationship because it permits him to speak as he does — demanding a return for parental affection from children. As their spiritual parent, Paul has loved and nurtured them; and they owe love to him in return. Sirach 7:28 highlights this universally accepted duty of children: “Remember that it was of your parents you were born; how can you repay what they have given to you?” (NRSV). Philo writes that “none can be more truly called benefactors than parents in relation to their children.” Paul therefore has every right to expect and to demand love from his children in return for the love he has shown them.

He calls for them to be reconciled to God (**5:20**) and to open their hearts to him. For Paul the two are intertwined. This interconnection makes sense if the issue at the bottom of the dispute concerns their associations with **idolatry**. They cannot be reconciled to God and to Paul if they continue in heathen practices. Some have noted the connection of **enlarged hearts** to the OT warning against worshipping other gods in **Deut 11:16**: “*Be careful that you are not enticed to turn aside, serve, and bow down in worship to other gods.*” The LXX has “*Do not broaden your hearts.*” In Deuteronomy the enlarged heart has a negative connotation and is related to pride swelling up in the people because of the bounty of the land, whereas Paul uses the idiom in a positive sense to refer to open and joyous affection. It is remotely possible, however, that Paul intends that they enlarge their hearts for him rather than for idols.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) How does the ministry of Christ provide the best model of transparent integrity in the ministry and affectionate open dialogue as He shared His compassionate heart with His disciples?
- 2) As we minister as ambassadors for Christ, we are only the channel for the exhortations and instruction that Christ actively provides.
- 3) Our suffering and hardship is not worthy to be compared to what Christ endured in a compressed time period during His earthly ministry.

4) Christ is the ultimate Suffering Servant. As we meditate on Paul's list of ministry experiences and spiritual character we always need to come back to the person of Christ as the ultimate role model in each area.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have we written off any fellow believers as not worth our time in terms of seeking reconciliation for the purpose of ministry partnership and fellowship in the gospel?
- 2) Do we have any black marks that would give occasion for the enemy to discredit our ministry? How can we pursue transparent integrity and mature in this regard?
- 3) Are we availing ourselves of the *spiritual weapons* essential to the warfare? Is the Holy Spirit producing His fruit in our lives?
- 4) Are we *restrained in our affections* towards any of our Christian brothers and sisters?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: I want to close with these words from **A. W. Tozer**, that rugged old prophet from Chicago. He says:

“A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for one whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest; and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge. The man who has met God is not looking for anything; he has found it. He is not searching for light, for upon him the light has already shined. His certainty may seem bigoted, but his assurance is that of one who knows by experience his religion is not hearsay. He is not a copy, not a facsimile. He is an original from the hand of the Holy Spirit.”

That is the life that wins, the "ministry of reconciliation" in action.

Bob Deffinbaugh: False prophets have minimized sin and its consequences throughout biblical history, and they have promised peace and prosperity to the wicked (**Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:3-7**). When Jesus spoke to those who would follow Him,

He made the cost of discipleship very clear (see **Luke 9:57-62**), and so did the apostles (**Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12**). The apostles know what it means to “*take up their cross*” in following Jesus. But the false apostles are not interested in paying a price for following Christ, because they do not know Him (see **Jeremiah 23; John 10:10-13**). They are motivated by greed and self-indulgence. Thus, one of the ways of discerning an authentic apostle is to see how much he has suffered for His Lord. . .

How do many professing Christians judge the authenticity of God’s servants, of the men (and women), of their message, and their methods? All too often, we judge on external standards, the very same standards employed by the world. Let us adopt the same standards Paul sets down, not only for those whom we will follow as our leaders, but as the standard for our own lives as well. Here in this text we learn not only what distinguishes an authentic apostle, but also that which distinguishes an authentic Christian. Let us live according to the standard of authenticity God Himself sets down for us through His apostle, Paul.

Geoff Thomas: No preacher can read these words without a terrible sense of failure. A minister can hardly speak on a passage like this without blushing, feeling an utter hypocrite. His congregation sees the luxury and ease of his life. He has grown fat in the ministry. There seems little contact between what Paul describes here as a credible ministry and the ministry of their own pastor. How could a man justify spending a half an hour sermon on this text simply explaining to a congregation that things were utterly different in the first century compared to the twenty-first, or in extolling the extraordinary grace of the apostle in such a way that the spotlight of these verses is never focused on we preachers ourselves? It seems to me that there are few other passages in the Bible more important for ministers of the gospel and contemporary Christians to be studying than these words, even if it should bring many of us to the point of resignation from our calling. Unless this passage makes a minister cry out, "I have been an unprofitable servant," then he has not understood it. . .

In these words of our text the apostle Paul has bared his heart, and told us what he has experienced because of the genuineness of his ministry. Who could have gone through all this and endured it, rejoicing at the grace of God, unless the hand of God was always upon him? He stayed on his course in spite of all he went through. He never became depressed, and so this list offers us tremendous hope. We study it together and we say, "If Paul could endure so much by the grace of God that same grace is available to me. I can cope too in my far less taxing afflictions."

Robert Gromacki: Throughout his life, Paul fought innuendo and false charges. In this section, he admitted that he appeared to be one thing, but in reality, he was just the opposite. He recognized that some reported false data about him completely contrary to the real facts. Others were constantly offending him, but he resolved not to offend them in turn. He isolated seven such false reports. They seem to fall into three major areas.

- 1) The first group of two contrasts deals with his reputation . . .
- 2) The second group of three contrasts deals with his health . . .
- 3) The third group of two contrasts deals with his finances . . .

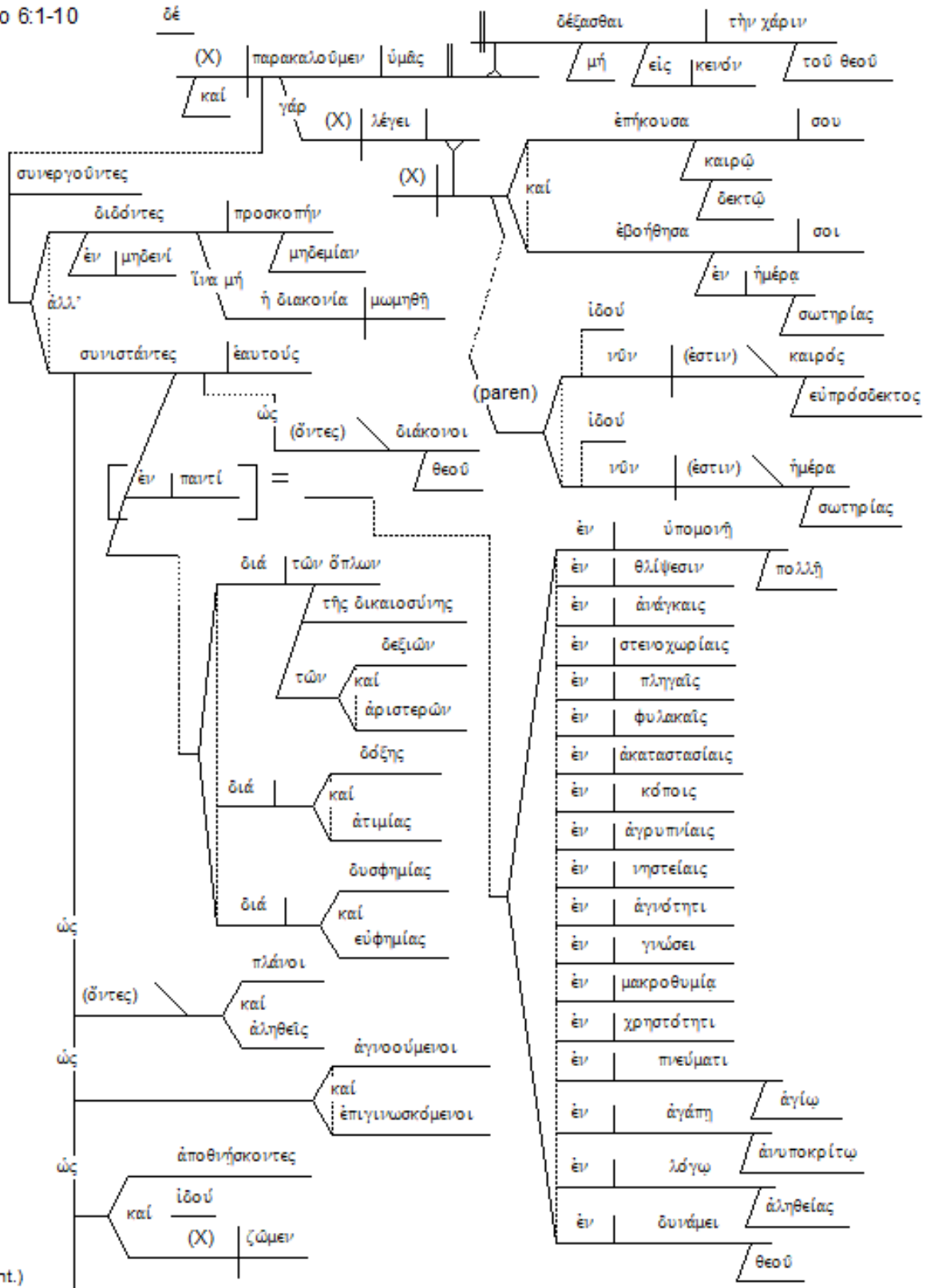
Charles Swindoll: Just imagine for a moment all the ways our ministry can be discredited. We could:

- break promises
- exploit disciples
- live hypocritically
- betray confidences
- compromise principles
- sacrifice integrity
- indulge greed
- live opulently
- behave lustfully
- lead selfishly

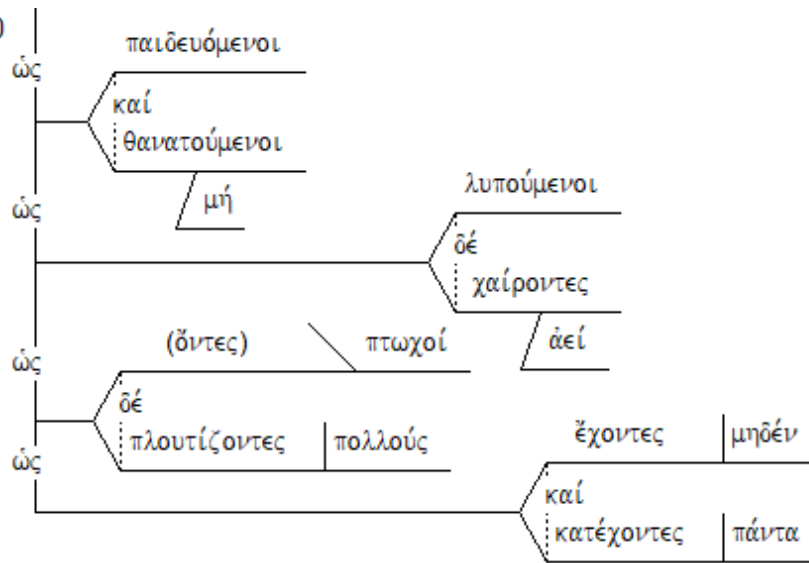
Sadly, we could all add to this already harrowing list. Any one of these could topple our ministries and bring dishonor to the gospel.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

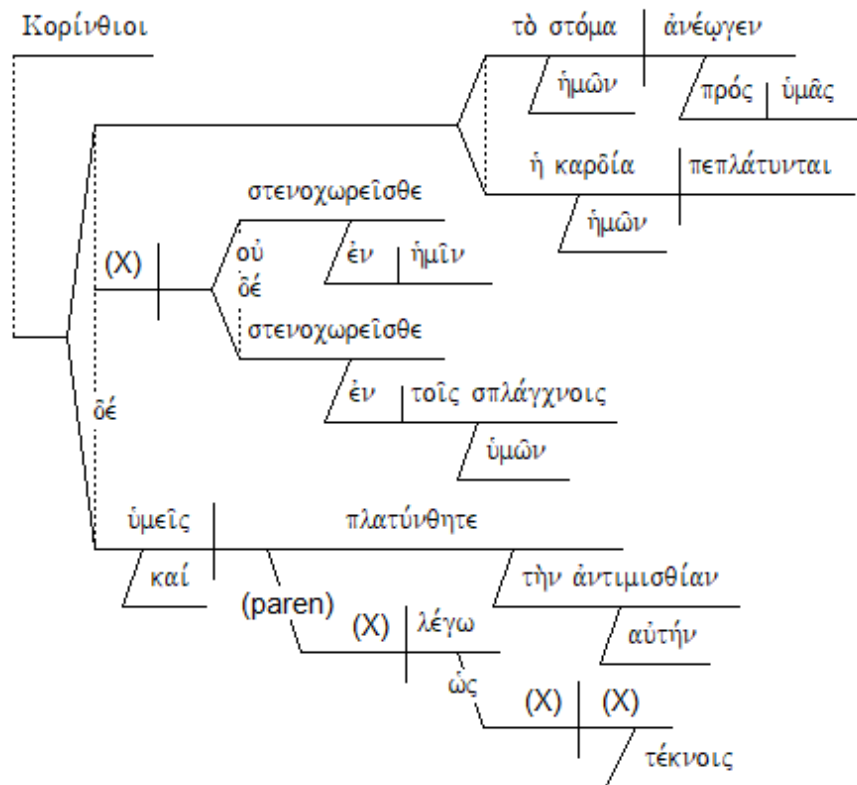
2Co 6:1-10



2Co 6:1-10
(cont.)



2Co 6:11-13



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1

TITLE: *BLESSED BE THE TIES THAT BIND (CHRISTIAN TO CHRISTIAN) --
AVOID CONTAMINATION AND YOU WON'T BE SPOILED*

BIG IDEA:

AVOID INTIMATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH UNBELIEVERS THAT WOULD HINDER YOU FROM GROWING CLOSER TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND MANIFESTING YOUR CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS

CALL TO CHRISTIAN SEPARATION AND HOLINESS

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Oh, the irony! Though the Corinthians had been reserved in their relationship with Paul (their spiritual father in the faith), they had eagerly entered into intimate personal and professional relationships with unbelievers. What a lack of discernment! They locked out the people who cared about them most, who sacrificed and suffered for them, and then locked arms with those who would harm their walk with Christ.

Paul Barnett: The opening exhortation *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers* (14) is the key to the whole section. All that follows relates back to this negative demand. It is a simple metaphor based on **Deuteronomy 22:10**, which forbade the yoking of ox and ass together, suggesting that ‘the Christian is a different breed from the unbeliever and is forbidden an improper relationship with him’. There is no call here, as is often claimed, for Christian to separate from Christian for doctrinal or ethical reasons. Neither is Paul requiring a wholesale separation from unbelievers. If a Christian is married to an unbeliever the believer should not seek divorce (**1 Cor. 7:12–15**). If invited to the home of an unbeliever the Christian is free to attend (**1 Cor. 10:27**). Unbelievers were not forbidden to attend the Christian meetings (**1 Cor. 14:22–25**). Indeed, as Paul writes earlier, total separation from the immoral, the greedy, robbers and idolaters would necessitate ‘leaving this world’ altogether (**1 Cor. 5:9–11**). Rather, as the rhetorical expansion which follows makes clear, it is a specific and technical association with temple worship which the apostle forbids. For this reason it is doubtful that Paul would agree with Christians today attending interfaith services with Muslims or Hindus, for example, since that would mean being mismated with unbelievers.

Five rhetorical questions, set out in balanced pairs and each requiring a negative reply, are now asked. The point of each question is that God’s people are to be distinct and separate from the characteristic beliefs and practices of unbelievers. . .

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that what is at stake here are fundamental truths about God, Christ and Christian commitment set in the context of a dark and seductive paganism. Paul’s words continue to have application wherever Christians are potentially entangled in idolatry, the occult or pagan religious practices. Christians may

be joined to unbelievers socially or by an existing marriage; they are not at liberty to participate in their religious worship.

John MacArthur: Believers and unbelievers inhabit two opposing worlds. Christians are in Christ's kingdom, which is characterized by righteousness, light, and eternal life. Unbelievers are in Satan's kingdom, characterized by lawlessness, darkness, and spiritual death. The saved and the unsaved have different affections, beliefs, principles, motives, goals, attitudes, and hopes. In short, they view life from opposing perspectives.

Consequently, relationships between believers and unbelievers are at best limited to the temporal and external. They may enjoy family ties, work at the same job, share in business relationships, live in the same community, experience the same hobbies and pastimes, and even agree on certain political and social issues. But on the spiritual level, believers and unbelievers live in two completely different worlds. . .

The Corinthians had struggled greatly to make a clean break from the idolatrous and immoral lifestyle of their past. Despite having professed faith in Christ and become part of the church, some in the congregation were still clinging to elements of their pagan religion. And though they, like the Thessalonians, had "*turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God*" (**1 Thess. 1:9**), still they failed to make a clean break with their idolatrous past. The lure of their former paganism, which permeated every aspect of life in Corinth, had proven hard to shake, as Paul's first epistle to them makes evident.

Making matters worse, the false teachers who had come to the church brought with them a quasi-Christian syncretism of gospel truth, Jewish legalism, and pagan mysticism. They were eager to stay connected to the Corinthians' former behavior, to make themselves more popular and, thereby, more prosperous. Thus Paul gave this mandate to separate.

David Garland: [This section] is specifically composed for the Corinthian situation to encourage them to establish appropriate boundaries for the Christian community to ward off the deleterious effects of idolatry in their world, which was filled with various trade guilds and associations and pagan temples dotting the landscape. . .

Paul presents the Corinthians with an either/or situation. Fellowship with God excludes all other fellowships, particularly those associated with idolatry. The Corinthian Christians were surrounded by pagan values and practices. Just because the Spirit has sealed them does not mean they can be careless about their relationships and partnerships with the world.

Scott Hafemann: Whether or not one responds to Paul's call in **6:14 – 7:1** will reveal publicly whether or not one has been reconciled to God as a genuine believer (cf. **13:5–10**). Conversely, as **Thrall** has pointed out, since the Corinthians are Paul's letter of commendation (**3:2**), "if they fail to maintain the holiness proper to God's covenant people (cf. **Lev. 19:2**), then the validity of both the message and the ministry of the new

covenant will be called into question.” Within this framework it becomes evident that **6:14 – 7:1** is not a later insertion into Paul’s argument, but a fitting application of his covenant perspective.

The “*fear of God*” that motivates the believer’s **perseverance in holiness** is therefore not simply a desire to gain rewards or an attitude of “reverence for God.” Rather, as its allusion back to **5:10–11** indicates, it refers to **God’s judgment between believers and unbelievers**, since the “*fear of the Lord*” is the distinguishing mark of the wise (**Ps. 2:11; 5:7; Prov. 1:7, 29; 8:13**). We ought not to downsize our appropriate response to the righteous and sovereign “Lord Almighty” into simply revering who he is. When we encounter God, we encounter ourselves as sinful.

R. Kent Hughes: Forty years ago liberal theologian **Langdon Gilkey** gave this assessment of his church in America, an assessment that could describe much of the evangelical church today:

“All around us we see the church well acclimated to culture: successful, respected, wealthy, full, and growing. But are the transcendent and the holy there? In the area of belief we find widespread indifference to the Bible and ignorance of its contents — and strong resentment if a biblical word of judgment is brought to bear on the life of the congregation. In worship we find notably lacking any sense of the holy presence of God and of what worship is for. . . . In ethics we find the cultural ideals of friendliness and fellowship more evident than the difficult standards of the New Testament or historic Christendom.”

Hearing this today, who can deny that biblical ignorance, an absence of holiness in worship, and ethical accommodation have become widespread among evangelicals? As **Joe Bayly**, author and editor, wrote, “The evangelical church is sick — so sick that people are crowding in to join us. We’re a big flock, big enough to permit remarriage of divorced people (beyond the exceptions of the Word of God), big enough to permit practicing homosexuals to pursue their lifestyle, big enough to tolerate almost anything pagans do. We’re no longer narrow; it’s a wide road of popular acceptance for us.”

Just as throughout history, the evangelical church’s **greatest danger is from within**. And this is where the opening command of our text intersects our lives: “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*” The command is not (as is commonly thought) an injunction against marrying unbelievers or entering into contracted relationships with non-Christians (though both actions are un-Biblical), but rather a command not to be yoked together with those in the church who oppose the truth — **unbelievers in the church**. . .

The **structure** of Paul’s argument is easy to see and ever so powerful. The command “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers*” is reiterated again in the middle of his argument in **verse 17**: “*Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing.*” And then again it is stated as a general

principle in the conclusion: “*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God*” (7:1). The call to unyoke ourselves from unbelieving aspirants reverberates with passionate nuance

I. (:14-16a) SEPARATION IS A NO-BRAINER

Separation = Avoiding Intimate Partnerships with Unbelievers

Psalm 1 – “*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked ...*”

A. (:14a) One Clear Command

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers”

Key = When does it apply

Marriage / Business / Church / Degree of Friendship

Raymond Collins: The Corinthians should have a positive relationship with Paul; they should not embrace an inappropriate relationship with unbelievers.

Scott Hafemann: Given the polemic situation in which Paul finds himself, “*opening up*” to him will necessarily entail closing themselves off from those who oppose him, whom the apostle now labels “*unbelievers*.” This statement is shocking because “*unbelievers*” is not a word Paul ever uses to describe erring but still genuine Christians (e.g., those dealt with in **1 Cor. 3:10–15**). Rather, “*unbelievers*” refers to those who are manifestly outside the sphere of God’s people, even if they profess otherwise (cf. **1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12–15; 10:27; 14:22–24; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 1:15–16**).

Thus, to make clear, in no uncertain terms, precisely what is at stake in supporting his opponents, Paul employs much of the same terminology in **6:14–16** and **7:1** that he used earlier to describe the necessity of breaking free from demon-dominated idolatry (cf. **1 Cor. 10:16–21** with **2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 8:7** with **2 Cor. 7:1**). But now it describes the absolute incompatibility between those who believe (and hence support Paul’s ministry) and those who are calling Paul’s apostleship into question. Paul’s point is stark. In the final analysis, the believers in Corinth must recognize his opponents as “*unbelievers*” and separate from them. Conversely, if they refuse to obey this command, they too will be considered unbelievers (cf. **13:5**).

John MacArthur: To infiltrate churches under the guise of **tolerance** and **cooperation** is one of Satan’s most cunning ploys. He does not want to fight the church as much as join it. When he comes against the church, it grows stronger; when he joins with the church, it grows weaker. Undiscerning believers who join in a common spiritual cause with unbiblical forms of Christianity or other false religions open the door wide to satanic infiltration and forfeit the blessing of God. Further, embracing those heretical systems falsely reassures their followers that all is well between them and God, when actually they are headed for eternal damnation.

Frank Matera: The meaning of Paul's exhortation, then, can be summarized in this way: the Corinthians are not to be united in religious matters with those who are not Christians, for such behavior inevitably leads to idolatry.

B. (:14b-16a) Five Clearcut Distinctions

(5 different Greek words used in rhetorical questions)

Charles Swindoll: Together these words describe close, intimate, interdependent, shared, and single-minded relationships that take time to develop and are difficult to end. Believers and unbelievers should never enter into these kinds of relationships. Never. Why not? Because certain things are essentially distinct and fundamentally incompatible. The saved cannot have spiritually intimate relationships with the lost. They should not form relationships with unbelievers that would either lead to a compromise of Christian standards or jeopardize the consistency of their Christian witness. . .

Our relationship with God places us in an intimate, corporate relationship with other believers. This relationship involves spiritual harmony (6:16), personal purity (6:17), and familial intimacy (6:18). We are God's temple, and we should not bring into His temple anything or any relationship that dishonors Him or destroys the harmony, purity, and intimacy we are meant to experience in the body of Christ, the church.

1. Orientation towards Obedience: Partnership / Righteousness vs Lawlessness *"for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness,"*

Robert Gromacki: These patterns of behavior are mutually incompatible.

Frank Matera: "Righteousness" (*dikaiosynē*) has no partnership with "lawlessness" since the former presupposes a moral life in accord with God's will, made possible by the power of the Spirit, whereas the latter is a life at odds with God's law (*anomia*, "lawlessness").

2. Orientation towards Character: Fellowship / Light vs Darkness *"or what fellowship has light with darkness?"*

Robert Gromacki: These cannot coexist.

John MacArthur: It is self-evident that **light and darkness are mutually exclusive**; thus, this contrast is a common biblical metaphor (cf. **Isa. 5:20; John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; Acts 26:18; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:8, 11; Col. 1:12–14; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5; 2:8–9**). Intellectually, light refers to truth, darkness to error; morally light refers to holiness, darkness to evil. Those who are righteous in Christ walk in the light (**John 8:12; 12:35; Eph. 5:8; 1 John 1:7**); those who are unrighteous are part of Satan's kingdom of darkness (**Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13**). The ultimate destination of the righteous is the eternal light of heaven (**Col. 1:12; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev.**

22:5), that of the unrighteous the eternal darkness of hell (**Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17**). To expect the children of light to work together with the children of darkness is as foolish as to expect it to be both light and dark in the same place at the same time.

3. Orientation towards the Savior Himself: *Harmony / Christ vs Belial*
“*Or what harmony has Christ with Belial,*”

Richard Pratt: The term *Belial* (*Beliar*) appears in a number of intertestamental writings as a personification of Satan, the chief of evil spirits. Paul spoke here of Christ and Satan as metonymies of believers and unbelievers. In principle, believers and unbelievers should have no more in common than Christ and Satan.

4. Orientation towards Faith: *In common / Believer vs Unbeliever*
“*or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*”

5. Orientation towards Worship: *Agreement / Temple of God vs Idols*
“*Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*”

II. (:16b-18) CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS

Separation = Essential for Intimate Fellowship with our Heavenly Father
Psalm 15 – “*O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent?*”

A. (:16b) Remember Our Sacred Identity and Privileged Calling
“*For we are the temple of the living God*”

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s point is clear. Whereas Israel as a people fell into idolatry and disobedience (cf. the vision of **Ezek. 8:3–18** as the basis of Israel’s judgment in the Exile), the Messiah has brought the church back into the presence of God’s glory and begun the process of transforming her into the image of God himself (**2 Cor. 3:16–18**). The separation described in **6:14–16a** that is to characterize God’s people under the new covenant is thus the positive counterpart to Israel’s history of syncretism under the old. Paul is therefore stunned that believers would consort with idolatry and wickedness. Here, as in **1 Corinthians 3:16–17**, the identification of the church with the temple consequently contains a warning of divine destruction against all who would destroy God’s people, since the Corinthians, as God’s temple, are “*holy*” (cf. **1 Cor. 3:17** with **2 Cor. 7:1**). The righteous who belong to the Messiah have been delivered from their idolatry and wickedness and brought back into the presence of God’s glory.

B. (:16c, 17b-18) Remember God’s Precious Promises to His People
“*just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’*”

*“And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.”*

C. (:17a) Obey God’s Clear Command

*“Therefore, come out from their midst
and be separate,’ says the Lord.
‘And do not touch what is unclean;”*

Scott Hafemann: Since the Corinthians are already part of God’s new covenant people in fulfillment of the prophets’ hopes (**6:16c-e**), they must separate from the unbelievers among them (**6:17a-c**) in anticipation of God’s final deliverance (**6:18**). The promise of a continuing covenant relationship and final redemption (**6:18**) is given only to those who keep the covenant stipulations (**6:17**), which in this case entail demonstrating their covenant identity by separating from impurity (**6:14–16**). In other words, the kingdom is here, but it is not yet here in all its fullness.

R. Kent Hughes: The fact that the Corinthians have been graced with the fulfillment of the covenantal promises of personal intimacy with God and personal adoption by God demands full **threefold separation** prophetically voiced in the restoration text of **Isaiah 52:11**: *“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing”* (v. 17).

Frank Matera: To summarize, Paul or the tradition he received brought together a series of quotations from Leviticus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and 2 Samuel (= 2 Kingdoms) to produce a single quotation that contains exhortation and promise: an exhortation to depart from an unclean people and a promise that God will dwell in the midst of this restored people. Even if Paul is not the compiler of this quotation, he undoubtedly saw its fulfillment in the new covenant ministry he exercised, whereby the sanctified Gentile communities that he established, such as the church at Corinth, have become *“the temple of the Living God.”*

III. (7:1) HOLINESS IS NOT OUTDATED

Purpose of Separation = Maturing in Holiness in the Fear of the Lord

Psalm 93:5 – *“Thy testimonies are fully confirmed; Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, forevermore.”*

A. Standing on the Promises

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved”

John MacArthur: Having God’s promises provides powerful motivation for believers to separate from unbelievers. Paul’s use of the word *therefore* is a call for action based on what he has previously written (cf. **Rom. 12:1–2**; **2 Peter 1:3–8**). The apostle moves beyond the commands of **2 Corinthians 6:14, 17** and appeals to God’s promises

enumerated in **6:16–18**. Those promises should elicit love, gratitude, and thankfulness for His overwhelming generosity.

B. Separating from All Defilement

“let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit”

John MacArthur: *Molusmos* (defilement) appears only here in the New Testament. In all three of its uses in the Septuagint, however, it refers to religious defilement. Paul calls believers not only to cleanse themselves from sin and immorality but especially, in this context, from all associations with false religion. That complete cleansing is to be both of flesh and spirit; that is, both inward and outward. False teaching defiles the whole person by pandering to sinful human appetites and corrupting the mind. Therefore, believers must avoid both the fleshly sins and the pollution of the mind that false religion brings.

C. Sanctifying Ourselves for Intimacy with God

“perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

David Garland: Therefore, Paul calls them to perfect their “holiness.” The verb “to perfect” (*epiteleîn*) means “to bring to completion,” “to bring to its intended goal” and does not mean that they are to become perfect. In the greetings of both letters to the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes that they have been “sanctified,” that is, set apart (**1 Cor 1:2**), and called as “saints,” that is, those who are set apart (**1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1**).

Barnett comments, “The holiness that is to be perfected is covenantal rather than developmental or progressive in character.” Holiness is “something that God gives to Christians (**1 Cor 1:30; 2 Thess 2:13**) but also something Christians strive to complete (**1 Cor 7:34; 1 Thess 4:1–8; Rom 6:19**), as well as something that God will ultimately complete (**1 Thess 3:13**).”

Robert Hughes: These Old Testament quotations involve much more than a simple call to purity; they are structured within the framework of **exodus thought**. The first exodus from Egypt (**Lev. 26** and context) and the second exodus from the Babylonian captivity (see **Ezek. 37** and **Isa. 52** contexts), both looked forward to the greatest of all releases from bondage, not from foreign political oppression, but from the mighty force of God’s wrath toward human disobedience. What is more, all three quotations are called “promises” (**7:1**), directly relating to the Corinthians. What ought the response of the captives be upon their release into this great exodus, but a **perfection of holiness**?

R. Kent Hughes: We must be perpetually vigilant. We must never allow those who oppose the gospel to ascend to leadership. We must yoke ourselves to the truth and the love of God.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Remember how Christ fulfilled all righteousness and avoided lawlessness while still being willing to rub shoulders with sinners.
- 2) Proclaim Christ as the Light of the world – shining in the darkness of this world.
- 3) Proclaim how God became incarnate in the person of Christ in order to walk among men and be their mediator so He could truly be their God.
- 4) Proclaim the privilege of being brought into God's family as a son or daughter.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we debate doubtful areas from the perspective of “How close can we come to the fire without being burned” rather than eliminating all controversy by a zeal that pursues as hard after holiness as we can?
- 2) What types of applications have we found in our own life in the realm of Marriage / Business / Church / Degree of Friendship?
- 3) What does separation involve for us on a practical level? What are some things we have found we can't do and must avoid?
- 4) Are we sufficiently motivated by the precious promises of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: Well, then, what constitutes a yoke that we are to avoid? Now, not all associations are yokes, but yokes have two characteristics by which we can always identify them:

The first one is that a yoke is not easily broken. It is a kind of permanent relationship. When you yoke two animals together they are bound together; they do not have any choice. Uncomfortable as it may be, they must do things together. . .

Now the second mark of a yoke is that it constrains someone; it does not permit independent action. There is something that forces you to comply with what the other one wants to do, whether you like it or not. Any kind of relationship that does not permit a believer to follow his Lord in all things is a yoke. Even a friendship can be a yoke. If it is the kind of possessive friendship in which you feel you cannot do what

God wants you to do because you will offend your friend, then that is a yoke and it must be broken.

Steve Zeisler: Paul uses two images drawn from the Old Testament. First, in **verse 14** he makes the clear statement, do not be yoked together with unbelievers. Then as he outlines a series of contrasts, the final one has to do with the temple of God and the temple of idols, so he picks up the imagery of the temple and expands on that. The one image is that of a yoke on two animals, and the other is that of the temple of God and what it means for God to dwell in a place and be at home in righteousness where he belongs.

The law of the Jews forbade that Jews should take two different sorts of animals and yoke them together with a hard, inflexible, wooden yoke. We're told in Deuteronomy that it is not permissible to take an ox and a donkey and yoke them together. It was given originally to forbid cruelty to animals. If a heavy-footed, slow-moving ox is locked together closely and unbreakably with a donkey, which is at a different height and moves at a different gait, the yoke will chafe and make both animals miserable.

Robert Gromacki: 2 blessings of obedience to this command:

1. First, God will “receive” the obedient, separated child of God. This is not a reception to salvation, but to full enjoyment of the privileges of sonship. . .
2. Second, there would be an awareness of the Father-Son relationship (**6:18**). It was difficult for the prodigal son to sense his sonship when he was living far away from his father, indulging in riotous living and, later, working in the pig fields (**Luke 15:11-24**). When he repented and returned home, the Father kissed, forgave, clothed, and fed him. So it will be for any Christian who will separate himself from sin and sinful alliances.

Homer Kent: (Regarding connection to previous paragraph)

The exhortation that the Corinthians open their hearts to Paul (**6:13**) must not be misunderstood as though he were asking for an undiscerning love that had no standards and no convictions. To return to Paul in a meaningful way would require a disavowal of all that was contradictory. . . He was warning his readers against forming the sort of binding relationships with unbelievers which would weaken their Christian standards or compromise their ability to maintain a consistent witness.

Murray Harris: Paul is probably implying that the Corinthians had become defiled, perhaps by occasionally sharing meals at idol-shrines or by continuing to attend festivals or ceremonies in pagan temples (cf. **1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22**); or even by maintaining their membership in some local pagan cult. If they made a clean break . . . with pagan life in any and every form, they would be bringing their holiness nearer completion by this proof of their reverence for God. The Christian life involves separation (**6:17**), familial fellowship (**6:18**), and sanctification (**7:1**).

John MacArthur: The Old Testament graphically depicts the **disastrous consequences of attempting to mingle idolatry with the worship of the true God**. It is instructive to

read **2 Kings 21:1–9**, which describes the reign of Manasseh, the most wicked of Judah’s kings:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord provoking Him to anger. Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. And I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.” But they did not listen, and Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.

The phrase “*abominations of the nations*” refers to the idolatry Manasseh brought back into Judah. Specifically, “*he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.*” Even worse, Manasseh “*built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put My name.’ For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.*” And if that were not bad enough, he put an idol in the temple itself: “*Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever.’*” That blasphemous insult to God provoked His **devastating judgment** on the nation:

Now the Lord spoke through His servants the prophets, saying, “Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in

My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.” (vv. 10–15)

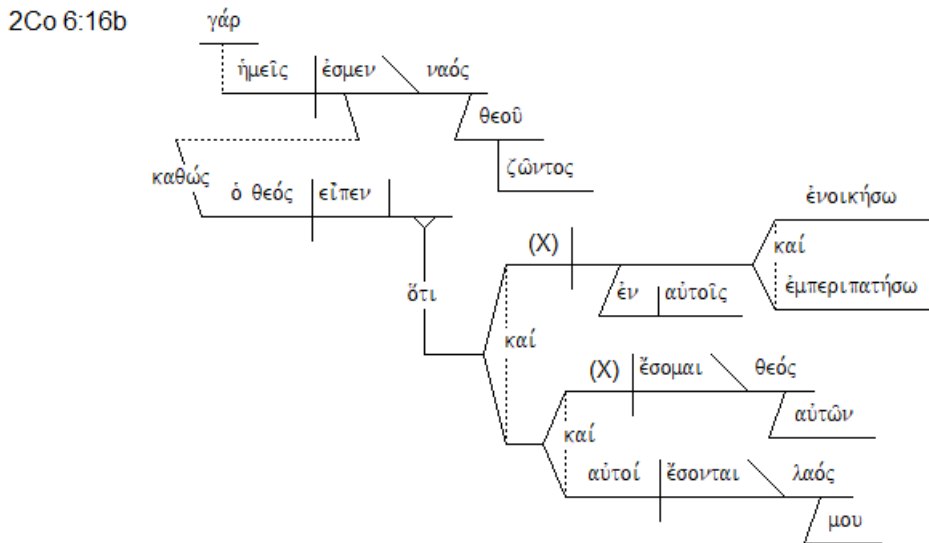
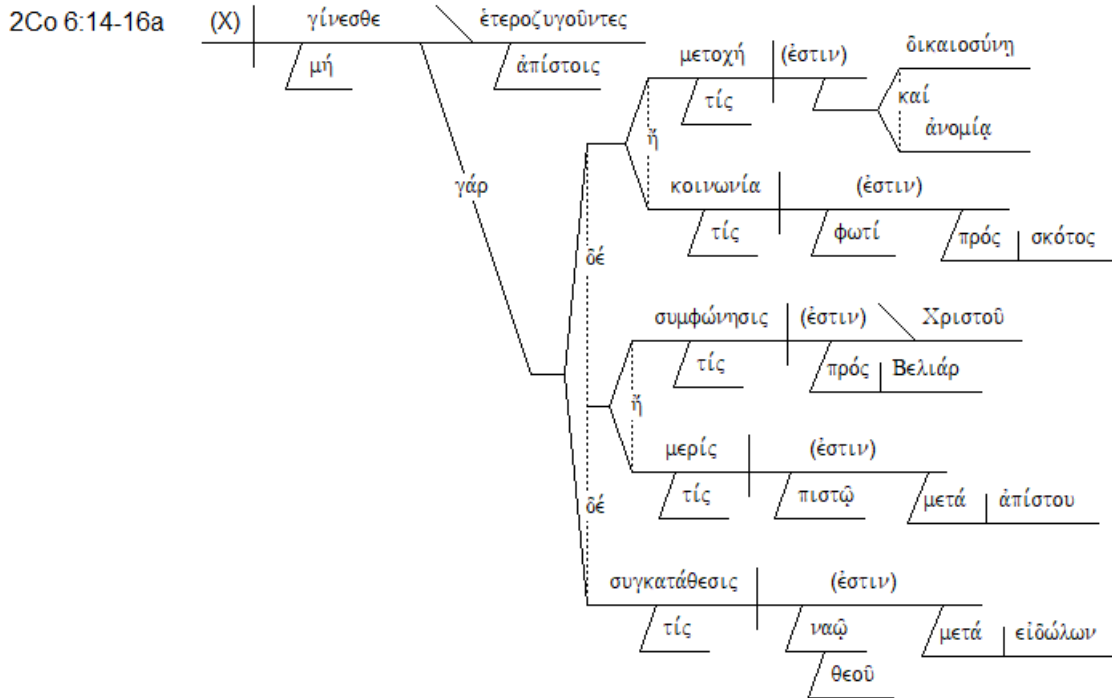
First Samuel 4 and 5 record another incident that illustrates the incompatibility of the true God with idols. Israel was at war with the Philistines and lost four thousand men in one skirmish (4:1–2). Dismayed by the Lord’s failure to help them in battle (which was due to their sin and apostasy), the Israelites sent to Shiloh for the ark of the covenant, the visible representation of God’s presence (4:3–5). Thinking themselves now to be invincible, they fought the Philistines again—this time losing 30,000 men and the ark: *“So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died” (4:10–11).*

The triumphant Philistines brought the ark to the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod (5:1–2). The next morning, much to their surprise, they discovered that the idol of Dagon had prostrated itself before the ark (5:3). They put the idol back in its place, only to have the same thing happen the next day—this time with Dagon’s head and hands cut off. The message was clear: **The true God tolerates no rivals.** He will not share billing with false gods.

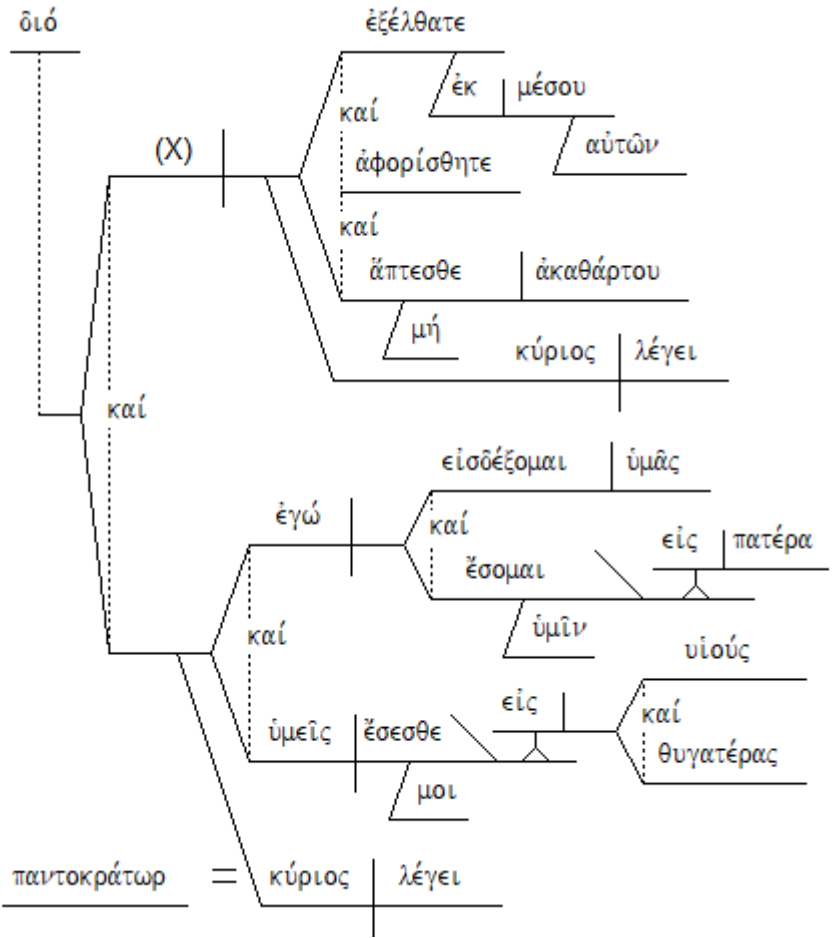
Ezekiel chapter 8 further illustrates that reality. In **verse 3** the Lord took Ezekiel (who was actually in Babylon) by means of a vision to the temple in Jerusalem, *“to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located,”* alongside *“the glory of the God of Israel”* (v. 4). Such a situation was intolerable to God, who declared in **verse 6**, *“Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary?”* Rather than share His own sanctuary with pagan idols, God chose to abandon it.

George Shillington: Idols come in many forms and guises. Humans beings shape reality and meaning into fixed structures and proceed to live within those structures. When the structures, whatever form they take, are treated as ultimate reality, they become idolatrous. The process of making idols is subtle, and it even happens within the church. Denominationalism, for example, can become an idol, as can marriage, property, education, career, clothing. But the most subtle form of idolatry is in the realm of ideas. When ideas, religious or otherwise, are construed as universally fixed reality, they become idols. Believers in the life-giving God of the universe are instructed in this text not to yoke themselves with the structures of the world that function in opposition to the will of God. Structures in themselves are not idols; they become idols by human imagination and will that are separated from the redemptive will of God.

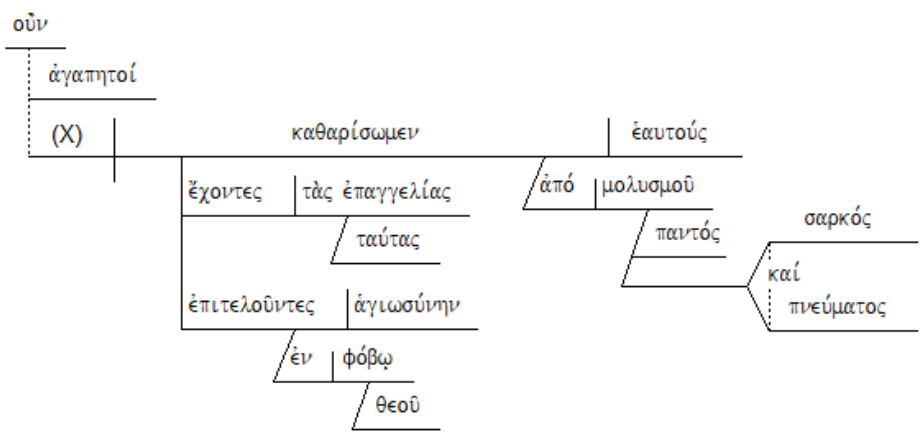
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



2Co 6:17-18



2Co 7:1



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

TITLE: *GODLY SORROW PRODUCES GENUINE REPENTANCE*

BIG IDEA:

**SPIRITUAL LEADERS REJOICE WITH COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE
OVER GENUINE REPENTANCE**

INTRODUCTION:

R. Kent Hughes: **Depression** actually has apostolic precedent — in the experience of the Apostle Paul. Paul’s self-description says that he was “*downcast*” (cf. v. 6), or as the NASB has it, “*depressed*” — a sense commended both by the context and the psychological import of Paul’s description. Paul is perfectly clear as to why he was down: “*For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn — fighting with-out and fear within*” (note: “*fighting*” and “*fear*” are plural in the Greek) (v. 5).

This Macedonian misery was the culmination of Paul’s excruciating anxiety over the Corinthian church to which he had written a harsh letter after suffering rejection in Corinth. So concerned was Paul with how the Corinthians would respond, he sent Titus to Corinth to find out and then report to him at an agreed-upon rendezvous in Troas. This plan only served to increase his stress because Titus didn’t show. So Paul left Troas and traveled to Macedonia, fearing that something had happened to Titus (cf. **2:12, 13**). But at first all he found there was the Macedonian mess. There in Macedonia Paul suffered exhaustion due to constant affliction as he was pressured externally and internally. . .

Along with this, he experienced “*fear[s]* within.” These were not fears for his own life. We have too much evidence to the contrary to think that (cf. **Philippians 1:21-24**). His inner fears were about what might happen to his work, for he often spoke of this. For example, he told the Galatians, “*I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain*” (**Galatians 4:11**); and he wrote to the Thessalonians, “*For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain*” (**1 Thessalonians 3:5**); and then, to the Corinthians, he will say, “*There is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*” (**2 Corinthians 11:28, 29**).

These **ministerial fears** weighed heavily on Paul. He was always fearful for some troubled soul in one of the churches who was falling away. There was never a time when someone was not unhappy with him and maligning him. Ecclesiastic conflicts were his daily fare, and he was constantly writing to calm the waters and set things straight. Such **depressing fears** were recurrent for Paul, and the aggregate sometimes got him down. . .

Depression sometimes visits the most godly believers, and often it is because they have willingly followed God into the fray so that their bodies have had no rest, and pressures have squeezed them as they are surrounded by fightings without and fears within. They need a **loving touch**.

John MacArthur: There are few things in life more painful than **broken relationships**. Shattered marriages, wayward children, and disrupted friendships produce intense suffering and deep sorrow. When those broken relationships involve fellow believers, the pain is even more severe. Watching believers suffer the consequences of their sinful conduct compounds the grief from the breaking of the relationship. . .

The most painful aspect of ministry involves difficult relationships between the sheep and the shepherds. All pastors know the hurt that comes when those in whom they have invested the most return the least.

As he penned this epistle, Paul nursed a broken heart over the church he loved and served. He was under severe external pressure, experiencing afflictions (**1:4, 6, 8**) and suffering (**1:5, 7**) to the point that he “*despaired even of life*” (**1:8**), “*had the sentence of death within [himself]*” (**1:9**), and needed to be “*delivered ... from so great a peril of death*” (**1:10**). . .

But what really broke Paul’s heart was not what the world did to him but what the church did to him. In **11:28**, after listing the trials he had endured, Paul wrote, “*Apart from [of a completely different nature] such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.*” And none caused him more trouble than the church in Corinth. The church in which he had invested nearly two years of his life had repaid him with disloyalty. They had allowed false teachers to come into their assembly and attack Paul’s character and ministry. Even worse, some of the Corinthians believed their lies and joined in a mutiny against him. One of them had apparently verbally assaulted and abused Paul (cf. **2:5–8, 10**) during the apostle’s painful, sorrowful visit to Corinth. That the majority in the church had not defended him from those attacks wounded Paul deeply. The visit was so discouraging that he did not want to return to Corinth and expose himself to more pain (**2:1**). As a result of the visit, he had written a sternly worded letter, rebuking the Corinthians for their disaffection, disloyalty, and lack of love toward him. Writing that letter was extremely painful for Paul, as he noted in **2:4**: “*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears.*”

Paul sent the letter to Corinth with Titus, his beloved son in the faith (**Titus 1:4**), who was also to bring the Corinthians’ response back to him. The apostle left Ephesus (where he had written the severe letter) and went to Troas (a seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor), where he hoped to rendezvous with Titus. But Paul was so anxious about the situation in Corinth that he could not minister in Troas (*2 Cor. 2:13*), even though the Lord opened a door for him there (**2:12**). Restless, unable to wait any longer, the apostle set off for Macedonia, anxious to meet Titus sooner and find out the Corinthians’ response to the severe letter (**2:13**).

At that point (**2:13**) the narrative broke off, and Paul entered into a prolonged digression about his ministry (**2:14 – 7:4**). Here, in **7:5**, the apostle returned to the events that followed the sending of the severe letter. When he came into Macedonia from Troas in search of Titus, his flesh had no rest (cf. **2:13**). Nothing changed; he had no relief from his concern over the situation at Corinth. In fact, he had new concerns. What if the severe letter had made things worse? Was the breach with the Corinthians now irreparable? How would they treat Titus? Corinth, as Paul well knew, could be a hostile environment for a lonely preacher; would the church leave Titus to fend for himself? Lack of relief from the heavy burden of grief and concern Paul bore sapped the joy of his ministry. His experience reflected the truth of **Proverbs 13:12**, “*Hope deferred makes the heart sick.*” . . .

The narrative does not end with Paul being depressed. God, who comforts the depressed, comforted him by the coming of Titus. This is, therefore, a passage about joy, not depression. In fact, **comfort** is mentioned six times in these verses and joy or rejoicing five times. In this section God comforts the anxious, grieving pastor and restores his joy.

The coming of Titus brought the joy to Paul’s heart. The apostle rejoiced that he was safe and in the renewal of their fellowship. However, it was not only Titus’s presence that comforted Paul but also the report that he brought about the situation at Corinth. There were still unresolved problems (which Paul addressed in **chapters 10–13**). But the majority of the Corinthian believers had repented and reaffirmed their loyalty to the apostle and the truth he taught, which brought him immense relief.

This very personal section offers profound insights into restoring broken relationships. It lists seven indicators of a genuine desire for real restoration: loyalty, repentance, purity, spirituality, unity, obedience, and trust. And though the context is the relationship between a pastor and his people, these principles are vital for restoring any broken relationship.

Eric Mason: (:**2-13**) -- Main Idea: God empowers you with all you need to deal with your church hurt.

- I. Dealing with Church Hurt Involves Joyful Optimism (**7:2-4**).
- II. Dealing with Church Hurt Involves Coming alongside One Another (**7:5-7**).
- III. Dealing with Church Hurt Involves Authentic Repentance (**7:8-13**).

How do you handle **church hurt**? Do you run? Do you avoid confrontation? Do you just vote with your feet? Or do you commit yourself to a gospel that put God on the cross, where God shows through Jesus the most effective way to deal with hurt is through his hurt.

PERSPECTIVE:

We need some perspective on the **overall process of Reconciliation** before beginning this study. There was a serious problem between Paul and some of the believers in Corinth. Remember some of the specific charges that had been leveled against him by his opponents:

- You are Ambiguous (1:13) – you are difficult to understand; Paul’s opponents would twist his words and misrepresent his teachings
- You are Fickle (1:15-20) – You can’t be depended upon; you change your travel plans and back out of previous commitments; we can not depend on your commitment to us
- You Brag about Yourself (3:1-3) – You are always commending yourself; exalting yourself; boasting in your accomplishments
- You are an Imposter (6:8) – Your apostolic call is questionable; Christ does not really speak through you (13:3)
- You have no real Authority (10:1-2) – In fact you are timid in person and only bold when you are writing from a safe distance away
- You are Crafty and Deceitful (12:16) – You take advantage of others

These are all very **serious charges** that have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry. Divine grace was needed not to lash back defensively and vindictively. What type of interaction would Paul choose:

- Loving Communication (with goal of restoration) or
- Angry Confrontation (with goal of revenge)

The Apostle Paul took the initiative by writing a severe letter and then waiting for Titus to report back with the response of the Corinthians.

Loving Communication produces Godly Sorrow which leads to Genuine Repentance and Reconciliation.

Angry Confrontation produces Worldly Sorrow which leads to Superficial Regret and further Separation.

(:2-4) INTRODUCTION: THE ANTICIPATION OF GENUINE REPENTANCE (LEADING TO FULL RECONCILIATION) EVOKES DEEP EMOTIONS OF CONFIDENCE, COMFORT AND JOY

Richard Pratt: With these verses, Paul makes an appeal that echoes that of **6:11–13**, once more appealing to the Corinthians to let him into their hearts. In addition to making this appeal, he defends himself with three specific statements that reveal something of the situation at Corinth: Paul has injured no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one. But lest the Corinthians misunderstand his rebuke, he assures

them that he is not condemning them. To support this, he reminds them of his readiness to die and live with them, as well as his frankness, confidence, encouragement, and joy in regard to them. The material brings to a close Paul's defense and exposition of his apostolic ministry, begun at **2:14**, and serves as a transition to the next section (**7:5–16**), in which he will describe the joy he experienced at finding Titus at Macedonia and learning of the community's concern for him.

A. (:2) Ministry Integrity Removes Any Barriers to Full Reconciliation

1. Plea for Full Reconciliation

"Make room for us in your hearts"

Charles Swindoll: When we **respect** someone, we make room for them in our hearts (**7:2**). Real respect is necessary to lay the groundwork to become kindred spirits *"to die together and to live together"* (**7:3**). Sometimes this kind of relationship in which two hearts beat as one can come quite naturally. The world calls it "love at first sight." Most of the time, however, making room for others in our hearts takes a great amount of effort. We need to rearrange some of the furniture in our hearts to create a place for them. This kind of respect for others can be inconvenient, but if we are going to have a thriving ministry with others, we need to *"make room."*

Richard Pratt: He did not want them to resent or reject him; he desired close fellowship with them like that between loving parents and children.

2. Personal Testimony of Ministry Integrity – A Clear Conscience

a. *"we wronged no one"*

b. *"we corrupted no one"*

c. *"we took advantage of no one"*

B. (:3) Tone of Loving Acceptance – Not Judgmental Spirit

1. Not out to Condemn

"I do not speak to condemn you"

2. Embracing Them in Loving Acceptance

"for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together."

C. (:4) Outpouring of Deep Emotions

Frank Matera: In **verse 4** Paul concludes with four statements that complete his appeal in such a way that there can be no doubt about his affections for the community. First, he has spoken *"frankly"* or *"openly"* (*parrēsia*), a claim that echoes what he said earlier when comparing his ministry with the ministry of Moses (**3:12**). Thus his gospel conceals nothing from the community. Second, despite the present rift between Paul and the Corinthians, he has great *"confidence"* (*kauchēsis*) in them, for they will be his

boast on the day of the Lord (1:14). Third, he is filled with “*encouragement*” (*paraklēsis*), the very “*comfort*” of which he spoke so eloquently at the beginning of this letter (1:3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and which he will experience upon hearing Titus’s report (7:6–7). Finally, Paul expresses his “*joy*” in “*our affliction*.” If “*our*” includes the community, then Paul is saying that despite their common troubles his joy abounds because not even affliction can separate a father from his beloved children.

1. Confidence

a. “*Great is my confidence in you*”

Scott Hafemann: In verse 4 Paul begins his extended argument in support of 7:3 by recounting his own disposition in response to the repentant in Corinth. He does so in a chain of inferences taken from his opening arguments that together form a topic sentence for what follows. Paul is not afraid to call the Corinthians to action because he is convinced of their genuine standing as Christians. Hence, as a mediator of the Spirit under the new covenant, he has “*great confidence*” (*parresia*, better, “*boldness of speech*”) toward them. As the parallel in 3:12 indicates, he is speaking boldly in 7:2–3 because he is convinced that those in whom the Spirit is at work will respond to the commands of the gospel (cf. 3:3–18; 5:17). In the end, nobody can do anything against the truth (cf. 13:8). This conviction is confirmed in regard to the Corinthians by Titus’s report (see 7:7–12).

b. “*great is my boasting on your behalf*”

Charles Swindoll: Paul, however, treated his spiritual children with respect not for what they had done, but for what they could do; not for what they were, but for what they could become. Paul, being the greathearted man he was, believed in them, even when they failed. He stuck with them, encouraging them and spurring them toward greatness. He poured his life into them even when he saw no return on his investment, knowing that they were worth every moment of time and every ounce of energy he spent on them. Thankfully, by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, he had begun to see signs of renewal and repentance. His **confidence** had begun to pay off; he could even boast on their behalf (7:4).

2. Comfort

“*I am filled with comfort.*”

3. Joy

“*I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.*”

Charles Swindoll: The closing words of 2 Corinthians 7:4 mention two benefits that flow from Paul’s prescription for relationships. When we respect others by making room for them in our hearts, refusing to condemn them, and holding out confident expectations for their growth and maturity, we can experience great comfort and joy in the midst of our affliction. Paul continues to develop the effects of the vertical reverence we have for God (7:1) and the horizontal respect we have for others (7:2–4)

as he describes the relief from distress we can experience in the midst of our circumstances (7:5-7).

Paul Barnett: Evidently, despite the problems, Paul remains both optimistic and confident of his relationships with them. He writes of his *great confidence* (rsv) and *pride* in the Corinthians and says that, in spite of afflictions incurred through the ministry, he is *greatly encouraged* (4). Here we have an insight into the remarkable resilience and perseverance of the apostle Paul, which doubtless he would quickly attribute, as we also should, to the grace of God and the power of the Spirit.

I. (:5-7) DIVINE COMFORT RELIEVES INTENSE MINISTRY PRESSURE

A. (:5) Inescapable Battleground Pressure – Squeezed on all fronts

“For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.”

B. (:6) Divine Strategic Reinforcement – Divine Comfort in the person of Titus

“But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus”

Paul Barnett: God brought his comfort to Paul in a twofold manner. There was, first, the eventual arrival of Titus, thus removing fears that thieves had struck him down. (Possibly Paul had expected Titus to bring the collection with him, thus making him an attractive target for attack.) Further, to his immense relief, Titus brought an enthusiastic report of the positive Corinthian response to the ‘*sorrowful*’ letter. Titus was comforted by the Corinthians’ longing, sorrow and ardent concern for Paul (7). Thus Paul was ‘*happy*’ (9) at their reassurance to Titus of their loyalty towards Paul and of their deep regret at having caused him pain.

C. (:7) Encouraging Scouting Report – First Fruits of Genuine Repentance

“and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.”

George Shillington: The Corinthians' loyalty and concern for Paul showed their acceptance of his apostolic correction as well as their loyalty to Christ. Paul delighted in the grace of God at work in the Corinthian church.

Frank Matera: Having spoken of how God comforted him by Titus’s arrival, Paul now points to Titus’s report about the community’s response as yet another way in which God comforted him. Thus it was not only by the arrival of Titus that God comforted Paul but by the news that Titus brought about the community’s “*longing*,” “*grieving*,” and “*zeal*” on Paul’s behalf. These three reactions suggest an ascending order of response on the part of the community. First, having received the harsh letter, the community, which has been at odds with Paul, now desires to see him, fearful that he might not return to Corinth. Next, fearful that he might not return, the community is already lamenting its role in the affair. Finally, mourning what it has done, it is now

zealous in its efforts to rectify the situation, perhaps by punishing the offending party (see 2:5–11).

John MacArthur: Specifically, Titus reported three characteristics of the Corinthians' response that revealed their loyalty to Paul: *longing, mourning, and zeal*. Together they define **loyalty**—a word that is fast disappearing from the contemporary vocabulary. In a postmodern society where self-centered narcissism reigns supreme, loyalty is seen not as an asset but as a liability. But loyalty is the most desirable virtue in any human relationship. On the other hand, disloyalty devastates a relationship.

II. (:8-10) GODLY SORROW PRODUCES GENUINE REPENTANCE

A. (:8-9) Godly Sorrow is a Means to an End, not an End in Itself

“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it – for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while – I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.”

George Shillington: Paul wrote a letter some time back that grieved the Corinthians; in light of Titus's report, he does not regret writing as he did. After he had written the letter, though, he was regretting (imperfect tense) having done so. In the present situation, however, he sees (present tense) that the grief was short-lived (lit.: for an hour), so he no longer regrets having sent the letter. Instead, he is rejoicing now (7:9). With this understanding of the syntax of 7:8-9c, the following translation is possible: *For even though I grieved you with the letter, I am not regretting it. Even if I was regretting it, even if I see that that letter brought you pain for an hour, I am now rejoicing, not because you were hurt, but because you were hurt unto repentance.*

Anthony Thiselton: In v. 8, Paul admits that his letter made the Corinthians “sorry,” but he only briefly had regrets. In retrospect, he is glad that he wrote it. His hesitation has given way to joy because of the effects that his letter finally achieved. He is sorry for the grief that the letter caused, but ultimately it succeeded in its purpose. Their grief led to their repentance (v. 9).

B. (:10) Godly Sorrow is Different than Worldly Sorrow

“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

Charles Swindoll: The difference between sorrow inflicted by God and sorrow inflicted by the world is that one is purposeful while the other is pointless. Sorrow “according to God” produces repentance; worldly sorrow produces death (7:9-10). From a spiritual perspective, the feelings of guilt, shame, and sadness that accompany a stern rebuke are not meant as a punishment, but as a call to repentance. By receiving the reproof, one

opens the inner door of the soul to wisdom. By contrast, an angry reaction of resentment will bolt the door against an opportunity to learn from the experience.

1. It is directed by God – “*according to the will of God*”
2. It is the believer's insurance policy: the premium hurts, but the benefits pay off in the long run – “*without regret*”
If you had to do it all over again, you would pay the insurance premiums just like you did the first time.
3. It results in *salvation* (or reconciliation)
(worldly sorrow results in death, separation)
4. Examples of worldly sorrow
 - a. King Herod -- **Matt. 14:9**
 - b. Rich young man -- **Matt. 19:22**
 - c. Judas -- **Matt. 27:3-5**

John MacArthur: his passage is incompatible with the teaching that repentance is not necessary for salvation. The progression it reveals is obvious: confrontation of sin leads to sorrow, which leads to repentance, which leads to salvation. Nor will this passage allow repentance to be defined as merely changing one's mind about who Jesus is. The text inextricably connects repentance with sorrow over sin. Repentance is not, of course, a meritorious human work that earns salvation. Like every aspect of salvation, repentance is a gracious work of God in the human heart (**Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25**).

III. (:11-12) GENUINE REPENTANCE CAN BE RECOGNIZED BY OTHERS

A. Recognized According to its Nature, its Orientation

Definition of Repentance: "a change of mind leading to a change of action" -- It results in a complete reorientation of thoughts, attitudes, and actions. It involves a turning from sin and a turning towards God. It is either used in a broad sense as synonymous with conversion or in a more narrow sense as one of the two conditions for salvation: Repentance and Faith – these two always go hand in hand – like the two sides of the same coin. Just as Repentance is essential for initial conversion, it is also essential for continued spiritual growth (this is not emphasized enough). Cf. **Col. 2:6** – “*As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.*”

B. (:11) Recognized According to its Fruit – The 7 Fruits of Genuine Repentance

1. Speedy Resolution (diligence, earnestness, eagerness)

*“For behold what earnestness this very thing,
this godly sorrow, has produced in you”*

(our English word “*speed*”) – same word used in **Rom. 12:11** – “*not slothful in business*” – I am afraid we are more diligent in doing a good job solving problems at work than we are in addressing reconciliation problems. A genuinely repentant person will quickly seek out reconciliation on his own initiative. He will not treat the situation with careless indifference or ignore the problem (hoping it will go away). There is a need to get busy and be in earnest.

Anthony Thiselton: *Earnestness* translates the Greek *spoudē*, which means quick action, diligence, or eager commitment. He uses the word again in **v. 12** and **8:7**.

2. Reasonable Dialogue (controlled by reason, not by emotion)
“what vindication of yourselves”

(controlled by reason, not emotion – cf. English word “apology”) – Not compounding the sin or seeking to justify your participation in that sin, but explaining your repentance so that now you stand in a state of innocence – not participating in any of these false charges; not giving them any more of a hearing.

3. Indignation (shame and distress) – *“what indignation”*

Not calm and unruffled evidencing no sorrow for sin; not arrogant and stubborn; but recognizing the shame associated with such failure and being distressed by the whole situation and yet not despairing because of the forgiveness for sins provided by the blood of Christ.

Anthony Thiselton: *Indignation* translates *aganaktēsis*, and presumably refers to displeasure about how Paul had been treated.

4. Fear – *“what fear”*

The Corinthians recognized they had sinned against a holy God and against His apostolic representative. They realized how serious such an offense was and what judgment could have been theirs; no complacency or false security.

5. Longing (to see the offended party) – *“what longing”*

They wanted to meet personally to set things right and to make sure that the problem is behind them; not avoiding or despising the offended party.

6. Zeal (upholding the honor and reputation of the offended party)
“what zeal”

Encouraging others to express their loyalty towards this person; upholding his honor; not undermining loyalty to such a person and attacking him at every turn

7. Avenging of wrong – “*what avenging of wrong*”

The church is the proper forum for judging one another and exercising any necessary discipline. We should hold to a high standard of justice. We should not take matters into our own hands or seek revenge.

John MacArthur: Truly repentant people have a strong desire to see justice done and to make restitution for the wrongs they have committed (cf. **2 Cor. 2:6–7**). Instead of protecting themselves, they accept the consequences of their sins.

Summary: “*In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.*”

George Shillington: As if this list were not enough to demonstrate Paul’s confidence in the Corinthians, he concludes it with a sweeping affirmation of their innocence: at every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter, the case of the member injuring another. In what sense is the congregation innocent in the matter? Paul had to write them a hurtful letter of censure because they were anything but innocent in the matter. Furthermore, Paul has just admitted that they have worked at clearing themselves of his charge against them. The most plausible explanation of the inconsistency in **7:11** is that Paul is willing to declare the Corinthians innocent now that they have taken action in accordance with his directive in the letter.

C. (:12) Recognized For What it Is

“So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.”

Essential for their ongoing spiritual growth and fruitfulness in ministry

Ray Stedman: they begin to recover a sense of their own identity

Homer Kent: Our knowledge of the details prompting this letter is admittedly meager, and thus we can only suggest possibilities. The view espoused in this commentary sees the offender as the ringleader of opposition against Paul (and perhaps Titus). The one offended was probably Paul, or perhaps Titus, but this is less likely. With this understanding, Paul is regarded as saying that his primary concern was not to secure punishment for the offender or vindication for himself. What he really wanted was for the Corinthians to prove to themselves that their response to spiritual truth and to God’s messengers was right. To accede to the directives of the apostle would rectify the situation, true repentance and an altered course of action would bring God’s approval, and this in turn would remind the Corinthians of the importance of heeding the instruction of Christ’s duly chosen apostles.

Tasker: quoting **Menzie:** The painful letter was written to make the Corinthians clearly conscious of the sentiment with which they did all the time regard him. That was to be done before God, in a marked and solemn manner, so that there could be no going back on it afterwards.

(:13-16) CONCLUSION: GENUINE REPENTANCE EVOKES DEEP EMOTIONS OF CONFIDENCE, COMFORT AND JOY

Paul finishes this section just as he began it in verses 2-4

A. (:13) Genuine Repentance Brings Great Comfort and Refreshing Joy

1. Personal Comfort – experienced by the Apostle Paul

“For this reason we have been comforted”

Frank Matera: It is now clear why Paul concludes this unit by writing, *“This is why we are comforted”* (v. 13). The harsh letter about which Paul had second thoughts resulted in the community’s repentance. And in a way that the community did not anticipate, the letter also resulted in God’s work of comforting the afflicted apostle.

2. Vicarious Comfort Evoking Even Greater Joy – based on encouragement to Titus

“And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.”

Anthony Thiselton: The third and final movement of this section speaks of the **joy of Titus** after his encounter with the Corinthians. He actually found that his meeting with them had *“set his mind at rest”* or was refreshing (Greek, *anapepautai*, perfect passive, i.e., past with effects remaining). The NIV translates, *“We are especially delighted to see how happy Titus was.”* This does good justice to the Greek *peissoterōs mallon echarēmen*, which uses a double comparative and redundant use of *mallon* with *perissoterōs*, i.e., *more abundantly*. The implication is that Titus, acting on behalf of Paul, was relieved and proud of the outcome of his labors in Corinth. Titus’ joy is contagious.

B. (:14) Genuine Repentance Brings Vindication of Boasting (Renewed Confidence)

“For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.”

George Shillington: Because Paul had bragged to Titus about the church at Corinth, he had risked embarrassment by sending Titus to deal with troubles there. He feared that perhaps they would not respond properly to his letter and that Titus would not be impressed with the church. But the Corinthians had been filled with godly sorrow and had repented, so they had not embarrassed him. Thus, Paul was vindicated in his boasting ... to Titus.

C. (:15) Genuine Repentance Brings An Outpouring of Affection

*“And his affection abounds all the more toward you,
as he remembers the obedience of you all,
how you received him with fear and trembling.”*

John MacArthur: Their willing obedience to the Word of God proved the genuineness of the Corinthians’ repentance. When people are truly repentant, they submit to the commands of Scripture without reluctance, caveat, or qualification. To have a congregation of such obedient people brings great joy to their leaders.

Paul Barnett: Unspoken but implied is Paul’s **renewed confidence in the power of God** which had so clearly worked through the letter Paul had written. His new confidence arose out of the Corinthians’ response to the ‘*sorrowful*’ letter. It is a serious mistake to underestimate the impact of the Word of God on those who hear and read it. To all appearances Paul was checkmated by the Corinthians’ repudiation of his painful visit. His ministry there seemed to be at an end. And yet it was not finished. The living God is quite capable of changing apparently intractable attitudes (including ours!) by his Word and Spirit. Ministers of God’s Word can find encouragement and renewal in their ministries by this example of the changed attitudes of the Corinthians.

D. (:16) Genuine Repentance Brings Joy in the Confident Expectation of Future Obedience

“I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.”

Quite the blanket statement!

Scott Hafemann: The focus throughout this passage has been on Paul’s **comfort** and **joy** because of the Corinthians, especially as this resulted in Titus’s own comfort, happiness, and renewed affection toward the repentant. By way of summary, Paul’s declaration of joy in **7:16** as a result of his renewed confidence in the Corinthians marks a **key turning point** in the letter.

Frank Matera: Looking back, it is now apparent that the material of this section has had a twofold result.

1. First, it has brought Paul’s narrative of his altered travel plans, the painful visit, and the harsh letter to a successful conclusion by showing how God has once more triumphed in the ministry of the afflicted apostle.
2. Second, it has assured the Corinthians of Paul’s abiding confidence in them, allowing him to raise the delicate question of the collection for Jerusalem, to which he now turns in **chapters 8–9**.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Note the compassionate heart of Christ who is able to comfort the distressed and depressed in every circumstance.
- 2) Note how Christ responded to those who attacked Him and His ministry? *“Father, forgive them”* was His prayer as He actively pleaded with them to be reconciled to God before impending wrath would strike. Note his example in 1 Peter of suffering unjustly for the sake of doing good according to the will of God.
- 3) Reconciliation is only possible because Christ has paid the price for our sins and become our Mediator.
- 4) Christ offers life and union with God the Father rather than death and separation. He alone can bring wholeness to any broken relationship.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we take the initiative to seek reconciliation – whether we judge ourselves to be the offending party or the offender?
- 2) Do we have a condemning, judgmental spirit that seeks to place blame or to exact revenge or do we deeply long for the spiritual growth of the other party and for restored relationships?
- 3) Do we teach our children the difference between just mouthing the words “I’m sorry” (= worldly sorrow) and actually following through with attitudes and actions that demonstrate a changed heart of repentance (= godly sorrow)?
- 4) Do we make our boast in the spiritual maturity and proper responses of those whom we are training in discipleship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steve Zeisler: Characteristics of a Corrector

Paul makes two important points. First, his motives are right. When he had to say hard things to them, it was not for his own sake. He didn't have an axe to grind, and he didn't come to get riches, prominence, or ego satisfaction from them. I used to play football, and I recall good and bad coaches. One demanded a lot of the team, insisting we go beyond what we thought we could physically do. We ran until we dropped, practiced till it hurt, and call on reserves we didn't know we had. Sometimes the coach's demands on

us succeeded in producing efforts that went beyond our expectations. But he wasn't centered on his own ego. He was demanding, but he wanted to serve his team, to see those in his charge succeed. But other coaches I've known are exactly the opposite. They treat their players like cattle, and if an individual is injured or needs extra help, he is "thrown away" and someone else put in his place because the program exists to promote the coach.

Paul is making that distinction here. He has had to demand hard things of the Corinthians. He has pointed out areas of their lives that they needed to hear about even though they didn't want to, but he didn't do it for his own sake. His motives were pure. That's a very important place to start if we are ever to be Micaiahs ourselves. Remember what Jesus said about logs and splinters in one's eye. Jesus said, first the log needs to be removed from your own eye before you can remove the splinter from another's eye. If we don't deal with our own motives and shortcomings, we shouldn't be in the ministry of shaping up someone else.

Paul alludes to another qualification in saying that the Corinthians are in his heart; he would live or die with them. Whatever happens in this correction process, he is not going to hold himself at a distance. Whatever pain or hardship they have to go through, his shoulder will be under the burden with them. Christian ministry of this sort cannot possibly take place at great distance. When the apostle must come to his church, or when a brother must come to his brother or sister, then he needs to be willing to say, "I know it's going to cost me something if you suffer because you matter so much to me."

To conclude, last week we talked about being yoked to non-Christians and why that's such a bad idea—having an unbreakable, inflexible oneness that dilutes our influence, that makes us live in a way that is less and less of the Lord. The exact opposite point is being made here, isn't it? We're not yoked enough to each other! We're not involved enough with those who are our family—we don't get close enough, speak forcefully enough; we're unwilling to do the courageous thing or we're too hardened to receive godly sorrow. We've taken communion today, and the Bible forbids us to take communion in an unworthy manner. It may very well be that we need someone to help us see our unworthiness. I need someone to come to me and tell me when I'm being arrogant, or when greed has infiltrated me, or I've stopped caring for other people. You need people like that to come to you. So it's good to avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers. But let's be more yoked to each other! Let's be more willing to say the hard thing when it's required, and expect godly sorrow to have its result, that life should abound.

David Garland: The church in every age must walk a narrow tightrope as it tries to be in the world but not of it. To do this, Christians need a proper sense of their own identity and of appropriate boundaries. Christians must always be on guard against the pulls of the surrounding paganism and must resist religious entanglements that will compromise their loyalty and commitment to Christ and jeopardize their witness and their ultimate destiny.

John Piper: I would suggest two ways to distinguish them.

1) Worldly regret is when you feel sorry for something you did because it starts to backfire on you and leads to humiliation or punishment. It's the reflex of a proud or fearful ego. Pride will always regret making a fool of itself. And fear will always regret acts that jeopardize comfort and safety. So feeling sorry for something we have done is in itself no sign of virtue. But godly regret is the reflex of a conscience that has wounded God's ego, not its own. Godly regret grieves that God's name has come into disrepute. The focus of godly regret is God.

2) A second way to distinguish worldly regret from godly regret is that godly regret is owing to God's word putting its finger on sin in our lives. Worldly regret is owing not to God's word but to the attitudes of men whose praise we don't want to lose. We can feel extremely sorry for something we have done if we detect that the people around us think it is stupid or silly or reprehensible. The word of man not God becomes the criterion of guilt.

So in summary, godly grief, or godly regret, is the uncomfortable feeling of guilt when the word of God shows you that what you've done is sin and thus has brought reproach on God's name. (Of course, if other people have been hurt by your sin, godly regret will want to redress the wrong and so remove the reproach upon God's honor.) Godly regret is the regret of a God-saturated heart, not a world-saturated heart.

Robert Gromacki: Genuine repentance is permanent as well as observable. A temporary reformation is a sign of human change rather than divine. Peter warned against those professed believers who “*are again entangled therein, and overcome*” with the pollutions of the world (**II Peter 2:20**). Paul was concerned whether their repentance was genuine or false. The report of Titus proved that it was genuine.

William Barclay: The last thing that Paul wished was to rebuke. He did it only under compulsion and because there was nothing else to do. He took no pleasure whatever in inflicting pain. There are those who take a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince beneath the lash of their tongue. Who pride themselves on being candid when they are only being rude, and on being blunt when they are only being boorish. It is the simple fact that the rebuke which is given with a certain relish will never prove as effective as the rebuke which is obviously unwillingly dragged out of a man and which he only gives because he can do no other. . .

Paul's sole object in giving rebuke was to enable people to be what they ought to be. By his rebuke he wished the Corinthians to see the real earnestness they possessed for him in the depths of their hearts in spite of their disobedience and their trouble-making. Such a course might for the moment cause pain, but its ultimate object was not the pain; it was not to knock them down, it was to lift them up; it was not to discourage them, it was to encourage them; it was not simply to eradicate the evil, it was to make the good grow.

Raymond Collins: **Consolation** and **joy** are the dominant themes of **7:5–16**. Paul uses the verb “*console*” (*parakaleō*) four times, the noun “*consolation*” (*paraklēsis*) twice, the verb “*rejoice*” (*chairō*) four times, and the noun “*joy*” (*chara*) once. The motifs pick up the final words of the previous section of the letter, in which Paul says, “*I have been filled with consolation; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction*” (7:4).

Consolation and joy are **gifts of God**. Paul begins **7:5–16** by mentioning how downhearted he had been. He was beset with difficulties and was suffering turmoil within. Such was Paul’s human situation before God’s intervention. Reprising the description of God with which he began the letter, Paul identifies the intervening God as “*God who consoles the lowly*” (7:6). The descriptive language recalls that Paul has previously described the Father as the “*God of all consolation*” (1:3). That Paul will invoke God in this fashion, as he does in **Rom. 15:5**, indicates not only that God is the source of consolation but also that this divine attribute provides the lowly and downtrodden with a claim to be heard (7:5–6a). That God is the God of all consolation bespeaks his special relationship with those who are in need.

For Paul and other biblical authors, both OT and NT, joy results from the experience of God’s presence among human beings, particularly but not exclusively in circumstances of affliction (7:4; 8:2; see **1 Thess. 1:6**; **James 1:2**; **1 Pet. 1:6–8**; cf. **Heb. 10:34**). That joy is a consequence of experiencing the divine presence means that God provides the initiative in the human experience of true joy. Thus Paul can speak of joy as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Gal. 5:22**) and as a quality of the kingdom of God (**Rom. 14:17**).

The consolation that God gives is **granted through human experience**. Paul, who was afflicted in all sorts of ways, was consoled by the arrival of Titus. A fearful Titus was consoled by the reception that he received from the Corinthians. Paul was consoled by the news about the Corinthians that Titus brought. From the standpoint of those who are consoled, experiencing divine consolation can be described as having one’s spirit refreshed, as through rest when there has previously been restlessness. In simple language, receiving divine consolation is an experience of being cheered up.

Since consolation is experienced as a result of a divine intervention, consolation results in joy. Thus Paul can write that he rejoiced all the more because of the conversion that the Corinthians have experienced. Titus was consoled by the reception that he received from the Corinthians. That brought him joy, a joy in which Paul could share. Paul’s joy brought him confidence. Rejoicing, he knew that he could rely on the Corinthians because God was at work among them.

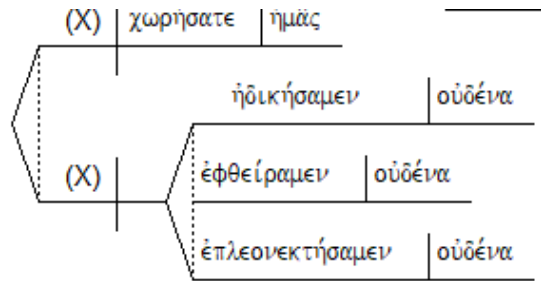
The careful reader of Paul’s missive should not psychoanalyze Paul’s experience of consolation and joy, but it is difficult to miss the **exuberance** that issues from Paul’s experience of consolation and joy. He describes the Corinthians’ conversion experience with seven terms, barely distinguishable from one another, but they do add up to seven, the number that signified fullness in the ancient world. Using paronomasia, the word “*all*” echoes throughout. Paul says that Titus was well received and encouraged by all of you and that all of you were obedient. And Paul has confidence *in every way* (*en*

panti, 6:16), whereas previously he was afflicted *in every way* (*en panti*, 7:5). Paul’s language may be hyperbolic, but there is no lack of enthusiasm on his part.

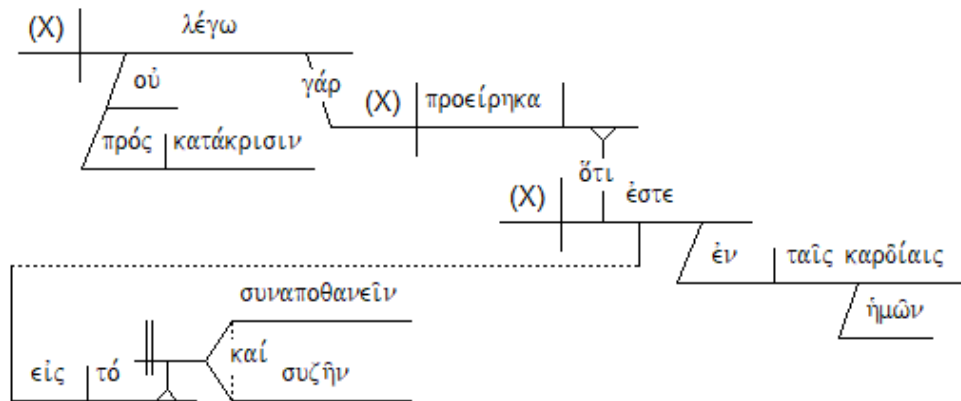
The way Paul describes how he was consoled and encouraged by the arrival of Titus and the things that the latter had to say—all this serves as a reminder that **God works through human beings**. Titus’s consolation of Paul was the expression and incarnation of divine consolation.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

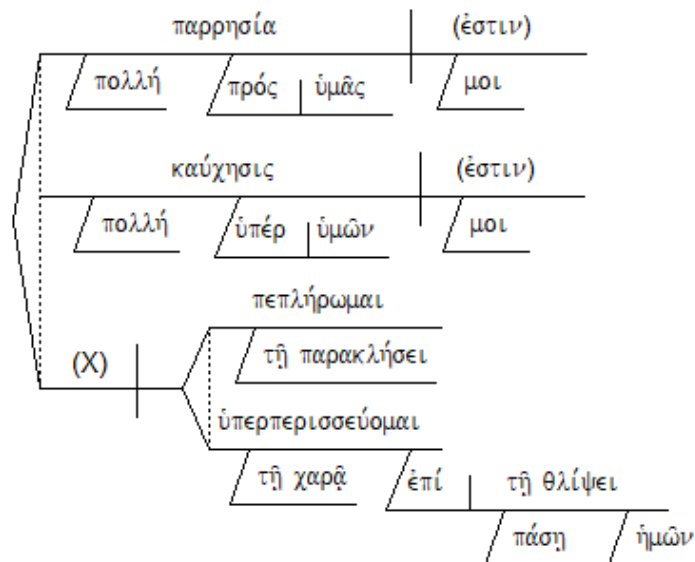
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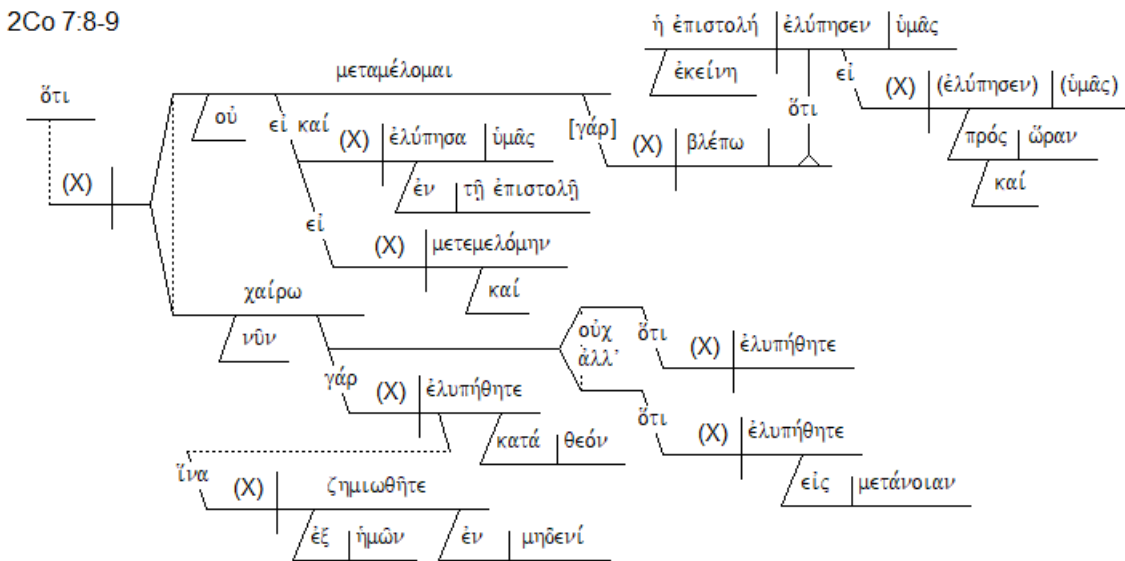
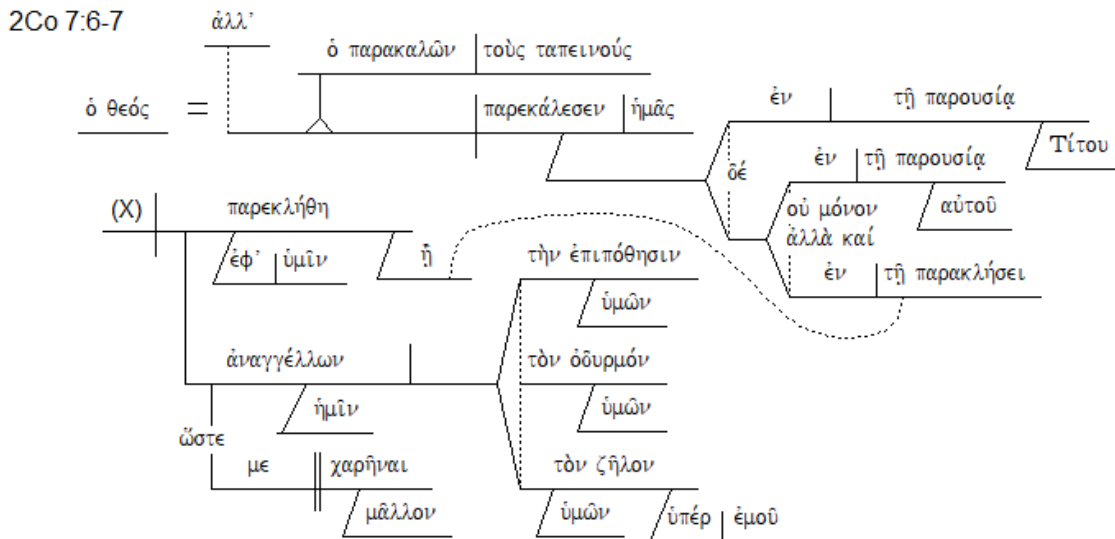
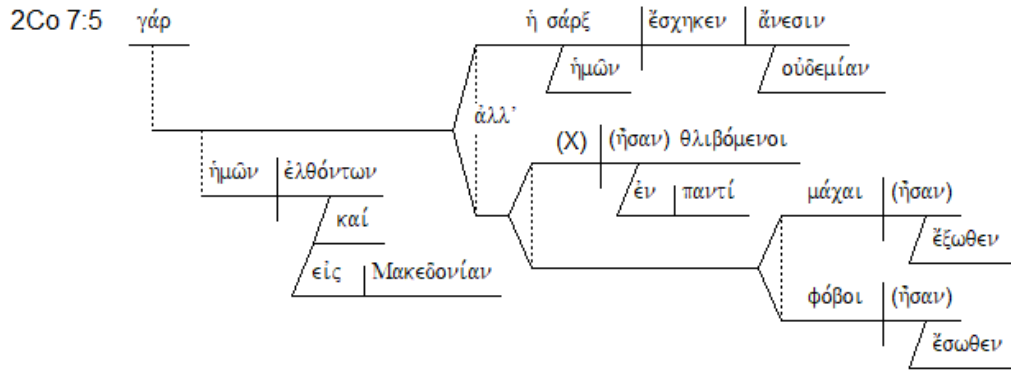


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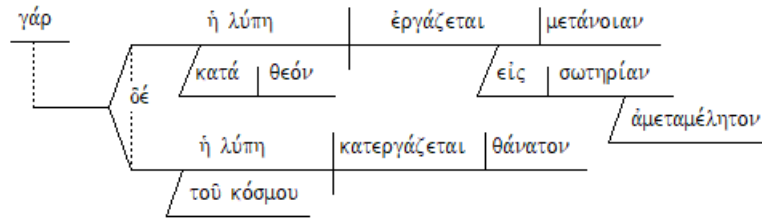


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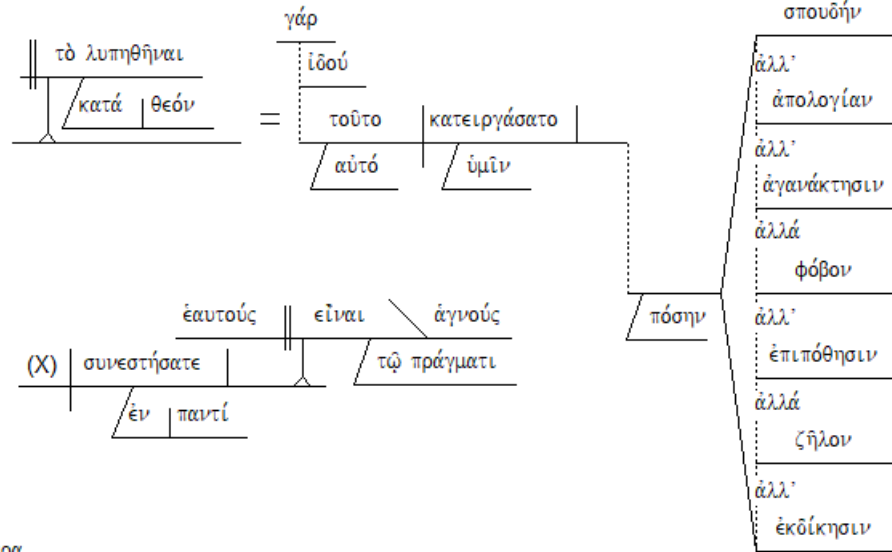




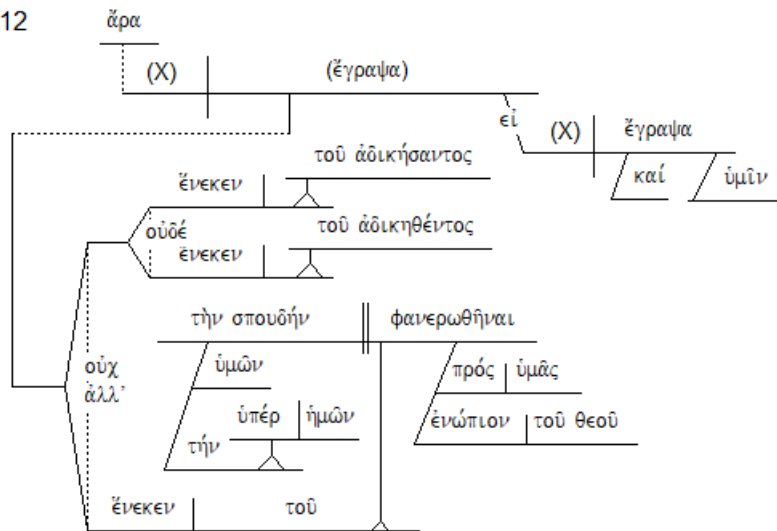
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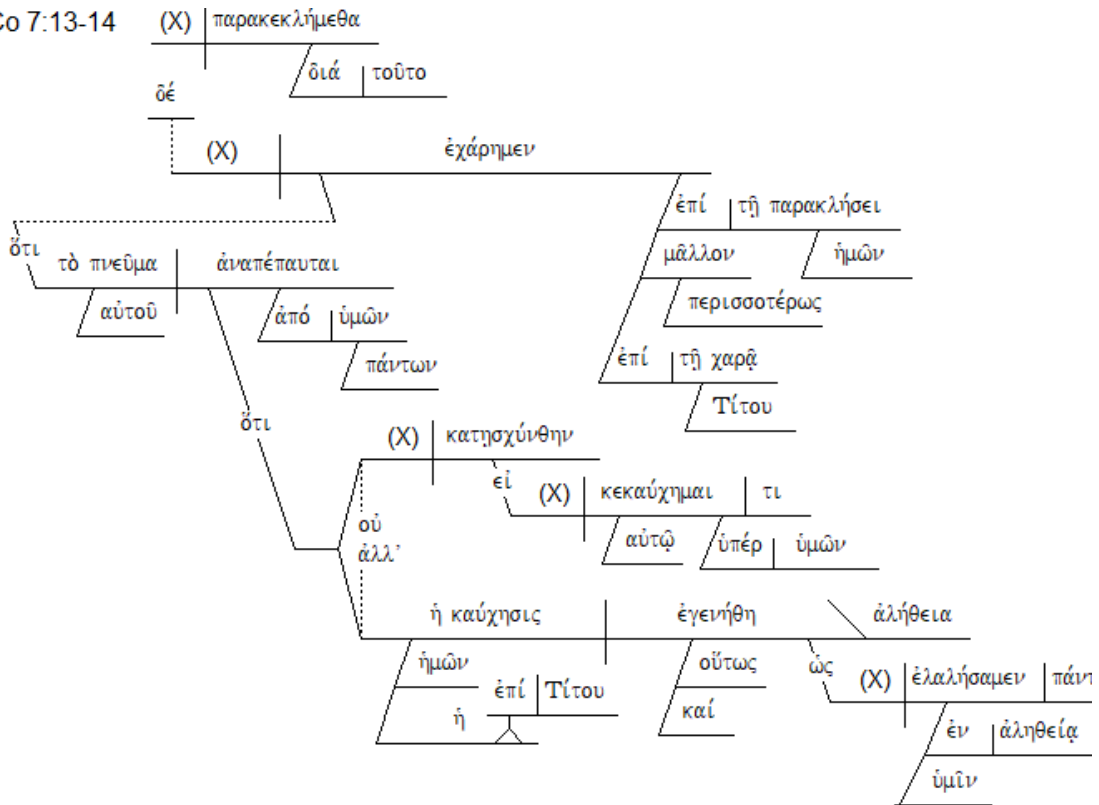
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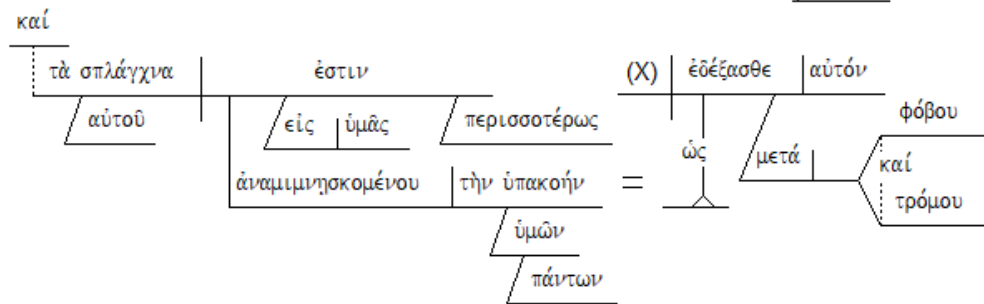
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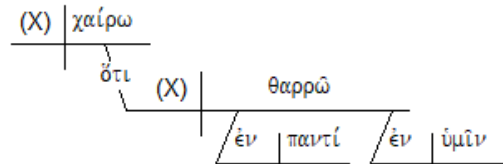
2Co 7:13-14



2Co 7:15



2Co 7:16



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

TITLE: *THE GRACIOUS WORK OF GIVING – ITS PRIORITY AND PRIVILEGE*
[Charles Swindoll: *Making Good Sense with Our Dollars*]

II. (8:1 – 9:15) POVERTY OF FELLOW BELIEVERS PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD’S GRACE AND SUFFICIENCY TO BE DISPLAYED IN GENEROUS CHRISTIAN GIVING (OFFERED FREELY FROM THE HEART AND ADMINISTERED WITH INTEGRITY) (PAUL’S PLEA FOR PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF FELLOWSHIP IN GOD’S GRACIOUS WORK OF GENEROUS GIVING)

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”
(9:8)

BIG IDEA:
GOOD INTENTIONS IN GIVING MUST BE CONSUMMATED ACCORDING TO YOUR ABILITY – OR IDEALLY BEYOND YOUR ABILITY

INTRODUCTION:

Principle: you can never out give the Grace of God

Paul Barnett: The transition from **chapter 7** to **chapter 8** is marked by a change of tone. In the former chapter Paul relives the joyous reunion in Macedonia with Titus who brought good news of the Corinthian response to the ‘sorrowful letter’ about the disciplining of the offender. Now, in **chapter 8**, he writes in more sober tones yet with a real measure of encouragement and optimism about the other report brought by Titus from Corinth – news about the collection.

Chapters 8–9 relate to what Paul elsewhere calls ‘*the collection for the Lord’s people*’ (**1 Cor. 16:1**) or, more elaborately, a ‘*contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem*’ (**Rom. 15:26**). This ‘contribution’, finalized c. ad 57, had its beginnings a decade earlier in Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas made a missionary compact with the Jerusalem church ‘pillars’, James, Peter and John. It was then agreed that James, Peter and John would evangelize Jews while Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles. The one condition attaching to this missionary agreement was that Paul and Barnabas should ‘*remember the poor*’, that is, make provision from the Gentile churches for the poor among the Christians in Jerusalem (**Gal. 2:9–10**).

Paul explained to the Romans that the ‘spiritual blessings’ of the gospel enjoyed by the Gentile Christians had come to them from the Christian community in Jerusalem. The Gentiles owed them a spiritual debt which was to be repaid by ‘material blessings’ (**Rom. 15:27**). Implicit in the collection was Paul’s desire to create a sense of unity and

brotherhood between the two branches of Christianity, Jewish and Gentile, between whom there had been a measure of tension. Perhaps Paul, in particular, sought to demonstrate his bona fides in keeping his side of the agreement made at Jerusalem regarding 'the poor'. Hence it was appropriate that, near the end of his Aegean ministry, Paul should arrange for this collection. In bringing this gift from the churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia to the church in Jerusalem, Paul fulfilled the undertaking made to James, Peter and John some ten (?) years earlier. It was a fitting end to this chapter in Paul's missionary career.

Raymond Collins: Apparently the Corinthians' interest in the collection has flagged, undoubtedly as a result of the difficult circumstances surrounding Paul's visit to their city (**2 Cor. 2:1**). Titus's enthusiastic report about the Corinthians' renewed zeal for Paul and his work has given Paul hope that this important work can proceed. Christians in Jerusalem are in need (**8:14**). In his letter to Rome, Paul says that the resources are to be shared with the poor among God's holy people in Jerusalem (**15:26**). The poor are not people living on the brink of poverty or who are marginally poor; they are people who are truly destitute, who are suffering from a deeply entrenched poverty.

Any number of factors could have contributed to their poverty. To begin, believers in Jerusalem were not, for the most part, drawn from among the wealthy class. Living in a fairly arid area of Palestine, people in Jerusalem bore the brunt of periodic famines (see **Acts 11:27–30**). The Sanhedrin had the leading disciples arrested (**Acts 4:1–3; 5:21b–41**); Paul himself had persecuted the church (**1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13**; see **Acts 8:1; 9:1–2**). It is not unlikely that this open hostility toward believers was accompanied by a more subtle hostility that took an economic toll on believers. Intra-Christian factors may have exacerbated the situation. Some support had to be found for the Galilean leaders of the church who settled in Jerusalem. Hospitality was needed for missionaries and pilgrims. There seems to have been a number of widows who needed support (see **Acts 6:1–7**). . . the poverty of the church in Jerusalem was real, deep-seated, and prolonged.

Scott Hafemann: As a result, the collection illustrates the significance of Paul's theology of grace both for the individual (having received from God, Christians give to others) and for the life of the church (having been accepted by God, Christians accept one another). Completing the collection would therefore be the theological capstone of Paul's apostolic service, bringing his ministry east of Rome to an end (**Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:18–29; 1 Cor. 16:12, 6; Gal. 2:9**).

David Garland: The Corinthians' need to complete their collection

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 8:1–5 | <u>Example:</u> God's grace given to the Macedonians |
| 8:6–8 | <u>Direction:</u> Bring to completion this act of grace
(excel in this grace of giving) |
| 8:9 | <u>Example:</u> God's grace in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ |
| 8:10–12 | <u>Direction:</u> Finish the work (willingness sanctifies the gift) |
| 8:13–15 | <u>Divine principle:</u> Equity (Scripture citation) |

I. (:1-6) IT IS COMMENDABLE TO GIVE BEYOND YOUR ABILITY – EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIANS – THEIR STRONG DESIRE TO GIVE

Frank Matera: The Greek text of this unit (:1-6) consists of a **single sentence** that begins in **verse 1** with a disclosure formula (“*we want you to know*”) and concludes in **verse 6** with Paul’s decision to send Titus to Corinth once more (“*so that we appealed to Titus*”). **Verses 2 and 3** introduce subordinate clauses, each beginning with *hoti* (“*that*”), in which Paul explains how the grace of God manifested itself among the Macedonians. This unit consists of three subunits.

1. In the first (**v. 1**) Paul employs a disclosure formula to announce his theme, “*the grace of God*.”
2. In the second (**vv. 2–4**) he explains how the grace of God manifested itself among the Macedonians.
3. In the third (**vv. 5–6**) he relates how the extraordinary response of the Macedonians to the collection for the holy ones at Jerusalem encouraged him to ask Titus to resume the collection among the Corinthians.

A. (:1) The Key to Giving = the Grace of God

“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia”

We do God a disservice whenever we add any elements of legalism into Christian giving.

Charles Swindoll: “*grace*,” “undeserved or unmerited favor,” “cause of delight” -- Though *charis* often refers to that which brings pleasure or delight, Paul frequently used *charis* as a special term for the undeserved and superabundant blessings that God bestows upon His people, especially unto salvation. In **2 Corinthians 8–9**, Paul also uses the term in reference to a voluntary financial contribution given for the benefit of the suffering saints in Jerusalem (**8:1**). This horizontal, tangible manifestation of grace among believers reflects the vertical grace believers receive through Jesus Christ (**8:9**).

Mark Seifrid: Paul presents the Macedonians to the Corinthians as an example. Yet they are an example, not of generosity, but of the **grace of God**. Paul seeks to stir the Corinthians to a renewed experience of God’s grace with their completion of their promised gift for Jerusalem. . .

Paul also makes it clear that he understands the Macedonian act of giving as the reception of a gift from God. God is present and active in human giving in such a way that human givers are finally mere receivers. This profound theology of gift continues throughout Paul’s argument in **2 Cor 8–9** and appears emphatically in his closing exclamation in **9:15**: “*Thanks be to God!*”

Will Pounds: The Macedonians make it absolutely clear that our stewardship does not depend upon our circumstances. It depends upon the quality of our relationship with

Jesus Christ. We give because He first gave to us His amazing grace. . . .
The only true motive for giving is the grace of God. We give because of God's goodness to us. If God has not done anything good for you please do not give a dime. However, if you are the recipient of His abundant amazing grace then pour it out according to the measure you have received. It is a privilege and opportunity to be involved in the stewardship of grace. It is not our duty; it is our privilege. God invites us to come and join Him in what He is doing. That includes our giving.

John MacArthur: The Corinthians were apparently unaware of the magnitude of the Macedonians' generosity, prompting Paul to make it known to them. Their giving was not motivated primarily by philanthropy or human kindness, but by the grace of God at work in their hearts. One of the effects of saving, transforming, sanctifying grace is a longing to give generously and sacrificially to those in need, especially other believers.

The Macedonians did not give like worldly rich people often do, mere tokens of their riches, without sacrifice. Nor did they give like selfish Christians, whose love for temporal things matches their love for eternal things. Giving for them is a battle, because they are still holding on to the temporal. The Macedonians gave magnanimously and abundantly, consistent with Christ's command to "*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*" (**Matt. 6:33**). But Paul shuts out all thought of human merit by noting that they did so because they were prompted by God's grace (cf. **Eph. 2:10**).

B. (:2-4) The Principles of Giving from the Example of the Macedonians

1. (:2) Poverty Does Not Have to be a Limitation to Generous Giving

*"that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy
and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."*

Everyone can participate in the privilege of giving since it is not conditioned on having an abundance of wealth.

Scott Hafemann: The Macedonians' generosity is also evidence that they passed the "*test*" brought on by their afflictions (**8:2**; lit., "*in much testing of affliction*"). Such giving in the midst of adversity with joy (!) confirms that one's faith is real (for *dokime* [test, outcome of a test], cf. **2:9; 9:13; 13:3**). Joyful giving to others and joy in one's good fortune, even in the midst of one's own poverty and suffering, is the sign of having received God's grace (cf. **1:24; 2:3; 6:10; 7:4, 7, 9, 13, 16**). Though the Macedonians gave generously, the "*wealth*" that spilled over to others was not the amount that the Macedonians could give, but their joy in what God had done for them (cf. **Mark 12:42–44; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6**).

John MacArthur: The Macedonians rose above their trying circumstances. They did not allow their situation to have a negative effect on their giving. In the midst of their trials, they put the needs of others, whom they had never met, ahead of their own. Though their poverty may have limited the amount they could give, it did not diminish their

love. Devout Christians give no matter what the situation, because even the worst circumstances cannot hinder their devotion to Jesus Christ. . .

Believers are not to base their giving on the Old Testament principle of **tithing** but on the **example of the Lord Jesus Christ**, who “*though He was rich, yet for [their sakes] He became poor, so that [they] through His poverty might become rich*” (2 Cor. 8:9).

2. (3-4) Viewing Giving as a Privilege Motivates Sacrificial Giving Beyond One’s Ability

“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,”

Voluntary giving without any compulsion must be the rule; here the compulsion is turned around so that the givers are begging for the privilege of participating.

David Garland: In making clear that the Macedonians responded “*of their own accord*,” Paul underscores that he did not constrain them in any way. They volunteered to participate and to give sacrificially. Since Paul encourages the Corinthians to give willingly, he may be referring to how the Macedonians gave. The Macedonians considered it a privilege to contribute. The word translated “*privilege*” is the same word “*grace*” in Greek that rings throughout these two chapters. They did not plea poverty to evade any obligation. They pled with Paul instead to allow them to join in this service. By contrast, Paul must plead with the more affluent Corinthians to follow through on their first pledge.

Paul gives the impression that he was taken aback by the Macedonians’ eagerness and generosity. They gave beyond their means and did so without Paul’s encouragement, let alone his insistence. If it comes from “*grace*,” then it cannot come from coercion. They gave beyond anything he anticipated because they gave of themselves.

John MacArthur: The privilege the Macedonians sought so eagerly was the favor of participation in the support of the saints. *Favor* translates *charis*, which is commonly translated “*grace*.” They literally begged for the blessing of helping to meet the needs of believers they had never met. They did so not out of a sense of obligation but out of the generosity of their transformed hearts.

Eric Mason: Giving Has Three Characteristics:

1. “*According to their ability*” means they didn’t give emotionally
2. Paul adds that some were giving “*beyond their ability*.” Why would he say that? Because there are times when the Spirit will tell you to give sacrificially. There are times when the Holy Spirit will prick your heart, and he will push you to give. And you’re thinking, “But God . . .” Give. Now, that’s not the preacher leaning on you real hard. God will lead you when you are presented with an opportunity.

3. But then it says that they gave “*of their own accord*” (v. 3). That means they freely gave. Why is this important? Because these people were poor.

What was the **spirit of their giving**? The spirit of their giving was, Paul says, begging us “*earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints*” (v. 4). . . In other words, they were saying, “I want in on this kingdom investment. When I look at the investment of that thing, I want to be able to say, eternally, that what I gave helped God’s work to increase.”

Mark Seifrid: In the eagerness of the Macedonians, the roles of apostle and church were reversed. Paul did not need to appeal to them to participate in the collection, for “*with much encouragement*” they petitioned him to be included in this effort. More precisely, they asked for “*the grace and fellowship of the mission to the saints.*” Paul again describes the collection as a “*grace,*” locating the love and kindness of giving within the gift given. He also recalls his opening word concerning the “*grace of God*” given to the Macedonians. The grace of God given produces the grace of giving in its recipients, without in any way diminishing its unconditioned priority.

C. (:5-6) The Execution of Giving

1. (:5) Giving Must Be Preceded by Consecration

*“and this, not as we had expected,
but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”*

David Garland: “*First*” they gave themselves to the Lord. The “*first*” refers to the **priority of importance**, not to time. They also gave of themselves “*to us,*” which means they dedicated themselves to Paul’s project. He recognizes that the success of the project depends on the churches’ relationship to him. If they are not prepared to give themselves to him, they are unlikely to give to the relief fund. The enmity between Paul and the Corinthians has threatened to suspend their participation. The Macedonians’ eagerness to participate allows Paul to use them as a model for the Corinthians. In doing so he makes clear that this surprising turn of events stemmed entirely from their dedication to the Lord. Paul not only puts their generosity in the context of their Christian commitment but also subtly draws attention to their loyalty to him. Again, Paul leaves the Corinthians to draw the proper inferences for themselves. Generosity stems from devotion to Christ as their Lord. If they renege on their pledge, it raises the question if they have surrendered themselves first to the Lord. Paul implies that devotion to Christ will also issue in support for Christ’s apostle.

2. (:6) Giving Must Be Completed as Intended

*“So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning,
so he would also complete in you, this gracious work as well.”*

This provides a **transition** to the next major point – moving from the example of the Macedonian churches to the responsibility of the Corinthians.

Frank Matera: From a rhetorical point of view, this unit provides Paul with a shrewd way to broach the question of resuming the collection, and the example of the Macedonians provides the Corinthians with the necessary motivation to do so. But the theological point of view is the most important, inasmuch as it clarifies the meaning and significance of the collection. Participation in the collection is **participation in God's grace**, for it is the grace of God that allows believers to be gracious to others, a point that Paul will make most clearly in **9:6–15**.

II. (:7-11a) IT IS COMMENDABLE TO EXCEL IN THIS GRACIOUS WORK OF GIVING – CALL TO THE CORINTHIANS – THEIR DUTY TO CONSUMMATE THEIR GOOD INTENTIONS

Paul Barnett: A study of the letters to the Macedonians and the Corinthian churches reveals further striking characteristics. The Corinthians were quick to form factions, take one another to court and parade their spiritual gifts. They were slow to show consideration to their poor and weak members (**1 Cor. 11:21**). They tolerated, even boasted in, flagrant immorality on the part of some of their members (**1 Cor. 5:2**). When new ministers from Judea arrived, they quickly lost interest in Paul in favour of these more interesting new arrivals (**11:4**). Their selfishness and fickleness are written on every page of Paul's letters to them. The Macedonians, however, though not without their difficulties, reveal themselves to have been more concerned and caring congregations. The Philippians sent Paul money for his ministry and, on one occasion, the gift of a personal companion. Paul is only once able to commend the Corinthians for showing love, and even then he is being somewhat charitable towards them (**8:7**). So lacking were they in love that it was necessary for Paul repeatedly to exhort the Corinthians to show love. By contrast, Paul commends the Macedonian churches for their loving behaviour. The Macedonians were full of love, and, in spite of their poverty, very generous. The Corinthians lacked both love and generosity. Perhaps it is significant that despite their esteem for 'wisdom' (**1 Cor. 1:20**) it was necessary for Paul to explain to the Corinthian churches at such great length the meaning of the grace of God and the death of Christ. Apparently they did not understand what it meant either to be loved or to show love.

A. (:7) Excelling in Giving Should be High on Your List of Priorities

“But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.”

R. Kent Hughes: Giving is a matter of **grace** from beginning to end. Christ gave himself for us. We receive his grace, and then we give ourselves to him and to others in his name. This response to grace includes giving what we have. That is how the Macedonians gave out of their poverty with great liberality. And that is how we give out of our affluence. It is the same.

B. (:8) Excelling in Giving Proves the Sincerity of Your Love

*“I am not speaking this as a command,
but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.”*

Robert Hughes: [Paul] wanted proof of their sincerity (8:8). The Macedonians’ example should have prompted the readers to search their own hearts. Did they care about the poor? Were they earnest in their initial commitment, or did they just want to gain glory and, in the end, get by with giving as little as possible? Was anything like the Macedonians’ earnestness going on in the Corinthians’ hearts? But Paul’s motivation transcends mere competitive impulses. He now moves to the ultimate example of sacrificial giving.

Eric Mason: (:8-15) Main Idea: Jesus has generously given to us, so we should generously give to others.

- I. Generosity Isn’t Done under Pressure, but It Must Not Lack Commitment (8:8).
- II. Jesus Sets the Tone for Generosity (8:9).
- III. Generosity Counts on Follow-Through (8:10-12).
- IV. Generosity Has a Reciprocal Effect (8:13-15).

C. (:9) Excelling in Giving Follows the Pattern of the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

*“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor,
that you through His poverty might become rich.”*

John Piper: This is the grace of God that turns selfish people into joyful givers. The reason **verse 9** should take away our selfishness and make us joyful and generous is that it takes away the only basis for selfishness. The basis for selfishness is the notion that giving less away and keeping more for ourselves will provide more happiness and fulfillment to our lives. But **verse 9** shows that God's purpose in sending His Son was to create joyful, loving, generous givers. Now if God values joyful, loving generosity so much as to give His beloved Son to create it in His people, then we can be absolutely assured that when we are more generous we will be more happy and more fulfilled because God is bound to work mightily for those whose behaviour he values so highly.

John MacArthur: As the eternal second person of the Trinity, **Jesus is as rich as God the Father.** To the Colossians Paul wrote, “*For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*” (Col. 2:9), and “[Jesus] *is the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (Heb. 1:3). **Arguments for Christ’s eternity and deity are inseparable.** Since the Scriptures reveal Him to be eternal, and only God can be eternal, Jesus must be God. Therefore, He owns the universe and everything in it, possesses all power and authority (Matt. 28:18), and is to be glorified and honored (John 5:23; Phil. 2:9–11). . .

This verse is not a commentary on Jesus' economic status or the material circumstances of His life. Fred B. Craddock notes, "The gospel can no more be equated with the financial poverty of Jesus than it can be equated with the pain he endured on the cross" (*The Poverty of Christ*, [Apr. 1968], 162). The Lord's true impoverishment did not consist in the lowly circumstances in which He lived but in the reality that "*although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men*" (Phil. 2:6–7). In reality, Jesus did not live His life in abject poverty:

As far as Jesus' experience is concerned, it is true that Luke highlights the lowly circumstances of his birth, but this is not an indication of the poverty of the holy family, but rather of the overcrowded conditions in Bethlehem at the time of the census (Lk. 2:7). The offering that Mary made for her purification was that permitted to those who could not afford a lamb (Lk. 2:24; cf. Lv. 12:6–8), and this indicates the family were not well off. Jesus was known as "*the carpenter, the son of Mary*" (Mk. 6:3), and as a craftsman he would not be numbered among the abject poor. During his Galilean ministry he did remind a would-be disciple that "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*" (Lk. 9:58). However, this must not be taken to mean that as an itinerant preacher Jesus was continually in dire economic circumstances. The indications are that the costs of Jesus' itinerant ministry and the support for his followers were provided by a number of well-off sympathizers who had been the recipients of his healing ministry (Lk. 8:1–3). In addition it was a custom among the Jews to provide hospitality for travelling preachers (cf. Mt. 10:9–13) and Jesus enjoyed such hospitality at a number of homes, and especially at that of Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38–42; Jn. 12:1–3). On the evidence, then, Jesus was no poorer than most first-century Palestinian Jews, and better off than some (e.g., those reduced to beggary). Indeed Jesus and his band of disciples had sufficient money to be able to provide help for those worse off than themselves (cf. Jn. 12:3–6; 13:27–29). (Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 154)

The Lord did not make believers spiritually rich by becoming economically poor. Paul used the terms "rich" and "poor" in this verse in a **spiritual sense**, as he did when he described himself as "*poor yet making many rich*" (2 Cor. 6:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ became poor in His incarnation, when He was "*born of a woman*" (Gal. 4:4); "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (Rom. 8:3); "*a descendant of David according to the flesh*" (Rom. 1:3); and "*made ... for a little while lower than the angels*" (Heb. 2:7, 9). He left heaven's glory (John 17:5) and **laid aside the free use of His divine prerogatives**. In the most profound theological description of the Incarnation in Scripture Paul wrote that,

although [Jesus] existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-

servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6–11)

Though He existed eternally “*in the form of God,*” possessing all the riches of deity, Jesus “*emptied Himself,*” becoming poor by “*taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*” He suffered human weaknesses and limitations, becoming hungry (**Matt. 4:2; 21:18**), thirsty (**John 4:7; 19:28**), and tired (**Mark 4:38; John 4:6**). In addition, He was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb. 4:15**). So completely did Jesus identify with His people as their faithful high priest that “*He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.*” . . .

In the incarnation of Christ, the eternal God became poor by taking on human flesh and humbling Himself even to the point of death on the cross. By doing so, He defeated the powers of hell, accomplished the work of redemption God assigned Him, and gave His people the priceless riches of salvation.

Mark Seifrid: According to Paul, then, through the poverty of his incarnation, suffering, and death, Christ confers the riches of salvation, life, and righteousness. The “*grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ*” — the expression commonly appears in the prescripts and closing of Paul’s letters — is unqualified here, as it is elsewhere. Paul does not introduce it with a prior reference to the grace of God. It is not a “*grace*” that had to be sought, as with the Macedonians (**vv. 1, 4**). He speaks instead absolutely of “*the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ*” and presents that “*grace*” as the gift of salvation. The grace of Christ is an absolute gift. Paul thus attributes to Christ the role of giving that is otherwise reserved for God alone. Indeed, the saving exchange of sin and righteousness that appears in 5:21 as an act of God in Christ appears here as Christ’s act of self-giving. Christ has taken our poverty upon himself and has given us his own riches. In so doing, Christ has acted as God.

These riches include all the earthly gifts of salvation, the charismata, which the Corinthians have misjudged and misappropriated. Paul began First Corinthians with thanksgiving to God for the way in which the church has been “*made rich in [Christ Jesus],*” so that they do not lack any gift as they await the revelation of Christ. Among these gifts is the gift of love and the grace of giving that Paul now urges upon the Corinthians. As we have noted, Paul here reminds the Corinthians of Christ, who is not merely an example of giving but the source of their new life and existence, which is characterized by giving and receiving. The Corinthians know the grace of Christ. For this reason, and not because of any virtue in them, Paul is confident that their love is genuine.

D. (:10) Excelling in Giving Works to Your Advantage

“And I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.”

Charles Swindoll: (:10-15) -- Corinthians abounded “*in everything*” (8:7). They had faith, good teaching, knowledge, sincerity, and love. It seems they also were quite well off financially. Yet in the midst of their surplus, they struggled with focus. They had turned inward, consumed by their own internal problems: factions, false teachers, spiritual gifts, unrepentant sin. These things turned their attention from outward ministry to inward controversy. To realign them with their original God-given mission, Paul pointed to two examples of self-sacrificial giving: the Macedonian Christians who gave abundantly despite hardship and poverty (8:8) and Jesus Christ, who gave up all his heavenly riches to become poor in order to save us all (8:9). Now Paul seeks to overcome three common hindrances to giving:

1. procrastination (8:10-11),
2. hesitation (8:11-12), and
3. exception (8:13-15).

Let’s consider how he addresses each of these.

First, **procrastination** plagued the Corinthians. Though the Corinthian congregation was the first church to commit to financial support, a year later it still had not followed through on that commitment (8:10-11). Procrastination involves intentionally and habitually putting off something that should be done. It’s not just forgetting; it’s forsaking. It is not merely being accidentally delayed; it is intentionally ignoring. The procrastinator’s favorite word is tomorrow. The Corinthians had fallen into that trap. Tomorrow became next week. Next week became next month. And now, a year later, they still had not followed through on their commitment. The decisive cure to the plague of procrastination is the second word of **verse 11**: *now*.

Second, **hesitation** paralyzed the Corinthians. Hesitation is sometimes motivated by **uncertainty**: “Should I give my money to this person or to somebody else?” “Should we give this amount to the church or that amount?” Sometimes hesitation is motivated by lack of readiness (8:11): “If I just wait a little longer I’ll have more to give.” “My financial situation is almost ready to absorb this kind of financial gift, but not yet.” Paul responds to these excuses (8:11-12). The Corinthians already had made a commitment to a particular cause: the support of the Jerusalem church. The church’s need had not improved during their delay. In all likelihood, it had grown worse. Paul’s point in 8:12 seems to be along the lines of the old adage “A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush.” Paul says to the Corinthians, essentially, “If you’re ready, you can do it. You can complete the project even if you don’t think you have the resources. Do what you can now without hesitation; don’t worry about what you can’t do.”

The third hindrance to the Corinthians’ giving was **exception**. The person hindered by this excuse says, “Since others have it easier financially than I do, I am not responsible. I’m an exception.” We can always find people better off than we are. Somebody always has a nicer car, a bigger home, a larger paycheck, more free time. If we simply pass the

hot potato down the line, nobody will ever give anything to anybody. The Lord's work will screech to a halt. The Corinthians likely thought others could foot the bill this time; they would catch the next opportunity when it came around.

Scott Hafemann: Paul's argument is not one of simple expediency (i.e., it is better to finish what one has begun than not to do so), but another expression of his conviction that **genuine faith perseveres**. The Corinthians' desire to give in the past cannot substitute for a lack of desire in the present. What began earlier, if it was genuine, must and will continue on as part of their restored faith.

It is also striking that the “*not only ... but also*” comparison in **8:10** underscores the priority of one's intention over one's actions. Inasmuch as one can perform apparently loving acts that do not flow from love and are therefore worthless (cf. **1 Cor. 13**), Paul's stress is not on the action itself but on the desire that drives it. He calls the believers in Corinth back to the collection because he has every reason to believe that their initial desire to give was an expression of the love that is born of the Spirit (cf. **Gal. 5:22**). For what matters in the end is whether their act of giving is an act of grace toward others, like the incarnation of Christ, and whether it flows from God's grace, like the giving of the Macedonians.

Robert Hughes: The two problems he deals with in this section (equality and cheerful giving) operate at the level of will and desire, not just fiscal ability. **Verse 11** urges them to finish what they have begun. He only asked them to honor their promise within the limits of their ability. This leads into the discussion of equality.

E. (:11a) Just Do It! – Good Intentions are not Enough – You Must Consummate Your Giving

“But now finish doing it also; that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it”

David Garland: The only imperative in the chapter, “*finish the task*,” appears in **8:11** and expresses concisely what Paul expects to be the outcome of his writing to them. They were the first to get involved. Now they must stop their foot-dragging. Their delay in completing this undertaking not only causes their motivation to ebb but also calls into question their initial willingness. **Seneca** remarks that “a benefit . . . should not be given tardily, since, seeing that in every service the willingness of the giver counts for much, he who acts tardily has for a long time been unwilling” (*On Benefits* 1.1.8). “*According to what you have*” parallels the phrase in **8:3**, “*according to their ability*.” Paul asks them only to give according to their means. They are not to go into debt or to become overburdened. His goal is not unreasonable. He is not trying to raise record amounts. His instructions in **1 Cor 16:2** to set aside a sum of money each week reveals that he knows he is dealing with many who have limited resources, and a significant amount can only be accumulated over time. Whatever they give generously, he assures them, is acceptable to God. God does not expect the widow's mites, “*all she had to live on*” (**Mark 12:44**), but God does expect generosity without a begrudging spirit. What

matters to God is only what is in the giver's heart. In the Corinthians' case the smallest gift is greater than the grandest intention that goes unfulfilled.

III. (:11b-15) THE RATIONALE FOR GIVING ACCORDING TO ONE'S ABILITY IS THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY (NOT SHIFTING THE BURDEN TO YOURSELF) – FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN GIVING

A. (:11b) Willingness to Give Must be Consummated According to Your Ability

“that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.”

B. (:12) Giving Evaluated Based on One's Resources

“For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have.”

George Shillington: In this regard, the appeal of **8:12** contains three interlocking elements:

- (1) right motivation stands as the condition of gift-giving (if the eagerness is there);
- (2) motivation, on one side, determines the acceptability of the gift; and
- (3) material means, on the other side, determines the acceptability of the gift.

A person or community may give in excess of the amount proper to their means, but such a gift is not necessary by common standards of gift-giving. *The gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have (8:12b).*

The gift of money to the saints is no less a sacrificial offering to God than any of the traditional Jewish sacrifices, and as such requires the rule of acceptability (Betz, 1985:66). Poor people offer small gifts; their gifts are acceptable. But when rich people offer small gifts, they are not acceptable (cf. **Luke 12:47-48**; Grundmann: 58-59). However forceful Paul's argument for properly motivated proportional giving may be in this section (**8:10-15**), prescriptive legislation of amounts or percentages is noticeably absent.

C. (:13-15) Principle of Equality Applies to Mutual Giving – Not Shifting the Burden to Yourself

“For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality – at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”

David Garland: This divine principle — no one has a surplus; no one has a shortage — was enforced by God in the time of the wilderness. Now it is voluntary, dependent on the working of God's grace in the hearts of Christians. The principle governs Paul's advice on handling money. He told the Corinthians earlier that they should not depend on their money but live independently of it (**1 Cor 7:29-31**). He warns believers to

beware of greed (**Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 6:10; 2 Cor 3:5; Eph 4:19; 5:3, 5; and 1 Tim 6:10**) and to provide for those in need (**Rom 12:13; 2 Cor 9:8; Gal 6:6–10; Eph 4:28; and 2 Thess 3:13**). The most remarkable statement appears in **Eph 4:28**, that one should work so that one may have “*something to share with anyone in need*” (see **1 Thess 4:12**). At the same time, he warns other believers not to take advantage of the generosity of their brothers and sisters (**2 Thess 3:8–12**).

Paul applies the divine principle of equity to sharing material gifts with the poor in Jerusalem. Hays concludes that Paul uses the story about the manna “to good effect in depicting the Corinthians’ material ‘abundance’ (**2 Cor 8:14**) as a superfluous store that could and should be made available to supply the ‘*wants of the saints*.’” God pours out grace on believers so that they can be generous. The sharing of material gifts, however, is also a sign of their spiritual equality. Paul therefore sees this project as the demonstration of an even greater divine principle that is creating a worldwide fellowship of people in Christ. Gentile and Jewish believers are joined together by their faith in Christ and their equal access to God’s grace. If they truly trust in God’s daily provision, then they should not hoard their material blessings. God provides (see **Matt 6:25–32**). If they should lack anything, they need not fret. God also provides other believers with abundance to offer help.

Robert Hughes: Paul defined **equality** as the flow from ability to need (**8:14**). The direction of this flow is temporal. At another time, Jerusalem might have had the ability and Corinth the need. Equality is not all having the same amount. It is having basic needs met by others’ ability. But how is ability defined? Paul spoke to the Corinthians of actual ability, what they could give without going into monetary ruin. Such ability is called “**abundance**” (twice in **8:14**). In **8:14** the noun “abundance” answers to “abound” in **8:7**. Abundant giving is caused by abundant spiritual presence. The Corinthians would recognize their ability to give by noting the amount they had that exceeded their basic needs. That would no doubt take them on a conscience-searching trip as each family tried to distinguish needs from wants. That was to be a weekly sojourn (**1 Cor. 16:2**).

Frank Matera: Paul concludes his appeal with a quotation from **Exod 16:18**, which occurs in the account of how God provided Israel with manna in the wilderness (**Exod 16:1–36**). Each day the Israelites gathered the manna, some gathering more, some less. Those who gathered more, however, did not have anything left over, and those who gathered less had no shortage of manna to eat. Paul draws upon this episode to remind the Corinthians that God provided for and established an “equality” among the Israelites of old. Consequently those who hoarded the manna did not have more than those who gathered only a little of it. Rather, all enjoyed the same abundance. Applied to the Corinthians, this means that hoarding their abundance will not assure that they will have more for themselves; for if they do not establish a balance among the churches, then God will.

Scott Hafemann: But whereas the equality in the “first Exodus” was established miraculously by God for the people because of their hard hearts (cf. **Ex. 16:18, 28**),

now it is being established by the people themselves through their own Spirit-led sharing. While God supplied Israel's physical needs with manna and quail but did not change their spiritual condition, under the new covenant God is meeting the spiritual needs of the Corinthians in order that they might meet the physical needs of others (cf. **2 Cor. 9:8–11**). Paul's expectation in **8:11** is thus one more expression of his confidence in the transforming power of the presence of God under the new covenant (cf. **3:3, 6, 18**). For this reason, Paul leaves the amount of their giving up to the Corinthians, convinced that, as a new creation in Christ (**5:17**), the quantity of their giving will match the quality of their changed hearts (**5:15**).

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) As the Lord of our life, Jesus Christ deserves our total consecration as the starting point for whatever steps of obedience we take in individual areas like giving.
- 2) What high price did Christ pay for the privilege of giving His riches to us? Is it really Christian giving if we do not feel any cost? Do we consider ourselves rich because of what Christ has provided for us?
- 3) How did Christ exemplify giving beyond His ability rather than just giving in accordance with His ability?
- 4) What is the current extent of Christ's riches?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Paul not appeal to the practice of tithing in this important section on Giving?
- 2) What is the significance of viewing giving as a gracious work of God?
- 3) How do you evaluate your own resources to determine what constitutes your ability to give? Would Paul support the practice of pledges as it relates to giving?
- 4) How is this principle of equality different from an economic system of socialism?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: How people view money is an effective **barometer of their spirituality**. Money is neither good nor bad in itself; corrupt people can put it to evil uses, while good people can put it to righteous uses. Though it is morally neutral, what people do with their money reflects their internal morality. In the words of Jesus, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (**Luke 12:34**).

The Bible does not forbid the possession of money; in fact, it teaches that “*God [gives the] power to make wealth*” (**Deut. 8:18**) and “*richly supplies us with all things to enjoy*” (**1 Tim. 6:17**). Because of His blessing, many godly men in Scripture, such as Job (**Job 1:3**), Abraham (**Gen. 13:2**), Isaac (**Gen. 26:12–13**), Jacob (**Gen. 30:43**), Boaz (**Ruth 2:1**), and Solomon (**1 Kings 10:23**), were extremely wealthy. God promised His people that their obedience to Him would result in material as well as spiritual blessings (**Deut. 15:4–6; 26:15; 28:11**).

But while the Bible does not forbid possessing money, **it does forbid loving it**, warning that “*the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs*” (**1 Tim. 6:10**). Later in that chapter, Paul exhorted Timothy to “*instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches*” (**v. 17**). To love money is to have an unhealthy affection for it and be driven to pursue it. Such a pursuit is the height of folly. . .

Loving money makes people forget God (**Deut. 8:11–14; Prov. 30:9**), trust in their riches rather than Him (**Job 31:24–28; Ps. 52:7; Prov. 11:28**), be deceived (**Mark 4:19**), compromise convictions, be proud (**Deut. 8:14**), steal from God (**Mal. 3:8**), and ignore the needs of others (**1 John 3:17; cf. Prov. 3:27**). . .

Those who violate biblical principles in regard to money may find that they do not have enough of it. People in that situation need to consider whether they actually need more money, or merely want more. They should also recognize that their limited resources may be God’s way of revealing that their priorities are wrong. Misuse of the resources God has given in the past—especially the abuse of credit (cf. **Prov. 6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:7**)—may lead to a lack of resources in the present. People may also lack money because of stinginess (**Luke 6:38; Prov. 11:24**), impulsiveness or hastiness (**Prov. 21:5**), lack of discipline (**Prov. 10:4; 13:18**), laziness (**Prov. 14:23; 19:15; 20:13; 24:30–34**), indulgence (**Prov. 21:17; 23:21**), and craftiness (**Prov. 28:19**).

The Bible also gives guidelines on **how to spend money**. It is to be used to provide for the needs of one’s household (**1 Tim. 5:8**), pay debts (**Rom. 13:8**), and save for the future (**Prov. 21:20; 30:25**). Having met those basic obligations, believers are ready to give money to further the kingdom.

Though many view giving as merely another obligation, it is in reality a **priceless privilege**, because it is the pipeline which brings God's promised blessings to His people. In **Luke 6:38** Jesus promised, "*Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.*" Paul added, "*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*" (**2 Cor. 9:6**). Significantly, the only direct quote from Jesus' earthly ministry recorded outside of the Gospels addresses the issue of giving: "*In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*" (**Acts 20:35**).

Generous giving to God results in greater giving from God; it is impossible to outgive Him. The promises associated with giving should stimulate believers to be sacrificially generous givers. Sadly, the powerful lure of the world's advertising, slick appeals from purportedly Christian ministries, self-indulgence, and lack of faith all hinder believers from experiencing the full blessing of giving.

The early believers experienced no such hindrances. They freely gave in two general ways.

1. First, they gave to support those who were responsible for leading and serving the church. . .
2. Second, the early church gave to meet the needs of the poor. Most of its members were from the lower classes (cf. **1 Cor. 1:26**), and many were unable to meet their own financial needs. As Paul penned chapters 8 and 9 of this epistle, he had in mind this second aspect of giving. He did not write about the poor in the Corinthian assembly; the Corinthians were apparently faithful in caring for them. Nor was the apostle's focus on giving to the poor in general. He was concerned specifically about the many needy saints in the Jerusalem church.

Ray Stedman: To illustrate this, Paul quotes from the Old Testament the story of the manna that fell in the wilderness. He pictures the man who went forth with greed in his heart to gather this wonderful substance up and to fill his tubs, his crocks, his pots and his pans with this delicious stuff called manna. Manna means "what is it?" They did not know what it was so they called it "What is it?" Paul quotes, "*He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack.*" Here was a man who went out and gathered all he could get, hoping to have an abundance of this wonderful food. But those who gathered like that, in greed, found that what they could not use in one day turned to a foul mass of corruption, while for those who gathered little, God met their need by the sharing of others and there was an abundance. Those who gathered little had no lack. Paul is simply saying that if we fail to give in prosperity, God will curse what we have and make it become a curse to us. It will become a foul mass. If we attempt to accumulate more than we actually need and do not give that which is in abundance with us, it shall turn, in the providence of God, to cursing in our hands. On

the other hand, if we fail to receive in adversity, God will judge us for our carnal, stubborn pride. . .

When Joe Blinco was with us a number of years ago, he told us a story of a Christian leader, a prominent Christian man, who was speaking, on one occasion, to a group of ladies. He was giving his Christian testimony. He told how he came to Christ as a boy in his teens, how the Lord met him, delivered him, and saved him. Shortly after his conversion he went to a large city to seek for work. It was in the middle of the Depression and work was very scarce. In the joy of his new-found faith the first place he looked up was a church. The first Sunday night he went to church they were having a missionary meeting, and he told of the powerful appeal that was made from the pulpit for contributions to send out a missionary into a needy field. They took up an offering to accomplish this need. He said that he sat there in the audience and he had in his pocket, he knew, one silver dollar, all the money he had in the world. He knew that he would have to live on that dollar (it went a lot further in those days than now) for the next few days while he was looking for work. He said he could, at the same time, feel a tremendous pull of the Spirit in his life and heart to contribute to this need, but all he had was the dollar. The plate was passed up and down the rows and gradually it drew closer to him. He struggled with his desire to give and his feeling that he simply could not give when all he had was a dollar. But, he said, as the plate drew close to him he felt that the Spirit of God was urging him to venture his all. He said to these ladies,

"I reached in my pocket and I took out that silver dollar, all I had in the world, and I laid it on the plate and gave my all to Jesus Christ, expecting God to meet my need."

He went on to tell how God did meet his need. how someone met his physical need that night and the next morning a job came along, and he said that he then promised God that he would give faithfully and regularly of his income. God had greatly blessed him and now he was standing before them in testimony to the faithfulness of a God who gave in response to a giving heart. He had now come to a place of prominence, of power, influence, and wealth. And, as he was standing there before these ladies, a woman in the audience looked up at this wealthy Christian man, affluent, powerful, well dressed, and she said to him, "I dare you to do it again!"

Now, why not? Why not? This is the venture of faith that God calls us to. It is to step out on the promise that he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply our resources and increase the harvest of our righteousness, so that we will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. . . .

Have you ever noticed that there is no tithe in the New Testament?

Never once in the epistles do you ever read of Christians being asked to tithe. A lot of Christians today are taught to tithe, but I am always sorry to hear that, because that is not New Testament teaching.

The tithe was a tax levied upon people for the purpose of supporting a priesthood, a separate body of people who did religious things. When you come into the New Testament you find the priesthood has, in a sense, been eliminated. Now every Christian is a priest. We are a royal kingdom of priests, the epistles tell us, and there is no special collection or tax to support it.

It is laid upon us to give voluntarily, as our hearts are stirred and moved by the grace of God. That is what these Macedonians did. They understood that once you have given yourself it is easy to give anything else. That is the key.

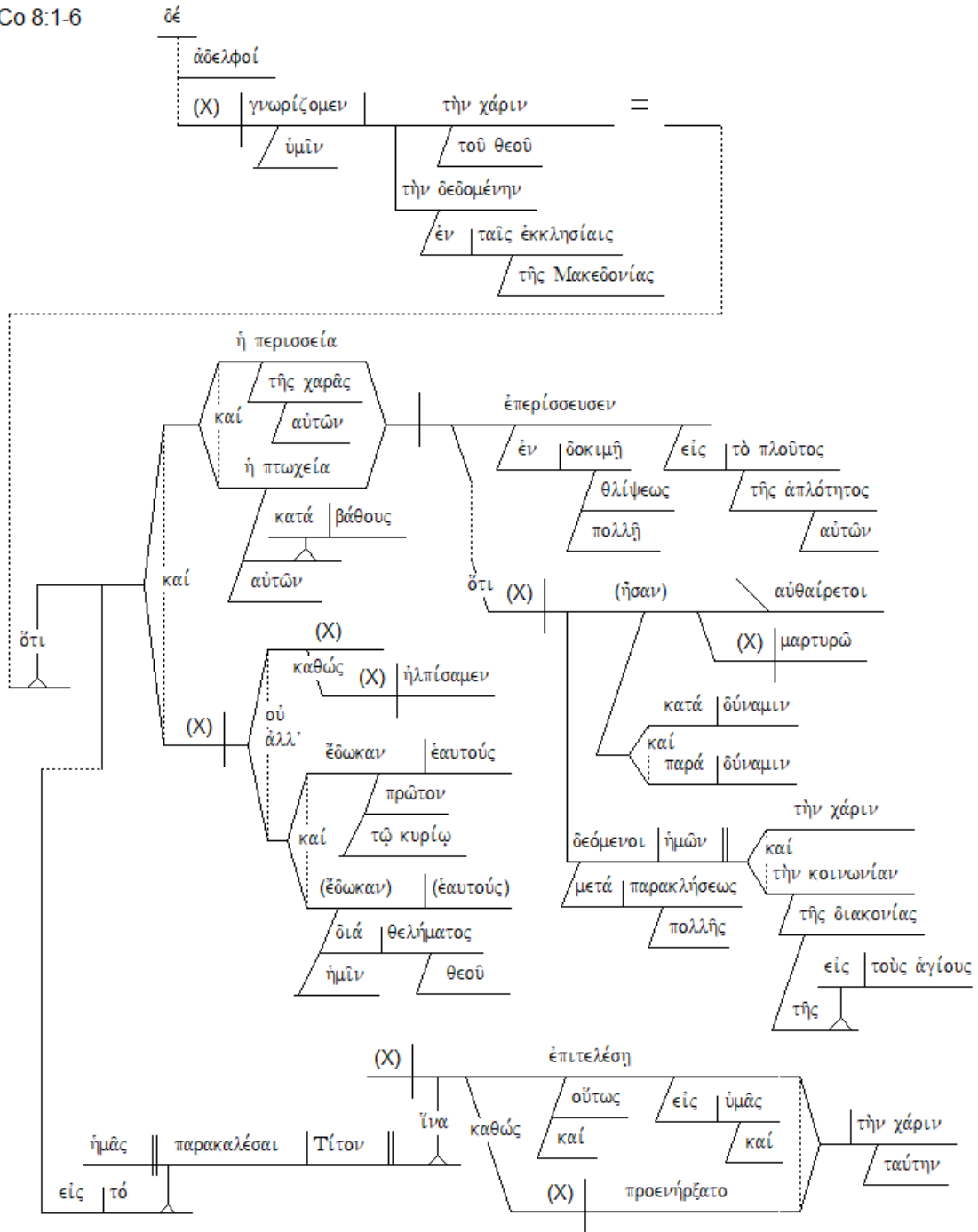
Steve Zeisler: One of the saddest things about contemporary "pop Christianity" is the fund-raising approach that many organizations have adopted. So often, highly sophisticated computer programs generate mailing lists or appeals that are intended to short-circuit the minds of people, grabbing at their emotions. There is an effort to spread the net as widely as possible so that even a small percentage of return will generate large sums. There's a horrible mentality behind all that. Instead of viewing the people who are giving as valuable in their own right, encouraging them to give their lives, to see the Lord at work, and to receive the blessing that comes from that, this mentality views them as sources of supply and little else. It's the farthest thing from what we read about in the scriptures. Paul saw something beautiful happen amongst the Macedonians, and their example was held up to others. They gave themselves first to the Lord; to his servants; and then they gave their money. . . .

Summing up, the Corinthians were embarrassed because they weren't going to have as much as they had indicated, so Paul is trying to relieve their embarrassment. And they were grumbling because they wondered if the system was going to be one-way and never work to their advantage, so he declares, "there will be equality." And Paul wants the sterling example of the Macedonians, who didn't think as much about the process or the details, who didn't calculate as much, but who were caught up in gratitude, to stand before the Corinthian Christians. Part of what he is trying to do is challenge them to consider whether their standards are what they ought to be. Their sense of what hardship is may need some adjusting.

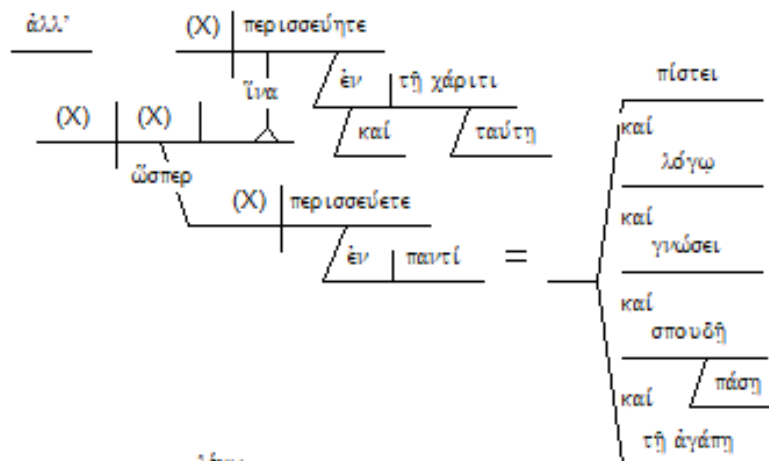
Philip Hughes: The example of the Macedonians is a practical proof that true generosity is not the prerogative of those who enjoy an adequacy of means. The most genuine liberality is frequently displayed by those who have least to give. Christian giving is estimated in terms not of quantity but of sacrifice.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

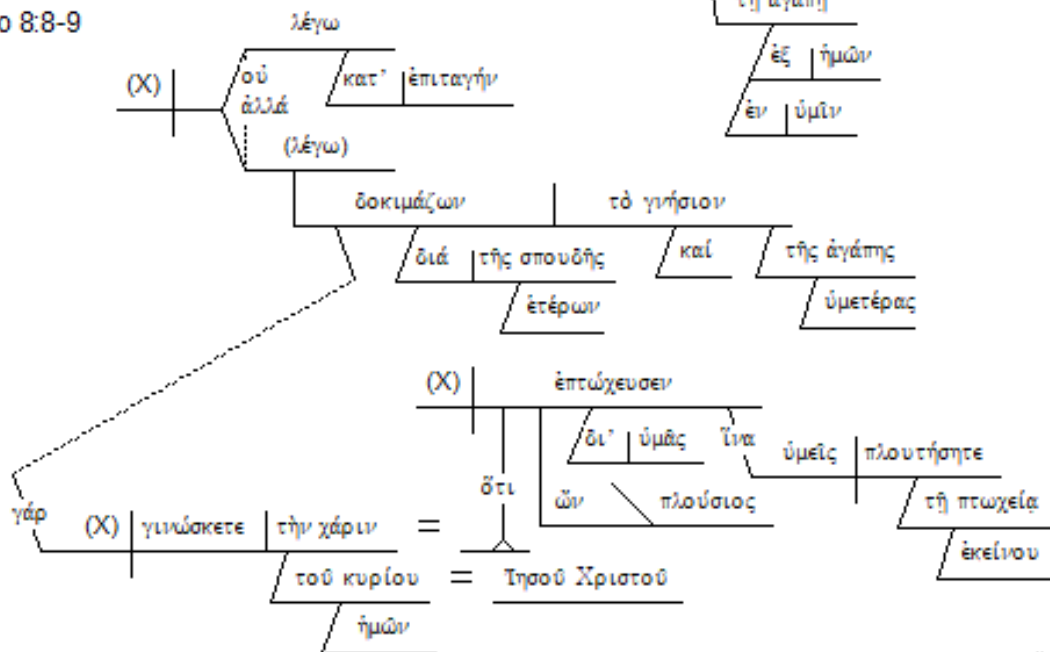
2Co 8:1-6



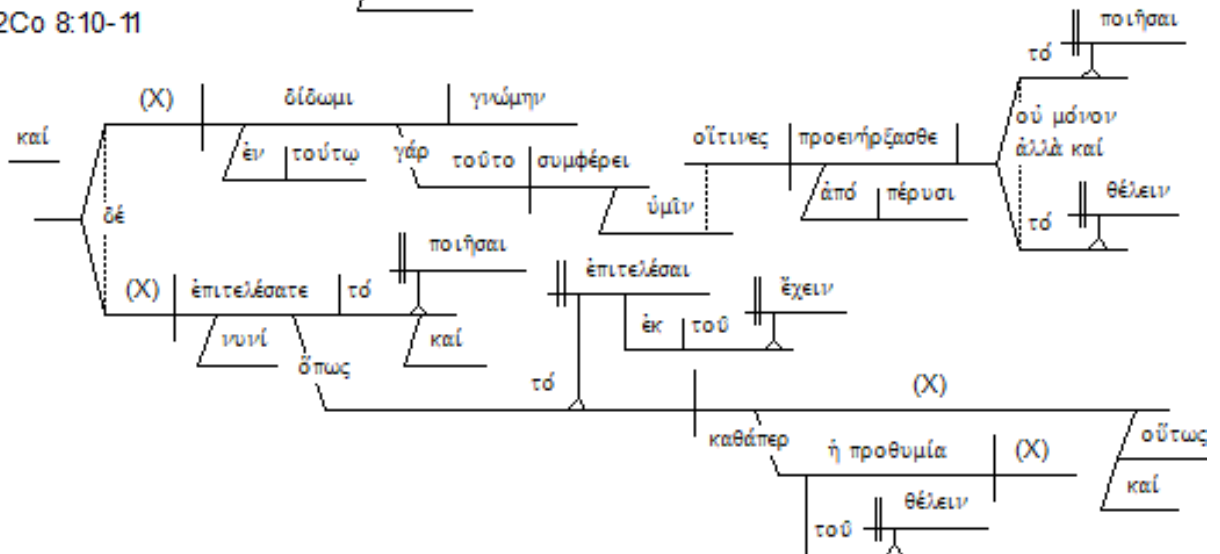
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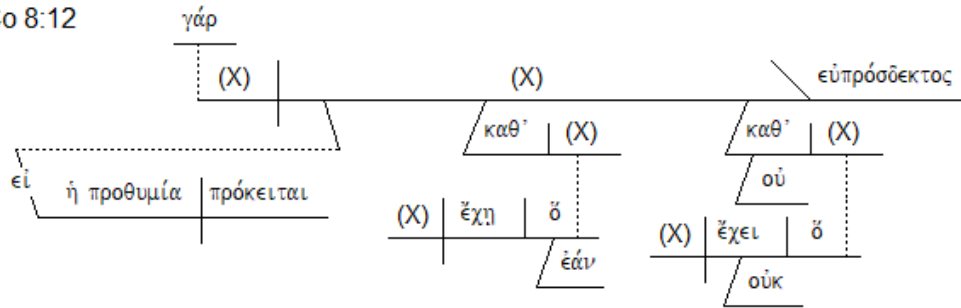
2Co 8:8-9



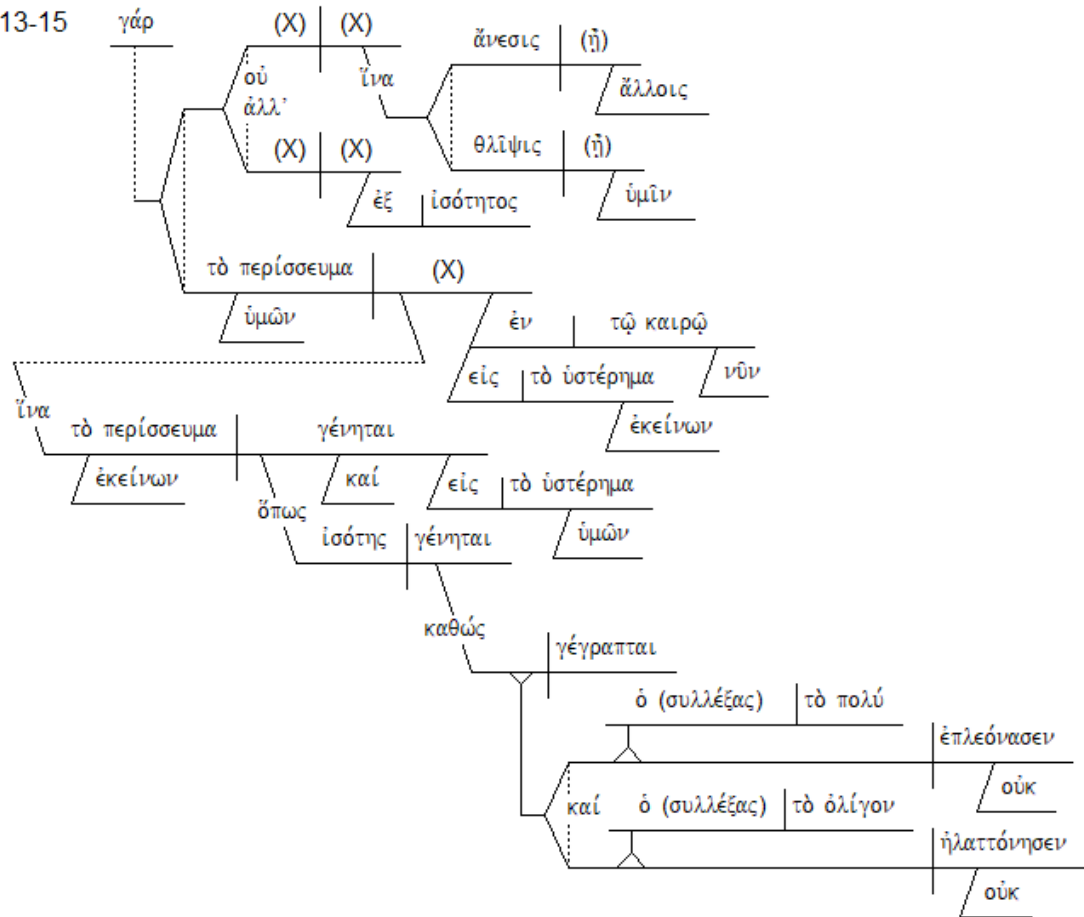
2Co 8:10-11



2Co 8:12



2Cor 8:13-15



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:16 - 9:5

TITLE: PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

BIG IDEA:

CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE ADMINISTERED WITH FINANCIAL INTEGRITY AND OFFERED FROM PREPARED HEARTS

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: For us today, the principles Paul shares in these last verses apply primarily to the recipients of financial gifts: Christian organizations, evangelistic ministries, missionaries, Christian schools, and local churches.

First, **only qualified people should handle financial responsibilities**. Throughout these verses Paul mentions three men —Titus and unnamed “*brothers*” —who would handle the collection of the gifts. Note their credentials: earnest (8:16), willing (8:17), approved by the churches (8:19), administratively gifted (8:19), diligent (8:22), cooperative (8:23), and Christ-glorifying (8:19, 23). Also notice that the emphasis isn’t on “thrifty,” “polished,” “business-minded,” “focused on the bottom line,” or “eager for return on investment.” These weren’t businessmen, fundraisers, or accountants. They were **godly men of unblemished integrity**, well-known to Paul and the churches, entrusted as a team to receive and carry out the project with diligence.

This leads to the second principle: **Money matters should be administered honestly and openly**. Paul says that they were “*taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift*” (8:20). Why must they be so cautious?

1. First, because **the money belonged to God**. It was not a gift to Titus and his two buddies, but a gift to God for the sake of all the suffering saints in Jerusalem. They were accountable to the Lord Himself for handling the finances.
2. Second, they were **accountable to others**. When people give money to churches, missionaries, ministries, or charities, they trust that their money will be used wisely and carefully —and in a manner consistent with the ministry’s purpose and goals. That sacred trust must be guarded.

Mark Seifrid: Paul’s announcement concerning the gift-delegation thus displays a subtle transition. His opening exclamation of thanksgiving for Titus’s eagerness reflects his concern for the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians, who are to benefit from their participation in the collection (vv. 10, 13-15). His focus immediately shifts, however, to the readiness of the Corinthians (v. 19). He thus underscores their own spiritual vitality, to which he returns more than once (vv. 22, 24). Just as Jerusalem is not to become subservient to Corinth materially, Corinth is not to become subservient to Jerusalem spiritually. Paul makes it clear that the representatives have accompanied Titus to ensure the probity of Paul’s dealings (vv. 20-21). Yet they serve at the same time as witnesses to the actions of Corinth. The Corinthians are to display “*the proof of their*

love,” not merely to Paul, but to the churches as well (vv. 7-8, 24). Again it is clear that Paul exhorts the Corinthians out of the Gospel itself and “*the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*” The “love” that they display will be only the love that they have received. As Paul makes clear shortly, their contribution will be a confession of the Gospel (9:13).

Frank Matera: In the first unit (8:16–24) Paul describes the composition of the delegation and formally commends it to the Corinthians; in the second (9:1–5) he explains why he is sending the delegation and what it will do. Having done this, Paul returns to the topic of generous giving.

Scott Hafemann: The importance of the collection within the argument of 2 Corinthians (not to mention within Paul’s theology) is often underestimated. Far from being a digression in Paul’s thought, the practical point of 2 Corinthians as a whole is actually expressed in these chapters: Those Corinthians who have not accepted the grace of God in vain (6:1–2), as evidenced by their repentance (7:9–11), are to prepare for Paul’s third visit (cf. 13:1) by purifying the church (6:14 – 7:1) and by completing the collection (8:1 – 9:15).

There is also an important apologetic motive behind these chapters: Paul wants to demonstrate his integrity regarding this sizable sum of money (7:2; 8:20; 11:20; 12:15–18) and to pave the way for transferring it to Jerusalem, since its favorable reception was by no means guaranteed (see Rom. 15:30–31; cf. Acts 21:15–26; 24:17). Thus, when it comes to the collection for Jerusalem, both the status of the Corinthians and the reputation of the apostle are on the line (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).

Eric Mason: Main Idea: We as the church must be dedicated to giving so gospel ministry can go forth.

- I. The Church Must Turn Offerings into Ministry (8:16).
- II. A Generous Church Starts with Trustworthy People and Trustworthy Systems (8:17-24).
- III. God’s People Must Be Dedicated to Giving (9:1-5).

I. (8:16-24) CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE ADMINISTERED WITH FINANCIAL INTEGRITY

George Shillington: Here the second major part of the appeal deals with the recommendation of the delegation destined for Jerusalem via Corinth, the kind of authority they possess, the parties they represent, and their function in collecting the gift.

Commending the Collectors

A. (:16-17) Commending Titus (for His Earnestness)

1. (:16) Divine Giftedness

“But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.”

Frank Matera: Just as Paul began his appeal by disclosing how “the grace of God” manifested itself in the extraordinary generosity of the Macedonians (8:1), so he begins his formal recommendation of Titus and the two brothers by showing that it is God who wills and enables the work of this great collection. For if God had not filled Titus’s heart with earnestness and zeal for the Corinthians, Titus would not have returned to Corinth of his own accord, as he is presently doing.

John MacArthur: Paul here anticipated and answered another potential objection to the offering, namely, that the project was his alone. But it was not just Paul’s passion; God had put the same earnestness for the project in the heart of Titus. Titus, who knew them so well and loved them so dearly (cf. 7:15), was also wholeheartedly committed to the relief effort for the Jerusalem saints. That God had so united the hearts of Paul and Titus further confirmed that the collection was His will. Nor could the anti-Paul faction accuse Titus of having a Jewish bias, since he was a Gentile.

2. (:17) Personal Initiative

“For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.”

Richard Pratt: Paul mentioned that Titus was returning. It appears that the Corinthian church had a positive relationship with Titus. They received him well and honored him as a servant of Paul. So the apostle expressed thanks to God for putting affection for the Corinthians into the heart of Titus. Titus shared Paul’s love for the church and wanted nothing but the well-being of the believers there. Paul explained by saying that Titus did more than respond to the apostle’s appeal. He was coming ... with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. He had so much affection for the church in Corinth that he voluntarily made the arduous journey to see them again.

David Garland: The Corinthians might be surprised to see Titus again so soon, so Paul writes a commendatory explanation. His main intention is to dispel any hint of coercion on his part. He also makes clear that he is not coercing an underling to return to the Corinthians. He sends his equal partner, Titus, who wanted to return to them of his own accord.

B. (:18-19a) Commending Famous Brother

1. (:18) Commissioned by Paul

“And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches”

Frank Matera: Having announced that Titus is returning to Corinth, Paul informs the Corinthians that, in addition to Titus, he is sending a “brother,” whom he identifies in two ways.

- First, this brother is renowned throughout all the churches because of his work for the gospel.

- Second, the churches have elected him as Paul's traveling companion to Jerusalem.

Although the designation "*brother*" (*adelphos*) could be applied to any believer, since those "*in Christ*" form a new family, here it appears to take on a technical meaning, referring to **someone entrusted with a special task**.

John MacArthur: Paul did not choose him to help with the collection because of his business acumen, but because of his spiritual maturity, unimpeachable character, and reputation for integrity. The involvement of another godly leader with the collection further enhanced the project's credibility. It was also in keeping with the New Testament pattern of entrusting money to the spiritual leadership of the church (cf. **Acts 4:37**).

David Garland: It is odd to recommend persons without giving their names, and this omission has raised speculation about why Paul does not name the brothers accompanying Titus because he usually omits the names of his adversaries, not his supporters. Several explanations have been proposed.

(1) Some argue that later scribes removed the names because they were judged unsuitable for some reason, such as falling into a heresy. This option seems far-fetched.

(2) Since Paul did not appoint them but they were elected by the churches, it is possible he sought to lower their profiles in the delegation. He did not want to give them any more status than necessary and did not want to diminish the authority of Titus, the key figure chosen by Paul. By omitting their names, Paul implies that there are "two levels of authorization within the delegation. Titus alone was authorized in the full sense, while the brothers derived their authority from him." Had they arrived without Titus or taken an independent course of action, they would have had no letter of recommendation.

(3) **Betz** claims that Paul's method of appointing was by apostolic decree; the Greek churches operated through the democratic process. Therefore, Paul did not name those he did not appoint.

(4) Another possibility is that this first envoy was a Corinthian Christian who had gone to Macedonia to work there in the gospel (see the contacts between Corinth and Macedonia in **2 Cor 11:9; 1 Thess 1:7-8**). Paul's eulogy would have flattered and relieved the Corinthians. The emissary was one of their own, not "a critical Macedonian," and was widely recognized for his contributions to the mission of the gospel. This choice may have been a diplomatic gesture.

(5) The emissary may have been someone already known to the Corinthians. Since he arrived with the letter, it would have been unnecessary to name him. Paul, however, identifies both the men who accompanied Titus as the messengers of the churches (**8:22**), which implies they were not chosen to go to Corinth to help them complete their donations but to represent the churches of Macedonia in Jerusalem (**8:19**; see **1 Cor**

16:3). They accompany Titus now to assure anyone who might question the integrity of the project that it is being carried out in an unimpeachable way. If someone suspects foul play or that a conspiracy is afoot, they will have to implicate the Macedonian churches as well. Paul does not commend these escorts by name because they are not sent to work with the Corinthians. What is only important to Paul are the qualifications of these men who with Titus safeguard the probity of this undertaking. The first emissary stands out for his work in the gospel, the recognition of that work by all the churches, and his appointment by the churches (**8:19**).

2. (:19a) Commissioned by the Churches

“and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work”

C. (:19b-21) Concern for Financial Integrity (Heart of the passage)

1. (:19b) Proper Stewardship

“which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness.”

Richard Pratt: Moreover, Paul and his company went through all this trouble to show their **eagerness** to help. Eagerness or enthusiasm in the service of God is a consistent theme in this context. Paul spoke of himself as helping or assisting because he did not handle the money himself but aided those who had been appointed. He showed great wisdom and caution in this sensitive area.

Scott Hafemann: The collection is an essential aspect of Paul’s ministry precisely because it glorifies God and demonstrates the reality of the Spirit through Paul’s enthusiastic willingness to meet the needs of others (cf. **3:18; 4:15; 9:12–13; Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:11; 2:11**). Indeed, the latter accomplishes the former. Once again, Paul himself models the same God-glorifying quality of Spirit-given “*eagerness*” that he calls for in the Corinthians (cf. **2 Cor. 8:11–12; 9:2**).

2. (:20) Fiscal Accountability

“taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift”

3. (:21) Good Reputation

“for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

R. Kent Hughes: Paul knew that few things would destroy his ministry as much as doubts cast upon his integrity in matters of money. So in **verse 21** he further emphasized the extreme care taken: “*for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.*” These words echo **Proverbs 3:4** and show that while Paul was careful to do what was right in the Lord’s sight, his driving interest was doing what was honorable in the sight of man, both friend and foe. As **Calvin** said, “there is nothing that so leaves a man open to sinister insinuation as the management of

public funds.” And again, “Thus the higher the position we occupy, the greater our need to imitate carefully Paul’s circumspection and modesty.” In the same vein, perhaps cued by Calvin, **William Barclay** writes, “It is a most interesting thing to note that this same Paul who could write like a lyric poet and think like a theologian could, when it was necessary, act with the meticulous accuracy and care of a chartered accountant. Paul was a big enough man to do the little things and the practical things supremely well.”

D. (:22) Commending Unnamed Brother (for His Diligence)

*“And we have sent with them our brother,
whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things,
but now even more diligent, because of his great confidence in you.”*

Frank Matera: The delegation that Paul sends to Corinth is carefully balanced to the extent that one of the envoys has been chosen by “*the churches*” and the other is a proven associate of Paul (though in v. 23 Paul will describe both brothers as envoys of the churches). Since Paul mentions only Titus by name, however, it is apparent that he has placed Titus in charge of this delicate mission.

Paul Barnett: These verses, then, are in effect a mini-letter of commendation of these three Christians to the Corinthian church. They serve to remind all Christians and church leaders to exert extreme care in all matters relating to church money.

E. (:23) Summary of Commendation

1. Titus

“As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you”

George Shillington: Titus is authorized as *my partner and my co-worker*, as compared to the other two delegates, who represent the churches. Titus is the official bearer of the letter, authorized by the apostle to carry out the letter’s instructions. The two anonymous brothers are messengers of the churches, with no such authorization.

2. Other Brothers

*“as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches,
a glory to Christ”*

F. (:24) Appeal for Loving Acceptance

*“Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love
and of our reason for boasting about you.”*

Richard Pratt: Paul was practical and pastoral about this matter. Though guided by biblical principles, he was concerned with putting to rest any misgivings the Corinthians may have had. His special efforts provide guidance for all who handle money in ministry.

John MacArthur: Paul had instructed the Corinthians about the importance and procedure of making their contribution. He had taken every reasonable precaution to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Now it was time for the Corinthians to give openly before the churches (lit., “*before the face of the churches*”) so that all would clearly see their generosity. By so doing, they would show them the proof of their love; as Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (**John 13:34–35**). A loving church is a generous church, and the Corinthians’ generous love would validate Paul’s boasting about the work of Christ in them.

David Garland: Paul’s appeal to their pride to show others their generosity is also theologically dangerous. Christians and churches, however, do not always make the right ethical decisions when left to themselves. **Accountability to others** keeps us from always doing what we want and serving our own selfish desires. Paul assumes that Christians live and act out of a communal context and that they are answerable to one another. The decisions made by the Corinthians regarding this matter will have immediate repercussions for the whole church. Knowing that our fellow Christians are watching what we do may help us to be more responsible in allowing God’s grace to work in our lives.

Scott Hafemann: Paul has boasted that the majority of the Corinthians, having genuinely repented, would indeed respond. Now it is time for them to confirm that confidence by living out what they have confessed (cf. **8:2, 8; 9:13**). To discipline their own is one thing, but to reach out across ethnic, social, religious, and cultural boundaries to the Jews in Jerusalem will be the ultimate test of their “*earnestness,*” “*eagerness,*” and “*concern*” (**7:11–12**). For as will become clear in **10:12–18**, one can only legitimately boast about those things for which there is concrete evidence that God has been at work. This explains why Paul’s boasting concerning the Corinthians in **8:24** is the ultimate ground for the praise to God with which this section began: His boasting is, at the same time, a declaration of thanksgiving to the One who made their lives possible.

II. (9:1-5) CHRISTIAN GIVING MUST BE OFFERED FROM PREPARED HEARTS

George Shillington: A sharp break in the form and flow of the appeal occurs between **8:24** and **9:1**, yet the aim of the appeal is the same in both chapters. Even with the interruption in thought, a number of commentators interpret **9:1–5** in conjunction with **8:16–24**. **The subject matter is similar** (e.g., **Furnish**, 1984:438; **Hughes**: 321–322; **R. Martin**, 1986: 281–282). However, the language of **9:1** definitely marks a new beginning, which must be accounted for in any interpretation of the two chapters on the collection.

After his rather awkward transition in **9:1**—*now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints*—Paul returns to the subject of the collection as though a new approach is indeed necessary. He mentions again the eagerness of the Macedonians (cf. **8:1-5**). This time, however, he points to the good example of the believers in Achaia (**9:2**, of which Corinth is the major city) that stirred up most of them, the Macedonian churches. As well, Paul resumes the matter of sending the brothers ahead to Corinth, explaining that their commission should not be viewed as a form of pressure or extortion, but as a way of validating Paul’s boasting about the Achaian churches to the Macedonians. In these opening verses (**9:1-5**), Paul urges the readers more delicately than he did in **chapter 8**, that the collection should be a gracious gift of blessing, and therefore bountiful and liberal.

Frank Matera: In **verses 1–5**, then, Paul is not so much taking up the topic of the collection a new as he is providing the Corinthians with his reasons for sending the delegation.

Collecting the Pledges

A. (:1-2) Confidence in Their Heart Preparation

“For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”

George Shillington: Of the Achaians, Paul now says, *Your zeal has stirred up most of them*. Though some groups in Macedonia are reluctant to participate, most are ready. For Paul to leave the rather hard-hitting appeal of **8:2-8** without this further qualification would jeopardize his desired effect: to stimulate the Corinthians to complete the collection. The readers of **chapter 8** could easily feel criticized or even shamed by the glowing example of the Macedonians. Here in the additional appeal, they are duly praised.

B. (3-4) Precaution of Checking on Their Heart Preparation

“But I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence.”

C. (:5) Summary

“So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.”

Mark Seifrid: If the Macedonians should appear with Paul and the “*blessing*” is not prepared, it will appear that the Corinthians are stingy, hoarding for themselves the earthly goods in which they abound. This reading of Paul’s statement corresponds to the benefit to the Corinthians that he has named in citing Scripture: “*The one* [who had]

much did not take too much [pleonazō].” What the Corinthians have available to give is sufficient (8:12-13). They need only make good on their promise.

Richard Pratt: Paul showed practical concern for the encouragement of the churches in Corinth and Macedonia. Although he was confident of the Corinthians' good intentions, he was not naïve. He took the precaution of sending messengers ahead to insure that no one would miss the opportunity for a great blessing.

Scott Hafemann: In 9:5, Paul is consequently pointing to two opposite ways of giving: the kind of generosity that flows from experiencing God's blessing and from trusting in the sufficiency of God's grace, versus the kind of begrudging greediness and self-reliance that selfishly seeks to keep as much as possible for oneself. The former realizes that everything is a gift of grace and that God can be depended on for the future (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 4:14, 18); this is the pathway of salvation. The latter views everything as a deserved reward to be hoarded out of insecurity and self-gratification, which are fundamental acts of unbelief in the faithfulness and goodness of God (8:7-8; 9:6-8, 11; cf. Luke 12:13-34). Some argue that in 9:1-5 Paul is playing one church off against another; others posit that he is merely trying to keep the Corinthians from losing face. But, as 9:5 indicates, the apostle is concerned with their souls. . .

Paul wants the collection completed before he returns in order to avoid any possibility of coercing the collection by his presence (9:5), since he knows that when he returns, it will be to judge the church (cf. 10:2-6; 13:1-4). Paul does not want people participating in the collection because of their last-minute fear of being judged by God, but because of the continuing grace of God in their lives. Paul's concern is to show that giving is not a way to stay in the church under the threat of punishment, but a way of demonstrating that they belong to the church because of their continuing trust in what God has done, is doing, and will do for them.

John MacArthur: Then Paul warned of the one sin that could keep the Corinthians from meeting their commitment: **covetousness**—the sin that is the greatest hindrance to giving. Since the Corinthians knew that the collection for the Jerusalem saints was God's work, and that it was being done in God's way, and since they had previously committed to be involved in it, to fail to keep that commitment was sinful covetousness.

Few sins are as ugly as covetousness; few sins manifest selfishness and pride so graphically as grasping for more at the expense of others. Covetousness is built into the very fabric of depraved human nature. “*For from within, out of the heart of men,*” declared Jesus, “*proceed ... deeds of coveting*” (Mark 7:21-22). Sinners covet because they have “*a heart trained in greed*” (2 Peter 2:14). Covetousness (greed) is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), and those who habitually practice it will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5). Covetousness or greed characterizes a depraved mind (Rom. 1:28-29), leads people to oppress others (Mic. 2:2), and spurn the Lord (Ps. 10:3). Christians are “*not to associate with any so-called brother if he is ... covetous*” (1 Cor. 5:11).

Stewardship with integrity, then, is marked by voluntary, faithful giving, proportionate to what one has, in submission to godly pastors who silence the critics by handling the money faithfully. It is motivated by exemplary love for God and others, and is completely free from selfish greed and covetousness. All giving must be measured by those noble standards.

Robert Hughes: Paul used what might have been mistaken as an inferior scare tactic (shame) as a reason for obeying Titus. But he had made clear that reputation was vital, if the people of God were going to claim that they reflected the glory of God (see, for example, **8:21**). The Corinthians had promised; Paul had not coerced. It was all in good faith that he believed their past promise, used it as a basis for boasting to the Macedonians, and then held them to their word. This was actually a compliment to the Corinthians. Paul's urging their complete follow-through was only consistent with his belief in and demand for reliability.

But Paul had yet to get to the heart of the matter. Though they needed to keep their word and maintain a good reputation, Paul knew all too well that their follow-through attempts might have been the result merely of last-minute scrambling to save face. He would have none of that, our apostle of the heart, so he provided the God-centered perspective that would avoid such phony and grudging giving. To the obligations of promise and its potential grudging response came three great principles for making giving a blessing, not a drudge.

Paul's approach in helping them complete the offering was threefold:

- (1) the good beginning (**8:6; 9:1-2**),
- (2) the description of the problem (**8:8, 9:3-5**), and
- (3) the solution to the problem (**8:8-15**). This solution is rounded out in **9:6-15**.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) In our efforts to live lives pleasing to our Lord, we seek to glorify Him in everything and we are careful to always do what is honorable in the Lord's sight, knowing that He is watching all that we do.
- 2) Christ always did what was honorable in the sight of all men. Look at His wisdom in answering trick questions from the religious leaders ... such as about paying taxes or who is married to whom in heaven.
- 3) Christ allowed the purse strings of His earthly ministry to be managed at least in part by Judas ... why would he do this if integrity of financial affairs was so important?
- 4) Look at how Christ proved His great love for us by the nature and extend of His sacrificial giving.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How careful are we in the giving of our money to Christian organizations? Have we checked them out to make sure that they are practicing policies of financial accountability and integrity?
- 2) Do we think that our responsibility stops with just giving a certain amount of money away to the Lord's work or do we view it as an investment where we want to make sure we get the best return for our \$\$?
- 3) Would we characterize our approach to giving as one marked by *zeal*?
- 4) What type of preparation do we make for our giving . . . or is it largely a very automatic thing without much compassion for the needs or without much concern for the glory of the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: If you've ever struggled with how to tackle a seemingly insurmountable task that had to be done, you know the challenges that can present themselves. We can be paralyzed with fear, demoralized by failures, and agonized over decisions. Yet all the while, the clock ticks away as our deadline approaches.

In my experience, there are four essential ingredients for overcoming these kinds of challenges and actually achieving a goal.

1. First, there must be **active participants**. When we face a monumental task, it's no time for one-man bands. Teamwork is necessary.
2. Second, there must be a **clear objective**. We need to know where we are starting, precisely where we are going, and what steps need to be taken.
3. Third, there must be **strong enthusiasm**. The best leaders bring out the best in people. This engenders teamwork and a level of energy that can't be achieved in any other way.
4. Fourth, there must be the **promise of reward**. The reward doesn't need to be material, but there must be some kind of "payoff," even if it's the feeling of accomplishment one gets when reaching a goal.

Ray Stedman: Personally, I would never give to a Christian organization that is headed by a single individual, no matter how responsible he may seem to be. It is just not wise to trust an individual with the administration of sums of money. . . Furthermore, I would never give to an organization headed by a board on which there were several members of the same family. . . Furthermore, in this regard, it is an excellent practice to require two signatures on every check disbursed from Christian funds . . . Do not

give to organizations or groups or people who habitually rely on emotional appeals to get you to give. . .

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that if you give according to the law of harvest, God will give back. And this is the form it will take:

1. First, it will awaken gratitude in those to whom you give . . .
2. second, it stimulates them to pray for you . . .
3. And third, it glorifies God with the thanksgivings of many. . .

Giving is godlike, and we are everywhere in Scripture reminded that we are to give because we have been given to. Therefore, we are encouraged by a passage like this to sow with a prodigal hand, to give generously, to realize we have affluence, we have additional money beyond our own needs for the very reason that we might have something to give to those who have less. Take advantage of it. Jesus put it as beautifully and as simply as it could ever be put: "*Freely you have received, freely give,*" (cf., **Matt 10:8** KJV). That is God's basis and motive for encouraging our Christian giving

Steve Zeisler: About a year previously, the Corinthians had heard about the opportunity to give to the poor in Jerusalem, and they had been effusive in their insistence that they would give a great deal of money; they wanted to be known as a generous church. So Paul took them at their word. They had not been required to say this or manipulated into offering a generous gift. In their characteristic way they had leaped at the challenge before them. So when Paul traveled to other places, he would speak of the generous response of the Corinthians, their commitment to sacrificial giving, and so on. Now word has come back to him that they are feeling embarrassed about all this, and that is one of the sources of tension between Paul and them. There isn't a big sum of money waiting in Corinth. Their response had waned quickly after they had first spoken. What Paul is doing now is bringing the issues out into the open. He is saying in effect that their reputation will be based on what they actually do, not on what they say. He is not willing to cover their embarrassment by pretending the facts are not as they are.

Tasker: Chapter divisions are not always found in the best places in our English versions, and the assignment of these words to the opening verse of a new chapter (**9:1**) is somewhat misleading, for Paul, in fact, is continuing to speak about the delegates who are soon to visit Corinth.

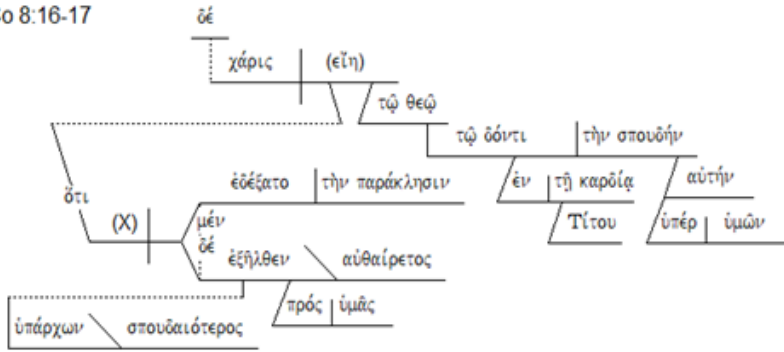
William Barclay: It is Paul's great desire here that the gift of the Corinthians should be ready and should not have to be collected and prepared at the last moment. There is an old Latin proverb which says, "He gives twice who gives quickly." That is always true. The finest gifts are given, not when they are demanded, but before they are asked for. The finest gifts are given, not after waiting until need has to ask, but by the man whose eye sees and whose heart feels and whose hand is stretched out even before any request is made. It was while we were yet enemies that Christ died for us. God hears our prayers even before we speak them. And we should be to our fellow men even as God has been to us.

Homer Kent: The apostle expected the collection to be a generous one. At the same time, he recognized that any considerable amount of funds given for charitable purposes opens the collectors to suspicion if safeguards are not provided. Anyone in the limelight as Paul was quickly learns that his prominence makes him an obvious target of critics, especially in financial matters. Once suspicions are aroused, they will color every future action. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that suitable precautions be taken. Paul was doing exactly that. By using a delegation of trustworthy men, and getting authorization from a spectrum of churches, he was avoiding any possibility of serious suspicion.

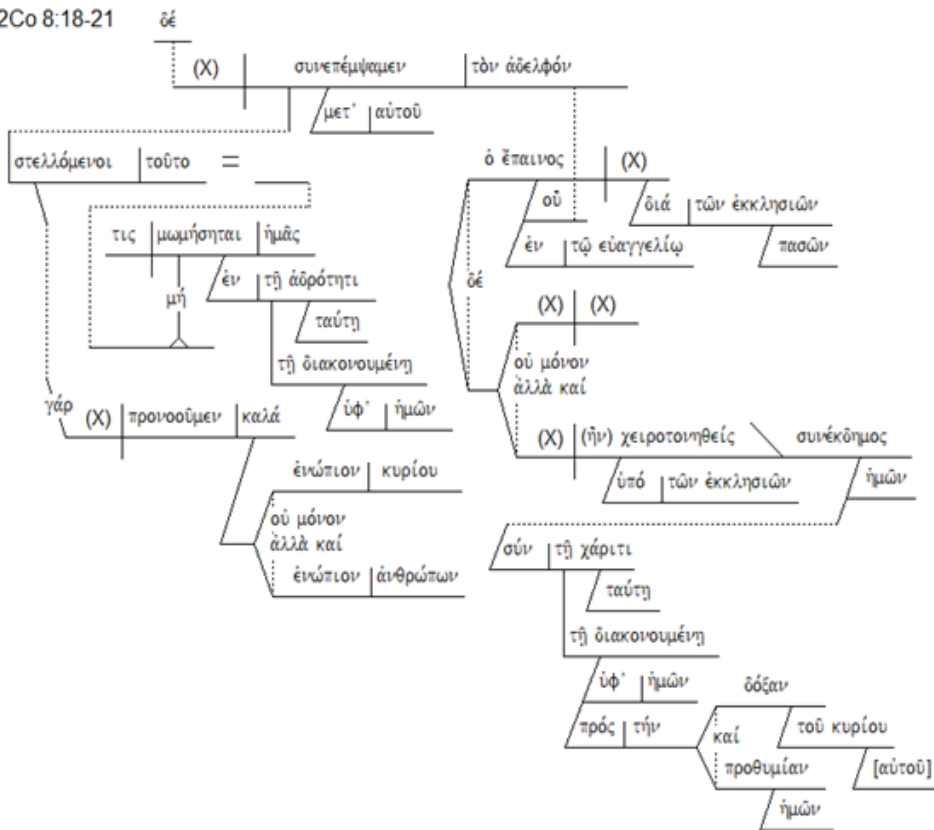
Robert Gromacki: He wanted them to “*be ready*” in performance as they had been ready in plans. The apostle had gone out on the proverbial limb for them (“*as I said*”). They could either vindicate his confidence in them or bring suspicion upon the integrity of his words. If the Corinthians had failed, then the other churches could have thought that the apostle manipulated them with a challenging example that was not true.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

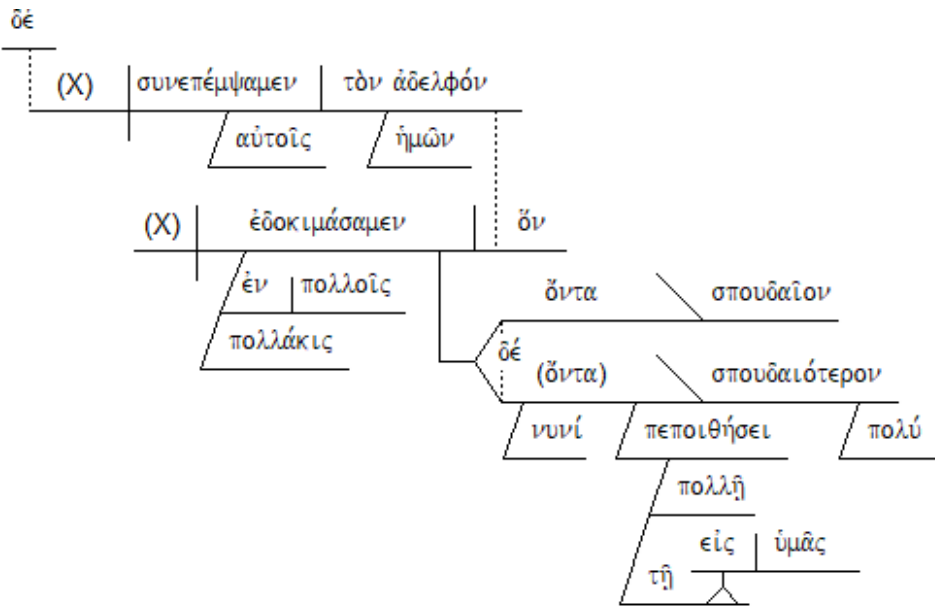
2Co 8:16-17



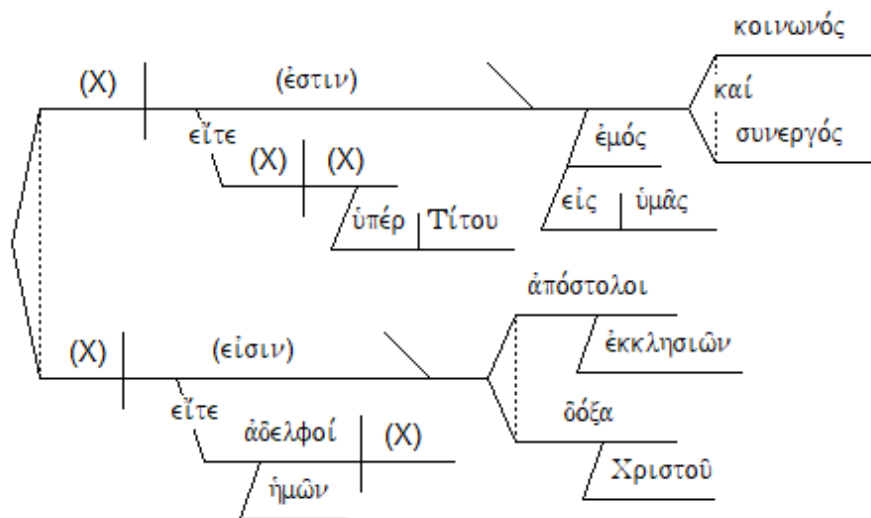
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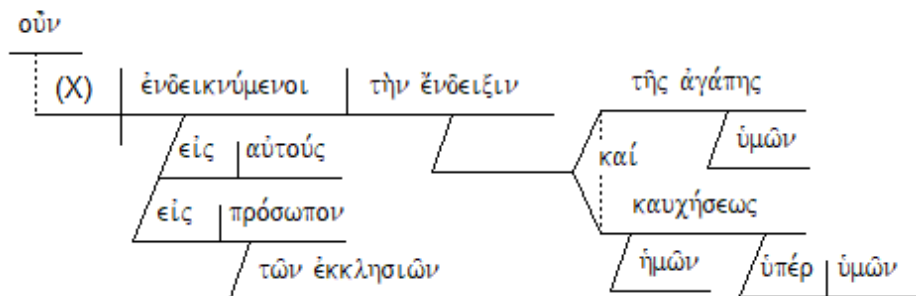
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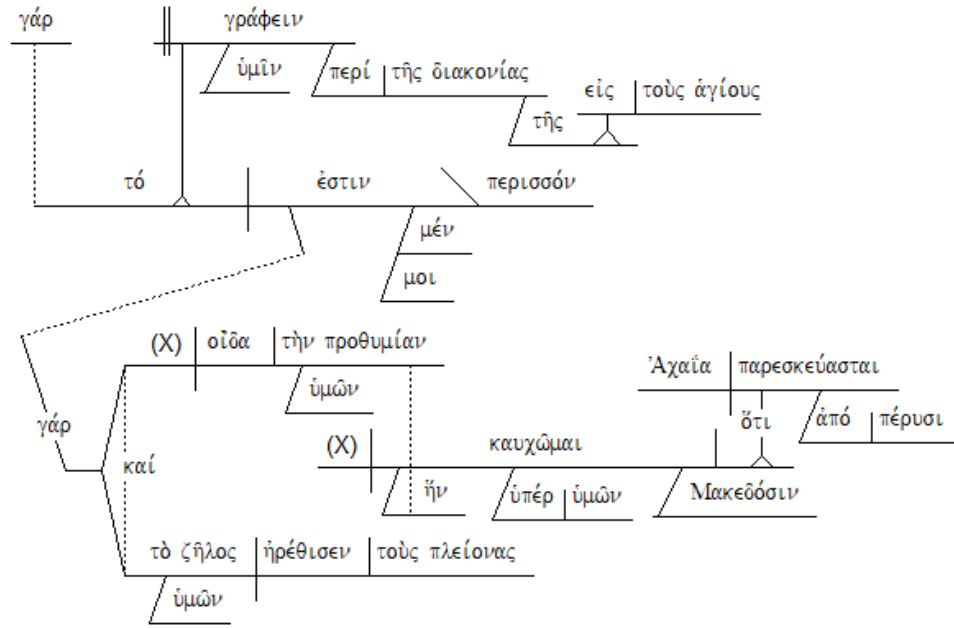
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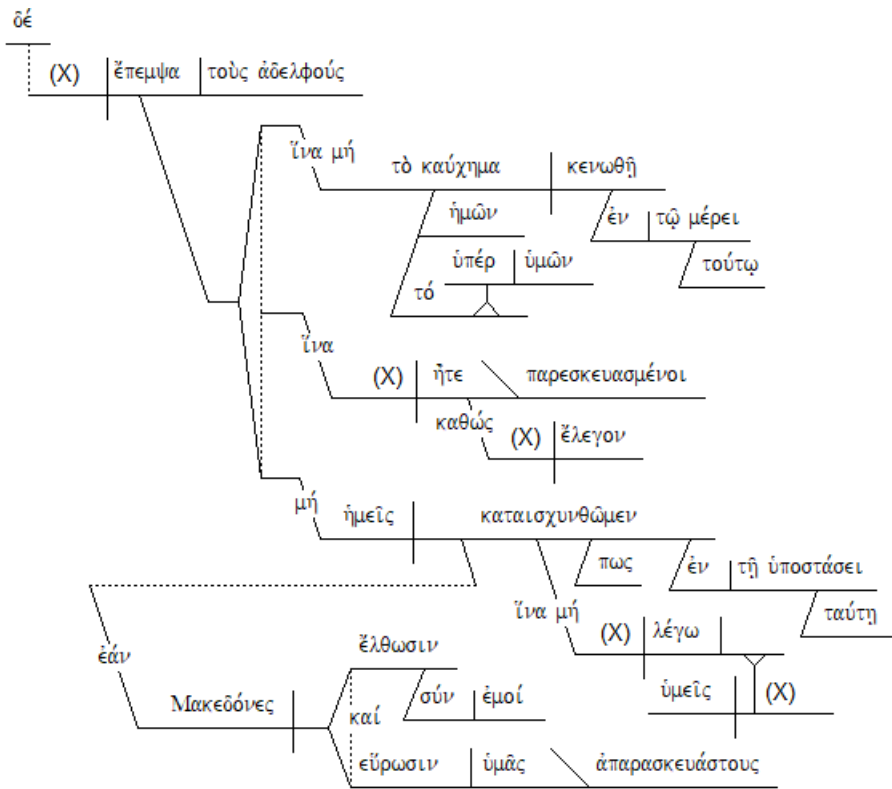
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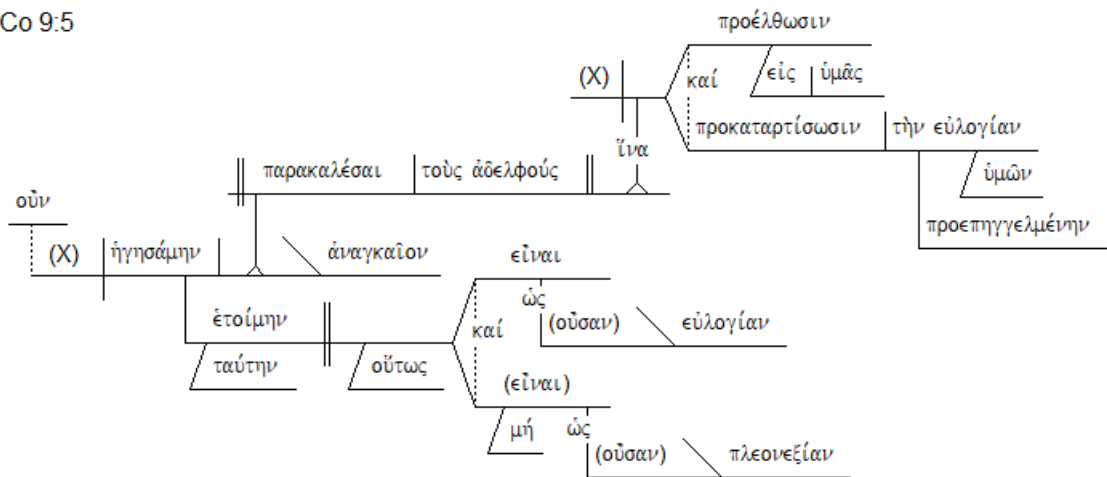
2Co 9:1-2



2Co 9:3-4



2Co 9:5



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

TITLE: *MONEY IN THE BANK -- GENEROUS GIVING YIELDS AN ABUNDANT HARVEST*

BIG IDEA:

**GOD GUARANTEES A RETURN ON SPIRITUAL INVESTMENTS –
THE PROMISES OF GOD PROMOTE GENEROUS GIVING WHICH BINDS
BELIEVERS TOGETHER IN GLORIFYING GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever made a really bad investment?? Discouraging to throw your money away. How generous are you when it comes to investing in the Lord's work?

Paul Barnett: God's grace towards us reproduces his graciousness within us. Since God's grace towards us is infinite and not measured out, we who receive it are to show generosity without measurement or calculation. We are not under compulsion. Thus ours is to be a ready, not a reluctant, response. God loves a cheerful giver (7) because he is himself a cheerful giver (cf. 15). Nevertheless, Paul is not encouraging his readers to be either casual or impulsive givers. Each person should give what he or she has decided in his or her heart to give (7). Inward resolve is to be followed by decisive and cheerful giving.

John MacArthur: In chapters 8 and 9, Paul sought to motivate the Corinthians to complete their giving for the needy members of the Jerusalem church. First, he reminded them of the example set by the Macedonians (8:1–9), then he gave them a direct exhortation (8:10–9:5), and in this section he pointed out the potential benefits. God graciously promises a harvest in accord with what believers sow. The appeal is not, of course, to self-interest. The promise is not that God will reward generous givers so they can consume it on their own desires. The real purpose of God's gracious rewarding of believers will become evident as the passage unfolds.

To motivate the Corinthians to give, Paul gave a fivefold description of the harvest that would result:

1. love from God,
2. generosity from God,
3. glory to God,
4. friends from God, and
5. likeness to God.

Frank Matera: The line of thought in **chapters 8–9** can now be summarized. Paul begins by telling the Corinthians how the grace of God manifested itself in the generosity of the Macedonians, exhorting the Corinthians to resume what they began a year ago so that there will be a certain equality among the churches (8:1–15), and it

concludes with Paul exhorting the Corinthians to liberal giving so that others will recognize and praise the same grace in them (9:6–15). Between these two exhortations, Paul recommends the delegation headed by Titus, which will make preparations for this gracious gift (8:16 – 9:5). Although these chapters are an appeal for money, they also provide a theology of grace, namely, the graciousness of the God revealed in Jesus Christ, which allows and empowers people to be generous to each other.

Richard Pratt: In these verses Paul made it clear that giving generously to the poor in Jerusalem would bring **many benefits**. The needs of the poor would be met. The Corinthians would be blessed, and their lives would be enriched. Paul and his company would be encouraged and thankful to God. These positive benefits were to motivate the Corinthians to fulfill their earlier commitment to giving.

Charles Swindoll: I am aware that there has been a lot of false advertising on this subject over the last several decades. The so-called prosperity gospel has spoiled a perfectly healthy doctrine of sowing and reaping. Those “**name it and claim it**” preachers have turned God’s promise of blessing us in order to bless others into a virtual Ponzi scheme. Let me be clear. God never promises to match you dollar for dollar, or to multiply your financial contribution sent to some TV or radio preacher with a thirty, sixty, or hundredfold return on investment, or to reward your “seed gift” by opening His floodgates of material blessings in the form of guaranteed health and enormous wealth. God promises to supply all of our needs, not all of our greeds (**Phil. 4:19**). And He promises to reward us with what we might call “incorporeal” blessings —blessings of the heart such as the joy of obedience, the pleasure of inner peace, and the outflow of abundant love for the brethren.

Yes, God promises a bountiful reaping for faithful giving, but don’t take this verse out of its biblical context. God may bless a person with riches in order to use that person as a conduit to bless others. If that is you, then use it generously for God’s work or risk losing it to the world. If you are blessed in other ways, stay faithful in your ministry of giving —whether that’s a gift of your time, your musical ability, your energy, your skills, your intellect, or your more modest —but equally noble —financial contributions.

Eric Mason: Main Idea: God wants to increase your giving capacity and bless your giving.

I. God Blesses Generous Giving (9:6-7).

II. God Longs to Increase Your Giving Capacity (9:8-15).

I. (:6-11a) 5 PROMISES OF GOD THAT PROMOTE GENEROUS GIVING

A. (:6) Promise of Proportional Reaping

1. Sow sparingly . . . Reap sparingly

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly”

David Garland: No farmer considers sowing as a loss of seed because the harvest will provide the seed for the next season. Consequently, no sower begrudges the seed he casts upon the ground or tries to scrimp by with sowing as little as possible. He willingly sows all he can and trusts that God will bless the sowing with a bountiful harvest. If the farmer, for some reason, stints on the sowing, he will cheat himself of that harvest. The more he sows, the greater the harvest he will reap and the more he will have for sowing for the next harvest. Applying this analogy to giving means that plentiful giving will result in a plentiful harvest.

2. Sow bountifully . . . Reap bountifully

“and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.”

Implies a careful effort; not just a scattering of the seed by careless planting;
Laws of nature apply to laws of giving.

Frank Matera: (:6-9) In **verses 6–7** Paul introduces a maxim (v. 6) that he applies to the collection (v. 7). In **verses 8–9**, he reinforces his exhortation by explaining what God can do (v. 8), supporting this by a quotation from Scripture (v. 9). Thus, whereas in **8:7–15** Paul exhorted the Corinthians to give according to their means in order to establish a certain equality, here he provides them with reasons for liberal giving.

B. (:7) Promise of Blessing of Free Will Offerings

1. OT Background of Free Will Offerings

2. Positively: Purposeful Giving

“Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart”

Mark Seifrid: All true giving must arise from spontaneous individual decisions, uncompelled by others. Faith cannot be forced, nor is it a mere communal phenomenon.

3. Negatively:

a. *Not grudgingly*

b. *Or under compulsion*

4. Blessing

“for God loves a cheerful giver” (“hilarious”)

Charles Swindoll: It means that God desires our giving to generate the same exuberant joy in our hearts as a lively celebration or a hearty laugh. If you can't give with a smile, then you are not giving from the heart. . .

Like the rest of the Christian life, giving is not to be done out of grinding obedience to rules and regulations, in response to guilt trips, or because of peer pressure. Giving should come from the heart. Ideally, it should be done with a most free and willing

attitude. A person should not be reluctant to give nor regret giving but rather be eager to give and also to receive joy from this kind of stewardship.

C. (:8-9) Promise of Abundant Grace

1. Key Principle

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you”

David Garland: Reluctance to sow generously reflects a refusal to trust that God is all-sufficient and all-gracious to supply our needs. It also assumes we can only give when we are prospering and have something extra that we do not need for ourselves. Paul says that since God always provides us with all that we need and we will never experience a time when we cannot be generous.

Scott Hafemann: Verses 8–9 continue to ground Paul’s call to give by indicating why God approves only of those who give cheerfully (9:7c). Note 9:8: The foundation and focus of faith is that God has the power to do what he has promised (cf. **Rom. 4:21; 14:4**). Specifically, as an expression of his grace, God is able to provide for his people whatever it is they need in order to provide for others. Giving to others is simply what trusting in God’s promises looks like in a different dress.

2. Meeting All Your Needs

“that always having all sufficiency in everything”

3. Providing Extra Resources to Help Others

“you may have an abundance for every good deed”

Eric Mason: Increasing your giving capacity is what the reaping is about.

John MacArthur: Human wisdom teaches that prosperity comes from grasping for wealth, not from giving it away. But **faith trusts in God’s promise to bless the giver** and in His ability to keep His promises, knowing that He is able to “*do exceeding abundantly beyond all that [believers] ask or think*” (**Eph. 3:20**), guard and preserve them (**2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 7:25; Jude 24**), help them when they are tempted (**Heb. 2:18**), and raise them from the dead (**Heb. 11:19**). Believers, like Abraham, must be “*fully assured that what God [has] promised, He [is] able also to perform*” (**Rom. 4:21**).

God gives back magnanimously so as to make all grace abound to Christians who give generously. He gives so freely and abundantly that His children will always have all sufficiency in everything. In this context, that refers primarily to material resources, because the harvest must be of the same nature as the seed. Having sown material wealth by their giving, believers will reap an abundant harvest of material blessing in return. God graciously replenishes what they give so that they lack nothing; He will continuously provide the generous giver with the means of further expressing that generosity.

Frank Matera: Paul affirms that God is the source of all human generosity, because it is God who supplies the “*blessing*” to make one “*sufficient*” in order to perform every “*good work*.”

Mark Seifrid: As Paul makes clear, the grace of God has a purpose. The abounding of God’s grace to the Corinthians is to cause them to abound “unto every good work.” This does not mean that God’s grace serves an end other than the display and giving forth of his goodness. The Corinthians are not obligated to offer a return gift. Their relationship with God cannot be reduced to an economic transaction. The grace of God is to bring the Corinthians into real participation in his grace; they are to receive and know that grace afresh, as they give it forth. Indeed, only in the giving forth of God’s grace shall they know God’s grace in its fullness.

4. (:9) Supporting OT Quote – Result = Abiding Righteousness

“as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever.’” Psalm 112:9

Tasker: Paul now produces Scripture proof for the truth that the giver shall be provided with the means of giving. In Ps. cxii, after stating in **verse 3** that the man who fears God will never lack riches, the psalmist goes on to say in **verse 9** that the righteous man, who desires to express his righteousness in beneficence, will never lack the means of doing it. *Righteousness* is used here for “*almsgiving*” (cf. **Mt. vi. 1**).

R. Kent Hughes: What spectacular benefits go to the generous giver. First, **sufficiency** for any generous deed to which God calls us: “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work*” (**v. 8**). And second, a **righteousness** that endures forever, demonstrated by willing, generous giving that then is followed by a personal harvest of righteousness that extends to the church at large.

D. (:10) Promise of Supplying Both Abundant Seed and Abundant Harvest

“Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness”

God provides the capital for all spiritual investments

Scott Hafemann: In the original text, **verses 10–14** form one long, complex sentence. **Verses 11–14** support **verse 10** by detailing the way in which God will “*enlarge*” the Corinthians’ “*harvest*”: God will provide for the Corinthians “*in every way*” so that they can be generous to others (**vv. 11a, 12a, 13a**). These people in turn will give thanks and pray to God (**vv. 11b, 12, 13b**), for God is the one who makes all this possible (**v. 14b**; cf. **1:11; 4:15** for this same principle, there applied to Paul). The Corinthians’ own “*harvest of righteousness*” will increase as their lives are blessed through being instruments for the praise of God and as recipients of the love and prayers of those

whose needs they meet. For as we have seen, the righteousness of God is his just character as demonstrated in the consistency of his actions toward his creation.

Frank Matera: For Paul the work of the collection is the **work of God**. Consequently he began his exhortation by telling the Corinthians of “*the grace of God*” that was given to the churches of Macedonia and resulted in an extraordinary generosity on their part. Now he tells the Corinthians that the same grace is enriching them so that they can be generous as well. As a result, through the ministry of the collection that Paul is administering, thanksgiving will be given to God. From start to finish, then, the collection is God’s work. **It begins with God’s grace, and it ends in thanksgiving to God.**

George Shillington: Lest there be any lingering doubt about the meaning of the agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping, Paul explains further in **2 Corinthians 9:10** (cf. **Isa. 55:10**). Since it is in God’s nature to supply seed for sowing and bread for food, he will multiply the metaphorical seed of the gift of money for the saints. God will increase the metaphorical harvest of justice (righteousness or benevolence) by distributing the surplus of the grace of God. The righteousness in this text bears some resemblance to the Jewish practice of almsgiving (**Lietzmann**: 138).

E. (:11a) Promise of Overall Enrichment

“you will be enriched in everything for all liberality”

Scott Hafemann: Since Paul is speaking of giving money to those in need, in **9:11** he uses the terminology of wealth to describe God’s commitment to meet the needs of his people (“*you will be made rich*”). But Paul’s own suffering as an apostle and his argument throughout **2 Corinthians** both make it evident that in speaking of such “*wealth*,” he does not have material prosperity in view (cf. **1:5–6; 2:14; 4:8–10, 17–18; 6:10; 8:9, 14**).

II. (11b-14) THERE ARE IMMEDIATE RETURNS ON SPIRITUAL INVESTMENTS – GENEROUS GIVING BINDS BELIEVERS TOGETHER IN GLORIFYING GOD

A. (:11b-12) Produces Abundant Thanksgiving to God

(in addition to meeting the needs of the saints)

“which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.”

Raymond Collins: Describing the Corinthians’ generosity as that which produces **thanksgiving** to God through us, Paul introduces the theme of thanksgiving, which will dominate the rest of the chapter. Thanksgiving will be offered by believers in Jerusalem, but Paul is the instrument of their thanksgiving since he is a key player in the organization of the collection and its delivery to Jerusalem.

David Garland: The purpose of the collection that Paul gives here is twofold, material and spiritual. First, it supplies the needs of the saints, creates common welfare, and establishes solidarity among Christians of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Their gift, however, is not just a service for the poor. Second, though not second in the rank of importance, it is a service to God because of the thanksgiving that will redound to God's glory. The recipients of their gifts cannot help but lift their voices in praise and thanksgiving to God.

Scott Hafemann: The combination of this terminology in **9:12** reflects Paul's conviction that giving to fellow believers in Jerusalem is an essential part of the ministry of the gospel and a genuine expression of worship. Indeed, the collection is a ministry of the gospel precisely because it brings about worship. Its purpose is praise and prayer among those to whom it is ministered, the two essential elements of magnifying God's character: We praise God for what he has done in the past, and pray for what we depend on him to do in the future.

R. Kent Hughes: The church-wide benefits of such giving are threefold.

1. First, **thanksgiving** to God
2. The second and parallel benefit is **glory** to God:
3. The third benefit, perhaps unanticipated, was **affection** for the Corinthians themselves

B. (13) Causes the Recipients to Glorify God

1. Because of Obedience to the Confession of the Gospel

“Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ”

Raymond Collins: A Public Work -- *Leitourgia* suggests an activity undertaken for the common good, the benefit of the greater society. The person in charge of distributing bread or grain to those in need was sometimes identified as a *leitourgos* in Hellenistic literature (see P.Oxy. 2925, 2941). The word group was occasionally used in a broader sense in reference to those who assisted the needy. Paul uses the vocabulary in this way to describe the work of Epaphroditus, who acts on behalf of Philippian believers to help Paul in various ways (see **Phil. 2:25, 30**).

As far back as Aristotle, the terminology sometimes enjoyed religious connotations. It is sometimes used in the Greek Bible in reference to the work of Levites (e.g., **Num. 4:41**).

2. Because of the Generosity of the Gift

“and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all”

John MacArthur: The Corinthians' sacrificial giving tangibly demonstrated love for their fellow believers, that mark of genuineness (**1 John 2:10; 3:17–18; 4:20–21**). It proved they were “*doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves*” (**James 1:22**; cf. **Eph. 2:10**). The Corinthians' obedience proved the genuineness of

their confession of the gospel of Christ. Their good works did not save them but gave evidence that they possessed a living faith, not a dead faith that is unable to save (**James 2:14–26**). All who heard of the liberality of the Corinthians' contribution would give "*thanks ... to the glory of God*" (**2 Cor. 4:15**).

D. (:14) Binds Believers Together -- receiver prays for giver

*"while they also, by prayer on your behalf,
yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you."*

Relates to spiritual growth and ministry

John MacArthur: Not only would their fellow believers pray for the Corinthians, they would also yearn for a deeper, more intimate fellowship with them. That desire would be stimulated when they saw the surpassing grace of God in the Corinthians. Other believers would long both to pray for and to have fellowship with those in whom God's grace was working so mightily.

Mark Seifrid: Paul here characterizes the grace of God as "*surpassing*," "*exceeding*," "*extreme*." It transcends all human thought and expectation. This has been his theme. His instruction concerning giving is nothing other than a description of the wondrous working of God's grace (v. 8). His encouragement to complete the collection is a call to grasp and know that grace of God afresh (**8:7**). His last word concerning God's grace especially recalls his first word concerning the remarkable grace of God given in Macedonia (**8:1**). His description of it here as "*surpassing grace*" deflects all attention away from the Corinthians, or any comparison they might be tempted to make between themselves and the Macedonians. It is not the persons or the churches that are outstanding, but the grace of God "*upon them*."

(:15) BENEDICTION

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Some think this refers to God's grace in the life of the Corinthians to spur them to giving ... but it must refer to God's incredible gift of His Son (**John 3:16**).

John MacArthur: This simple concluding benediction is one of the richest statements in Scripture. God's **indescribable gift** is, of course, His Son—the most magnanimous, glorious, wonderful gift ever given, the gift that inspires all other gifts.

David Garland: These words of thanksgiving conclude Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to renew their ardor for the undertaking and to fulfill their promise. They reveal that "all Christian giving is carried out in the light of God's inexpressible gift." Remembering thankfully Christ's sacrifice (**8:9**) and God's grace, which human words fail to capture, should cause them to finish the preparations for their gifts diligently, unselfishly, and cheerfully. Their gift would then model in a small way the indescribable gift God has given to them.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Christ is the supreme example of sowing abundantly; of giving purposefully (setting His face to go to the cross); of giving freely and cheerfully.
- 2) Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ had all of his physical needs met by His heavenly Father and was prospered in righteousness.
- 3) The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about giving and should produce in us a spirit of generous giving if we are obedient to our confession.
- 4) Words are not adequate to describe the incredible gift of Jesus Christ (and the associated grace) which has been given to us by the Father.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we hoarding riches for our future security or investing generously and wisely for a promised abundant harvest?
- 2) How do emotional types of fund raising and arm twisting tactics violate the spirit of how we have been instructed to give?
- 3) Have we appreciated the fact that God supplies the capital for all of our investments or do we consider the money He has enabled us to earn to belong to us?
- 4) In what sense does God promise to enrich us as we give with liberality?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Gromacki: Through the practice of biblical principles of giving, the Corinthians would constantly be “enriched in everything to all bountifulness.” Instead of becoming impoverished through giving, as they might have expected, they would actually become spiritual plutocrats The word “bountifulness” . . . refers to their liberality, comparable to that of the Macedonians (8:2). They would be rich in giving, wealthy in liberality. Those are genuine riches.

Homer Kent: The Corinthians’ bountiful giving would cause the Jerusalem saints to reciprocate, not by a return gift of money at this time – a situation clearly impossible –

but by heartfelt prayers on their behalf. As the Jerusalem Christians prayed for their Corinthian benefactors, their hearts would be knit together with them, and they would yearn for a closer association because the lavish gift (“*the surpassing grace of God*”) which God had enabled them to give showed that they were one in spirit.

William Barclay: Paul insists that no man was ever the loser because he was generous. Giving is like sowing seed. The man who sows with a sparing hand cannot hope for anything but a meagre harvest, but the man who sows with a generous hand will in due time reap a generous return. The New Testament is an extremely practical book and one of its great features is that it is never afraid of the reward motive. It never says that goodness is all to no purpose, that life is exactly the same for the man who obeys God and the man who does not. It never forgets that something new and precious and wonderful does enter into the life of the man who accepts God’s commands as his law. But the rewards that the New Testament envisages are never material rewards. It does not promise the wealth of things; but it does promise the wealth of the heart and of the spirit.

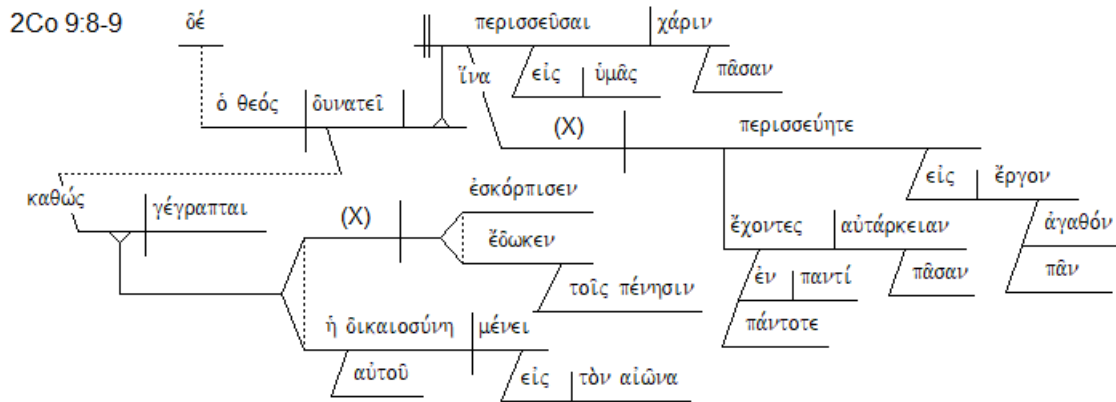
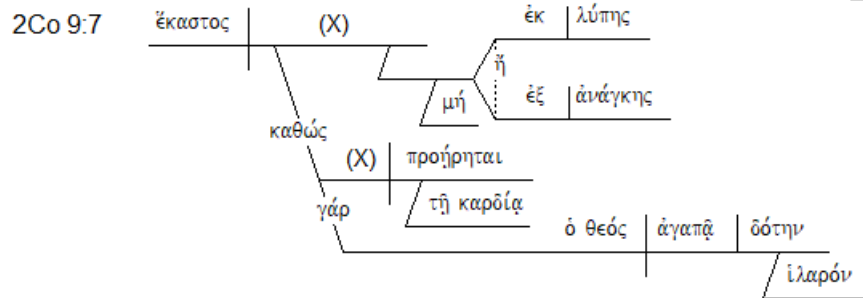
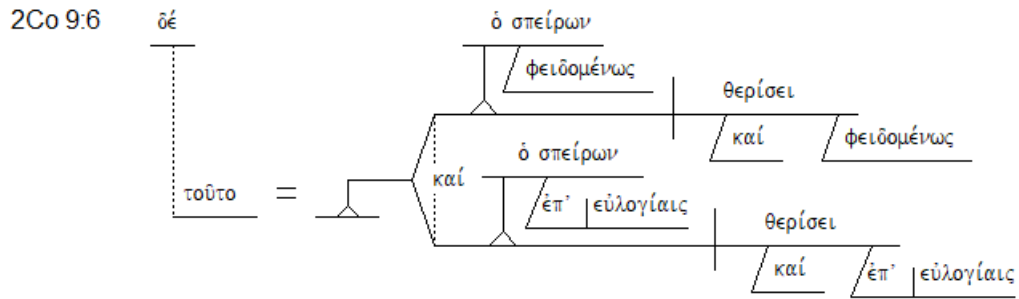
John Piper: The great truth of this text is that God wants to be known and trusted and loved as the Giver not the Taker in this whole affair of giving. Otherwise all our giving is draining, burdensome, oppressive, legalistic, and sparing. And who needs it!

Bob Deffinbaugh: Finally, our text has some remarkable parallels to the second coming of our Lord. Paul has been to Corinth, where he has proclaimed the gospel and many have come to faith. In his absence, he has written several letters and sent others to minister to them. He has promised to return to them, and his return appears to have been delayed. Now, he is soon to come, and he does not want the Corinthians caught by surprise, not really ready for his return, and thus embarrassed by his coming. This is the reason Paul writes to them and sends this delegation to prepare the way for his return. He wants his return to be a joyful reunion.

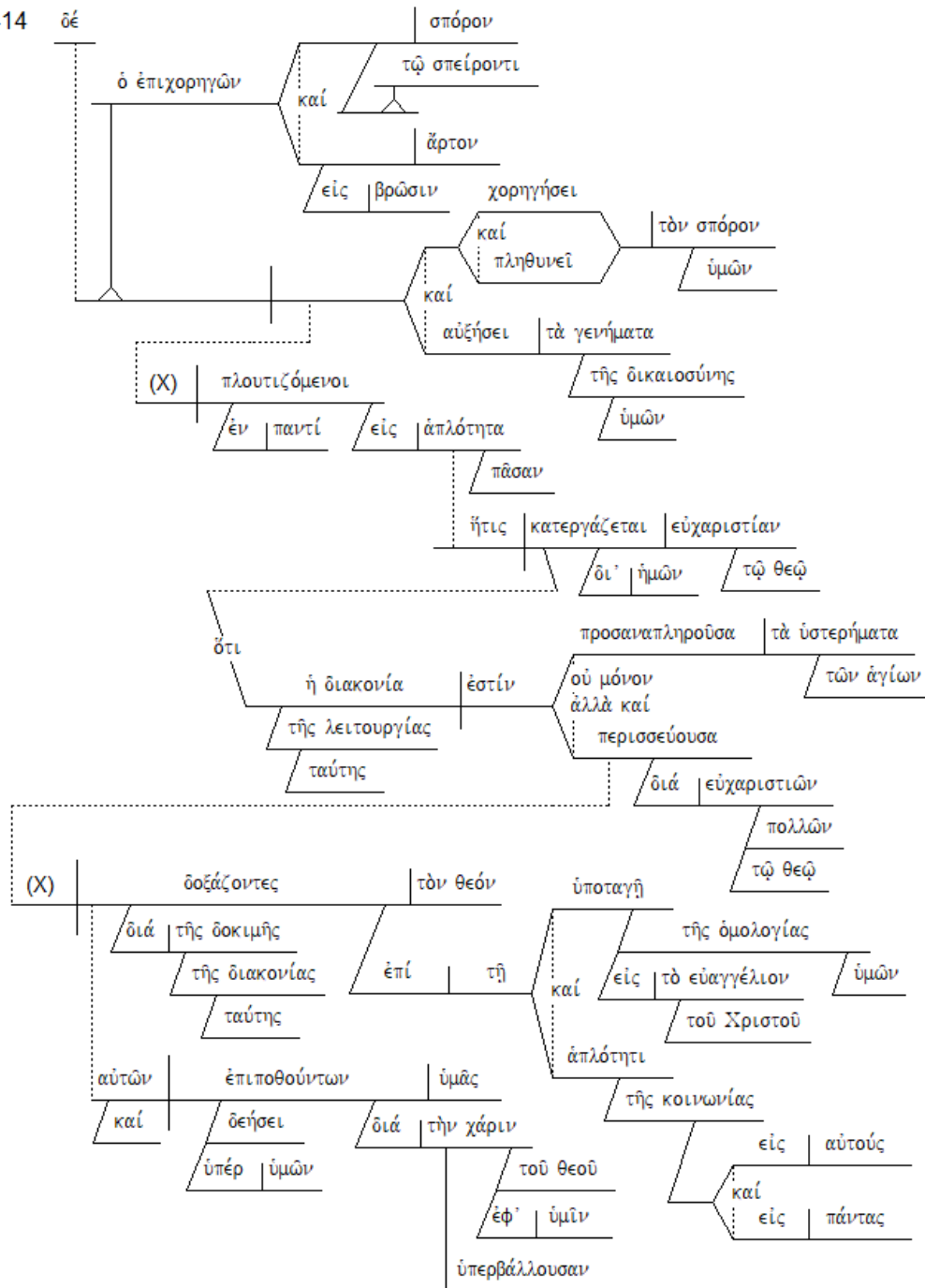
Our Lord has come to this earth and proclaimed the gospel. He has departed by His resurrection and ascension, but He assures us that He is coming again. He does not want us to be caught unaware and unprepared. He wants us to be ready for His return so that our reunion will be a joyful one, rather than an occasion for embarrassment. And so He has left us with His Word and with other gifted saints, all of whom are to encourage and equip us to live godly lives, so that when He returns we will be found ready. What a joyful time that will be if we are ready and waiting. Are there things which need to be done beforehand? Then let us tend to them now, quickly, before He returns, so that our reunion may be a joyful one.

Geoff Thomas: The true Christian, made rich in every way by God, shows it by a life of generosity. It is so much better to have your gold in your hand than in your heart, said a Puritan. I am told that there are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, 'I have to.' Duty giving says, 'I ought to.' Thanksgiving says, 'I want to,' and says it on every occasion.

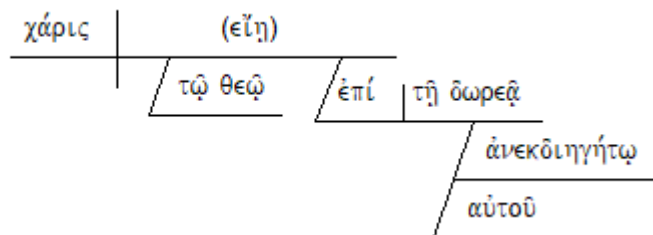
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



2Co 9:10-14



2Co 9:15



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

TITLE: *DON'T TRIFLE WITH SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY*

III. (10:1 – 13:10) PAINFUL ATTACKS AGAINST SPIRITUAL LEADERS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY TO EASILY BE DISTINGUISHED FROM COUNTERFEIT AUTHORITY (PAUL'S AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF HIS LEGITIMATE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY)

*“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.”
(13:10)*

BIG IDEA:
**THE REALITY OF PAUL'S AUTHORITY –
WHEN NECESSARY, SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST DEFEND THEIR
LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY AGAINST MISREPRESENTATIONS BY FALSE
LEADERS**

INTRODUCTION:

Beginning of a new section:

VINDICATION OF PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (10:1 - 13:10)

Charles Ryrie: In spite of Paul's general satisfaction with the Corinthian church, there were still some there who challenged his apostolic authority and followed certain leaders whom Paul calls “*false apostles*” (11:13). These leaders were apparently Jewish Christians (11:22) who claimed higher authority than Paul's (10:7) and who lorded over the church.

R. Kent Hughes: At present a small unrepentant minority of such detractors and interlopers opposed Paul in Corinth. Guided by their inverted values, they judged Paul's ministry to be fleshly. His unimpressive persona, his lack of rhetorical skills, his meek and humble demeanor, his poverty, his working with his hands, the absence of ecstatic experiences and visions, his incessant trials and difficulties (rather than “success”) were, to his opponents, incontrovertible evidence that his ministry was of the flesh and not of the Spirit.

Charles Swindoll: I didn't have a class on **handling criticism** during my years in seminary. To my knowledge, there isn't such a class in any seminary. It's something you learn either by watching your mentors deal with it, or by enduring it yourself, “on the job.” This explains why **2 Corinthians 10** is so vital for those involved in ministry.

As we work through this chapter, we will see Paul dive headfirst into the subject of ministry-related criticism. A close look at his words reveals several slanderous criticisms that had been hurled Paul's way, and how he dealt with them. . .

So, what was Paul's spiritual strategy in this desperate battle against the false teachers? First, he needed to gain the full allegiance of the true believers in Corinth. To be sure, many already were on his side. Nevertheless, far too many wavered in their loyalty between the orthodox Christians and the false brethren. That group needed to be won back to a fully obedient commitment to Christ (10:6). When that happened, Paul could confront the pockets of ingrown disobedience and rebellion with a united front, resulting in the Corinthian church being liberated from its deceptive oppressors.

George Shillington: Throughout his "fool's speech" (11:1 - 12:13), as also in the rest of the Letter of Defense, Paul's form of writing exhibits the basic elements of the **classic orator**: human character {ethos}, emotions {pathos}, and reason {logos}. The literary contours and tones of the language of the Letter of Defense exhibit all three traits, using the overt literary devices of sarcasm, irony, and parody (Marshall: 381-391; Betz, 1972:17-19, 34-35; Crafton: 109-136).

- Sarcasm pierces the feelings of the audience as they sense their culpability. For example, Paul addresses the question of his refusal to take money from the Corinthians for his apostolic services, thus proving his weakness as an apostle; he says, How have you been worse off than the other churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! (12:13). The exclamatory answer is sarcastic.
- Irony invites the reader to consider the flip side of a perceived "truth." When Paul engages two sides of an issue, such as weakness and strength, presence and absence, wisdom and foolishness, he is speaking ironically.
- Parody imitates the opposing character for the purpose of ridicule. Paul the fool parades the literary stage dressed like his enemies so as to ridicule them and thus render their authority inoperative at Corinth.

Why does Paul pull out all of these rhetorical stops in **2 Corinthians 10-13**? Writing of this sort does not spring from tranquil reflection on a secluded island. Instead, Paul is engaged in a struggle to save his apostolic place as the "parent" of the Corinthian congregations (1 Cor. 4:15). He is fighting against a bitter invective his enemies have executed at Corinth. "Paul's responses in 2 Corinthians must be viewed in the context of the enmity relationship. Paul has been the victim of a successful and damaging invective" (Marshall: 364). His sharp language in these four chapters calls for a reading in that light.

Frank Matera: The line of thought in 10:1-18 can be summarized in this way: Paul appeals to the Corinthians with the very meekness and clemency of Christ, so that he will not have to act boldly when he comes to Corinth. Although some accuse him of being servile and lacking the boldness that comes from the Spirit, he possesses the powerful weapons of the gospel that allow him to destroy false arguments, take minds

captive for Christ, and punish the disobedient. The Corinthians only need to look at what Paul has accomplished in their midst to realize that he is Christ's minister. In writing these things, Paul is not trying to frighten them by his letters, as if he were incapable of acting boldly in their midst; for the absent apostle portrayed through the letters is the same apostle who will be present in their midst. Paul, however, is not bold enough to commend himself, as do the intruding apostles, who do not understand the power of God. Rather, if he boasts it will always be within the limits established by the measure that God has assigned to him, an assignment authenticated by the indisputable fact that he was the first to preach the gospel to the Corinthians. If he boasts, therefore, it is in the Lord; for only the one whom the Lord approves is commended. Paul can claim such approval because he has been granted an assignment from the Lord, who guides his apostolic activity.

David Garland: The heart of the quarrel concerns Paul's authority over the Corinthian church, but, as Paul himself insists, he is not simply engaged in a personal defense (12:19). **Barrett** is spot-on: "It is the nature of the apostolic Gospel, and the apostolic authority behind it, that are at stake." Paul defends his reputation and his deportment, but it is more to save the community from fools and a false gospel than to save his reputation.

I. (:1-6) HIS READINESS (AND RELUCTANCE) TO EXERCISE HIS AUTHORITY – SPIRITUAL LEADERS CARRY A BIG STICK REPLY TO CHARGE OF WEAKNESS

A. (:1) Don't Confuse Meekness for Weakness

*"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ –
I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!"*

Paul speaking sarcastically here, answering the charge that he was only bold on paper but was nobody to be reckoned with in person.

Anthony Thiselton: Paul begins, "*I, Paul, myself, appeal* (Greek, *parakalō*) to you." **Bjerkelund** argues in his book *Parakalō* that the verb denotes something a little stronger than "please" but falls definitely short of "I command." It means appeal, beseech, or request, but with both moral discernment or moral authority and respect for the spiritual independence of the addressees. Paul's approach is with confidence but also with the **meekness and gentleness** of Christ. **Hughes** comments that meekness and gentleness are not incompatible with sternness, and that Paul had shown sternness in his letter to the Galatians. **Guthrie** entitles vv. 1–2 as "Meekness Not Weakness."

Frank Matera: "*Meekness*" (*prautēs*) according to **BDAG** is "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance." Thus it often has the meaning of "gentleness," "humility," "courtesy," or "consideration," as well as "meekness." In **Gal 5:23** Paul lists *prautēs* among "*the fruit*" of the Spirit, and it occurs in **Eph 4:2** and **Col 3:12** as one of the virtues or qualities that should characterize the Christian life. . .

“Clemency” (*epieikeia*) according to **BDAG** is “the quality of making allowances despite facts that might suggest reasons for a different reaction.” Thus it is translated as “gentleness,” “graciousness,” “courtesy,” “indulgence,” “tolerance,” as well as “clemency.” **Wisdom 12:18** describes God as governing “*with great forbearance*,” and in 2 Macc 10:4 Maccabeus and his followers pray that God will discipline them “with forbearance” should they sin. In **Phil 4:5** Paul exhorts his converts to let their *epieikeia* be known to everyone, whereas in the Pastorals, *epieikeia* is listed as one of the qualities required of a bishop (**1Tim 3:3**). **James 3:17** employs *epieikeia* to describe “*the wisdom from above*,” and in **Acts 24:4** the orator, Tertullus, asks the Roman governor Felix to hear him briefly with his customary *epieikeia*.

John MacArthur: Before wielding his apostolic might, Paul first manifested his **compassion**. He urge[d] the insubordinate minority by *the meekness and gentleness of Christ* to end their rebellion and be reconciled to the truth. Instead of seeking personal vengeance on his enemies, Paul showed them the same patience that the Lord Jesus Christ had shown him (**1 Tim. 1:16**). *Prautēs* (*meekness*) is usually translated “gentleness” in the New Testament. It refers to the humble and gentle attitude that results in the patient endurance of offenses. *Prautēs* marks those free of anger, hatred, bitterness, and a desire for revenge. The word denotes not weakness, but power under control. *Epieikeia* (*gentleness*) is translated “kindness” in its only other New Testament appearance (**Acts 24:4**). When applied to those in authority, it means “leniency” and describes those who graciously refuse to insist on the full measure of their legal rights.

Richard Pratt: By beginning this section in this way, Paul pointed to the irony of his opponents accusing him of timidity. What they saw as a liability was evidence that Paul was like Christ, and therefore substantiated the legitimacy of his apostleship.

Charles Swindoll: The first verse addresses the accusation of **two-faced hypocrisy**. They criticized Paul for being bold with his letters but lacking courage in person. Paul’s language needs to be read with a tone of sarcasm, as he virtually quotes the crowd of critics in Corinth. They were saying, essentially, “You’re meek when you are with us, but you write bold letters when you’re away from us. You’re two-faced! When you actually have to face people, you’re Mr. Nice Guy, but when it’s just a pen and a piece of paper, you boldly unleash! Would the real Paul please stand up?”

B. (:2) Don’t Make Me Use the Big Stick --

Spiritual Leaders Only Use the Big Stick as a Last Resort

“I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”

Charles Swindoll: The second verse combats the criticism of fleshly motives. They accused him of walking in the flesh, of harboring impure motives, and of using manipulative methods.

Mark Seifrid: Paul uses more than one term for “boldness” in this verse. He begins with a term (*tharreō*) that connotes daring or courage, i.e., a bold spirit. He concludes with a term (*tolmaō*) that is associated with action. Between the two, he again uses the term “confidence” (*pepoithēsis*), which, as we have noted, conveys the passive idea of trust in something. It has an object. The term again recalls the Gospel, with which the apostle has been entrusted.

David Garland: Paul’s purpose is not to get into a squabble with his detractors but to recapture the goodwill of his listening audience so that they might make a favorable judgment about him and the gospel he exemplifies. He does so by establishing his character as a genuine apostle, pushing emotional buttons, drawing on irony to show the foolishness of his opponents, and presenting sound arguments with which no reasonable judge could disagree.

C. (:3-4) Spiritual Leaders Don’t Fight Fairly –

i.e. they use weapons that are divinely Powerful

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”

- Cf. the weapons of David vs. Goliath – sling shot and some stones
- Cf. the weapons of Gideon
- Cf. the weapons of Joshua – literally knocking down fortresses

Anthony Thiselton: In this passage, “*in the flesh*” means simply living an ordinary earthly life, or being human; while “*according to the flesh*” (Greek, *kata sarka*) means living according to our worldly and self-centered nature. Paul plays on the Greek *en sarka* and *kata sarka*, as **Martin** says. **J. B. Phillips** renders this as “Although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level.”

“*Not merely human*” means not relying on eloquence, rhetoric, or a powerful personality. **Chrysostom** lists these “merely human” things as “wealth, glory, power, loquaciousness, cleverness, half-truths, flatteries, hypocrisies, whatever is similar to these.” The “spiritual” means “for God” in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Hughes** calls these weapons “*divinely powerful*.”

Mark Seifrid: Precisely within the weakness of the apostle, who lives “*in the flesh*” and bears the deadness of Jesus (**4:10**), the power of God is at work.

Eric Mason: If you’re going to fight the right battles, the main point is this: fighting the right battle involves using divinely empowered weapons. Paul is challenging the people in the Corinthian church who are filled with spiritual immaturity and who don’t want to function the way he wants them to function and the way God wants them to function. Paul is defending his apostleship, and he’s finding that their disposition toward him as a

leader, who has helped and influenced them, is based on faulty thinking that goes deeper than arguing with them.

John MacArthur: A spiritual war, however, cannot be successfully fought with **fleshly weapons**. Therefore, the weapons in Paul’s arsenal were not those of human ingenuity, human ideology, or human methodology. Human reason, wisdom, plans, strategies, organizations, skill, eloquence, marketing, religious showmanship, philosophical or psychological speculation, ritualism, pragmatism, or mysticism are all ineffective weapons against the forces of the kingdom of darkness, the “*powers ... world forces of this darkness ... [and] spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (**Eph. 6:12**). They cannot rescue sinners from the “*domain of darkness*” (**Col. 1:13**) or transform believers into Christ’s likeness. Such weapons gain only superficial, temporary, and deceptive victories at best. . .

The objective of our warfare is to **change how people think**—taking every thought they have and making it no longer captive to a damning ideology, but captive to the obedience of Christ. To do so, the proper weapon is necessary. To assault and throw down the fortresses of false religions, opinions, beliefs, and philosophies, only one weapon will suffice: **the truth**. That is so obvious that Paul does not mention it. Only one thing exposes and corrects lies—the truth. Thus, the only offensive weapon in the Christian soldier’s armor is “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (**Eph. 6:17**). Spiritual warfare is an ideological conflict, fought in the mind by assaulting the proud fortresses of ideas that sinners erect against the truth. *Aichmalōtizō* (*taking captive*) literally means, “*to take captive with a spear.*” Using God’s truth, believers smash enemy fortresses to the ground, march the prisoners out, and bring them into subjection (obedience) to the Lord Jesus Christ. They rescue sinners from the domain of darkness, “*snatching them out of the fire*” (**Jude 23**).

D. (:5) Spiritual Leaders Attack the Root of the Problem – Aggressively and Successfully

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

Mark Seifrid: The glory that accompanies the apostolic mission is apparent only to faith (**3:8-11**). The minds of the sons of Israel were hardened and unable to see it (**3:13-14**), just as the “*god of this age*” blinds the minds and thoughts of unbelievers (**4:4**). The nature of that hardening and blindness now becomes apparent. Paul is called to destroy the “*exalted things*” constructed by the minds and hearts of fallen human beings, the “*Babels*” we erect in opposition to the knowledge of God. We, together with all our thoughts, must be taken captive by the word of God, just as the apostle himself is led in God’s triumphal procession (**2:14-17**).

Frank Matera: These verses expand upon Paul’s **military metaphor** with three participles that highlight three aspects of his warfare:

- (1) Paul “*tears down*” (*kathairountes*) sophistries;

- (2) he “captures” (*aichmalōtizontes*) every proud obstacle; and
- (3) he “stands ready to punish” (*en hetoimō echontes ekdikēsai*) every disobedience.

The three phases of warfare that Paul describes here are similar to the stages of battle that the Romans employed against the Greeks, as portrayed in 1 Macc 8:9–10, when the Romans tore down the strongholds of the Greeks, took their wives and children captive, and then enslaved them.

Eric Mason: You and I need to learn how to use the divinely empowered mechanisms God has given us so that we can walk in the truth that we overwhelmingly conquer because of him who loves us.

Scott Hafemann: Verse 5 details the two ways in which Paul wages his war on behalf of the gospel.

(1) He demolishes the “arguments” and “pretensions” (lit., the “heights” from which the defenders opposed the besieging army) that his opponents have raised against “*the knowledge of God*” being revealed through his own preaching and suffering (cf. **2:14–17; 4:4–6; 8:7; 11:6; 13:8**). The arguments in view here are the objections being raised against his apostolic authority and message (the “arguments” [*logismous*] of **10:4** recall the “thinking” [*logizomenous*] of “*some people*” in **10:2**). Paul overcomes them by a clear presentation of the gospel and its implications, surrounded by an unabashed appeal to his own life as its verification.

(2) Once he has destroyed the enemy defenses, Paul takes every thought of the enemy “*captive*” by evaluating it in view of his own ministry of the cross and resurrection of Christ. Specifically, Paul argues for his conviction, and supports it evidentially, that as a true apostle of the crucified and risen Christ, he reveals the power of God (cf. **2:17; 3:2–3; 4:1–6; 5:11–12; 11:2; 12:19; 13:3–4**) in and through his weakness (cf. **1:3–11; 2:14–16; 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–12:10**). As a result, his presentation and embodiment of the truth also reveal the satanic nature of those who oppose his “*treasure*” because it comes in a “*jar of clay*” (**4:7**; cf. **2:11; 3:14; 4:4; 11:3**).

E. (:6) Spiritual Leaders Will Use the Big Stick When Necessary

*“and we are ready to punish all disobedience,
whenever your obedience is complete.”*

Paul Barnett: We do well to follow Paul in his realistic estimate of the entrenched power of unbelief and pride in the human mind. Only the right weapons will subdue and capture this proud fortified rebel who places himself over God.

II. (:7-11) HIS POWERFUL PERSONAL PRESENCE – CONSISTENT WITH HIS STRONG LETTERS – SPIRITUAL LEADERS SHOULD NEVER BE UNDERESTIMATED -- REPLY TO CHARGE OF INSINCERITY

Frank Matera: This first unit (:1-11) can be summarized as follows: Whether present or absent, Paul acts with boldness, because he is armed with powerful weapons of the gospel, and he has received his authority from Christ. Although his detractors misinterpret his humble bearing for weakness, his apparent weakness is the meekness and clemency of Christ.

Raymond Collins: The heart of the passage is the central section, **verses 7–11**, where Paul reflects on the **apostolic power and authority** given to him by God. The surrounding passages, **verses 1–6** and **12–18**, use metaphorical language to talk about Paul’s ministry, but they are just as much a critique of Paul’s rivals as they are an exposition of Paul’s ministry. Consequently, the chapter has a loosely constructed A-B-A’ structure. Its final two verses constitute a kind of rhetorical peroration in which Paul cites a scriptural maxim about boasting (**vv. 17–18**) that gives meaning to the entire passage.

A. (:7a) Outward Appearances Can Be Deceiving

“You are looking at things as they are outwardly.”

B. (:7b) No Place for Christian Elitism

“If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.”

William Barclay: It seems clear that at least some of Paul’s opponents asserted that Paul did not belong to Christ in the same way as they did. Perhaps they were still casting up at Paul the fact that once he had been the arch-persecutor of the Church. Perhaps they claimed special knowledge and special revelations. Perhaps they claimed a special holiness and a special spirituality. In any event they looked down on Paul and they glorified themselves and their own relationship to Christ.

Charles Swindoll: First, Paul corrected their perspective (**10:7**). Very simply, he charged his critics with focusing on the external rather than the internal. The critics revealed their shallowness with this criticism, but its pain cut deep. Of all their complaints, his less-than-impressive physical appearance had a ring of truth, as confirmed by a traditional description of Paul from the second century. Paul was “a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, full of grace.”

Clearly Paul didn’t turn any heads. The crowd wasn’t attracted to his physical appearance. Yet the critics who complained against Paul for his less-than-impressive presence had completely forgotten that God loves to demonstrate His power and glory through earthen vessels (**4:7**).

C. (:8-9) Goal is Edification Not Lording it Over

“For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you,

*I shall not be put to shame,
for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.”*

Anthony Thiselton: Paul chooses to follow a fine line between rebuke and more gentle care and concern, as he attempted earlier. . . This is many pastors’ dilemma: how to exercise genuine authority without appearing to be unduly authoritarian.

Charles Swindoll: Second, Paul clarified his motives in ministry (**10:8-9**). Having turned their attention from the externals to the internals, Paul made sure his opponents understood what was in his heart. Paul had a goal in his apostolic ministry to always build up, never tear down (**10:8**). Even though he may have had authority as an apostle to rebuke and correct the Corinthians for their sins, he wanted to edify, not terrify (**10:9**). Here Paul is completely transparent about his motives in ministry. In contrast to his power-hungry opponents who constantly tore Paul down in order to extend their own authority over the Corinthians, Paul assured them that he had a **positive ministry of construction, not a negative ministry of destruction**.

Mark Seifrid: Paul boasts that his authority is not his own; it has been given to him by the Lord. His conception of authority is thus decisively extrinsic. The weakness of his own person and his lack of rhetorical gifts therefore do not detract from this authority in the least. As he goes on to make clear to the Corinthians, his authority is not dependent upon his powers, but upon Christ, who is present in his weakness (**12:9-10**).

John MacArthur: False teachers tend to be self-centered, grasping, and abusive. People usually mean nothing to them, except as means to their own selfish ends. They are often overbearing, self-absorbed, and callous to the needs of others.

The false apostles perversely tried to assign to Paul the very evils they themselves were both familiar with and guilty of. They charged that he was an abusive leader, who tried to intimidate the Corinthians into submission.

Scott Hafemann: The main point of **verses 10:1–11** is **verse 9**. Paul is begging those Corinthians who are still rebelling to be reconciled to him (**10:1–2**) because he is fighting a Spirit-empowered war on behalf of the gospel (**10:3–6**). He consequently calls them to examine his claims to authority in view of what is clearly evident to them (**10:7–8**), in order that his letter might not merely frighten them from afar (**10:9**). For in spite of the fact that his opponents accuse him of duplicity and cowardice (**10:10**), Paul will execute the threatened judgment of God when he arrives (**10:11**).

D. (:10-11) Legitimate Spiritual Authority is the Real Thing –
whether by letter or in person

Charles Swindoll: Third, Paul confessed his authenticity (**10:10-12**). In technological lingo, we often see the term WYSIWYG—an acronym for “what you see is what you get.” This is particularly important in desktop publishing with the desire for the layout on the computer screen to look exactly the same as what the printer spits out. As far as

Paul's ministry was concerned, it was WYSIWYG. Paul was Paul —whether in their midst or through his letters (10:11). Now, his particular tone might change depending on the situation, but that's to be expected. Paul himself didn't change his views on Christ, his attitudes toward holiness and sin, or his methods of preaching the gospel and calling believers to a committed Christian life.

1. (:10) Accusation

“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible.’”

2. (:11) Response

“Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”

Mark Seifrid: His threat is an expression of apostolic audacity, not the power of his person. The confrontation and “retribution” of any disobedience will take place without force, by the power of the word. But it will require decisive action on Paul's part, which he is prepared to take, as he signals here and elsewhere in the closing. He hopes that the present threat will remove the need for action when he finally arrives (13:10).

III. (:12-18) HIS LEGITIMATE SPHERE OF AUTHORITY – REPLY TO CHARGE OF PRIDE

Anthony Thiselton: Paul explains his position in four steps. In v. 12, he rejects the wrong kind of comparisons between human leaders or personalities such as bedeviled the boasting of 1 Cor 1:12: “I belong to Paul” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Paul is emphatic that his “boasting” is quite different from the boasting of his opponents.

In vv. 13–15a, he affirms that he must not overstep the bounds of ministry by making wild claims: he must not “boast beyond limits.” The NRSV repeats “beyond limits” three times. In vv. 15b–16, he expresses the hope of extending his mission “in lands beyond you.” Finally, in vv. 17–18, he explains that the only ground of boasting is the Lord, and whom the Lord commends. Phillips renders the verse: “It is not self-commendation that matters, it is winning the approval of God.”

Frank Matera: The material can be divided into three subunits.

1. In the first (v. 12) Paul derisively says that he is not bold enough to compare himself with those who commend themselves by comparing themselves with each other.
2. In the second subunit (vv. 13–16), however, Paul implicitly compares himself with the intruding apostles by showing that his missionary activity is determined by the measure that God assigned to him, whereas the intruding apostles have no

- norm or standard of measurement beyond themselves. In this subunit the phrase “*we do not boast beyond our limits*” occurs twice, at the beginning of **verse 13** and at the beginning of **verse 15**, setting off **verses 13–14** from **verses 15–16**.
3. In the third subunit (**vv. 17–18**) Paul returns to the **theme of commendation** introduced in **verse 12**, arguing that only those whom the Lord commends are approved. Thus he encloses his discussion of the “rule” or “standard” that guides his missionary activity with two references to commendation.

Charles Swindoll: In ministry, there is nothing like **facts** to help in times of unjust criticism. Paul rapidly rehearsed the facts about his own ministry scope as it involved the Corinthians.

- God had given him the ministry to reach the Gentiles with the gospel (**10:13**). The Judaizers severely criticized this ministry focus, accusing Paul of trying to spread his own personal kingdom and authority rather than the kingdom of God.
- Within the sphere of his evangelistic calling, Paul reached the Corinthians (**10:14**). Like parasites, those Judaizers who came after him invaded the church planted by Paul and began to boast of their work as if they had established the church in Corinth themselves.
- He hoped the Corinthians’ growth would lead to additional resources to expand his ministry (**10:15-16**). The Judaizers’ strategy involved overhauling churches that already had been planted in order to boast of their conquests; Paul took the approach of preaching where no churches had yet been planted.

Whereas Paul had reason to boast based on the facts, his opponents had no reason to boast. Yet Paul remained meek, humble, and patient in the midst of their criticisms, while they boasted all the more boldly in their hijacking of the churches. In fact, Paul quotes **Jeremiah 9:24**, “*He who boasts is to boast in the LORD,*” not in their own accomplishments, riches, or strength (**2 Cor. 10:17**). Ultimately, God alone is the Judge whose commendation counts. Self-promotion and self-approval are meaningless, the hollow words of braggarts. True servants of God present the facts as they are and then let the Lord God sort it out.

John MacArthur: **Verses 12–18** unfold five characteristics of a humble messenger whom God has changed and called.

1. A HUMBLE MESSENGER OF GOD IS UNWILLING TO COMPARE HIMSELF WITH OTHERS
2. A HUMBLE MESSENGER OF GOD IS WILLING TO MINISTER WITHIN LIMITS
3. A HUMBLE MESSENGER OF GOD IS UNWILLING TO TAKE CREDIT FOR OTHERS’ LABORS
4. A HUMBLE MESSENGER OF GOD IS WILLING TO SEEK ONLY THE LORD’S GLORY

5. A HUMBLE MESSENGER OF GOD IS UNWILLING TO PURSUE ANYTHING BUT ETERNAL GLORY

A. (:12) Futility of Self Commendation

“For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.”

Mark Seifrid: Paul explains (*gar*) the assertion of his authority, an authority that sets him apart from his opponents. He neither includes himself among them nor enters into comparison with them, as they commend themselves. Even if he has been compelled to commend himself by the Corinthians (**5:12**) — as he does immediately in this letter (**11:1 – 12:13**) — Paul will not commend himself in the terms that the Corinthians require. The Corinthians are his commendation (**3:1-3**). They themselves ought to commend him (**12:11**).

Richard Pratt: First, Paul mocked his opponents’ tactics. He stated that he would not even dare... compare himself to his opponents according to their preferred grounds of comparison. These words must have caught the readers’ attention because they sounded as if Paul had conceded his inferiority. But the sarcasm of his statement becomes evident in the next sentence. They measure themselves by themselves, and thereby demonstrate that they are not wise. That is to say, they evaluated their importance in the church by human standards alone. In modern parlance, they had become “legends in their own minds.” Their self-commendation was unacceptable. At this point Paul’s readers understood why he did not want to be compared to them.

B. (:13-16) Sphere of Authority Corresponds to Sphere of Ministry

Frank Matera: With these verses Paul embarks upon a process of legitimizing his apostolic activity among the Corinthians by appealing to an external criterion, given by God, that bestows a **unique status** upon him in relation to the Corinthians: he is their father in Christ because he was the first to bring the gospel to them. In contrast to Paul, the intruding apostles, who have come to Corinth after Paul founded the church, do not possess a standard or criterion that allows them to boast in the Corinthians.

1. (:13) Principle Stated = We exercise our authority within the proper sphere
*“But we will not boast beyond our measure,
but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us
as a measure, to reach even as far as you.”*

Not overstepping the bounds of his authority in this matter

Robert Hughes: *According to God’s measure (10:13).* The Greek word for “*sphere*” comes from track and field events common to the Isthmian games held only seven miles northeast of Corinth. The track had lines within which each runner had to stay during the race. Paul would not boast outside of the lines that God had drawn for his ministry,

in this case, the “*reaching even as far as you.*” Corinth was given to Paul as a field. Others could certainly minister there with his blessing, as Apollos, Titus, and Timothy showed. But others were in view, ones who claimed an authority over Corinth that annulled Paul’s original claims of authority and replaced his God-given commission for an unhindered ministry among the Corinthians (see also **Acts 18:9-10**).

Mark Seifrid: The work of God does not exclude the ambitions and labors of the apostle, but includes them. It sets Paul free by providing him with the boundary that prevents his goals and aspirations from becoming unlimited demands and utopian dreams. The apostle is aware that a limited measure has been measured to him. It is only by the grace of God that he is who he is. Yet he labors more than all others, especially with the Corinthians (**1 Cor 15:10**; cf. **2 Cor 6:5; 11:26-29**). Just as he does in the letter to Rome, Paul here expresses the hope that the sphere of his mission will be expanded beyond the Corinthians to those who are yet unreached (**vv. 15-16**).

2. (:14) Historical Testimony = We brought you the Gospel

“For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ.”

Tasker: The false apostles had no authority for ministering at Corinth other than that which they had arrogated to themselves. It was they who were stretching themselves beyond measure, not Paul. Priority of service gave Paul a prior claim to the loyalty of the Corinthians.

3. (:15-16) Vision for Broader Outreach (vs. Sheep Stealing)

“not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.”

David Garland: Paul implies that the opponents’ boasting is “*beyond measure*” because it is “*without limits*” and casts off the measure of the gospel of Christ. For Paul, the measure of the gospel is what measures his authority and sufficiency. He does not boast beyond measure, because he does not boast in the labors of others, nor does he boast in his own labors except as one empowered by Christ and working under God’s commission. His complaint with the rivals is not simply that they wrongfully invaded turf assigned to him. They have discredited his influence where he rightfully deserves influence and take undue credit for what God has done through him. Paul counters their criticism of him by saying that he does not “meddle in other people’s territory and then compare our performance with theirs.” Paul does not take credit for another’s work but only boasts in God’s work that has transpired through the ministry assigned to him, giving God all the credit.

Robert Hughes: Verse 16 clearly shows that further missionary extension into new areas was Paul's point in bringing up the distinction between himself and his critics. Even when he left Corinth, he would only go where the gospel had not been preached. His hopes for the Corinthians were that through the maturity of their faith they would help him on his way. The hopes of the false apostles could only have been to stay at Corinth as long as possible and then move on to leech off another existing Christian community, not to start a new work. Paul always operated with the hope of entering new areas, establishing solid churches, and then moving on, never going where others had labored (**Rom. 15:20**). He based this philosophy on **Isaiah 52:15**, which he quotes in **Romans 15:21**. The regions beyond (**10:15**) were Rome and Spain (**Rom. 15:24**).

C. (:17) Focus of Boasting

“But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.”

Richard Pratt: Paul summed up Jeremiah's perspective by saying that boasting should be **in the Lord**. All confidence, pride, and boasting should be in the light of what God has done. Believers often accomplish much, just as Paul had, but they should always take pleasure in these accomplishments with the awareness that they are humble servants of the Lord.

Frank Matera: The exhortation that those who boast should boast in the Lord, therefore, stands at an important juncture in his argument. For having asserted that he does not boast beyond the limits assigned to him, and having expressed his confidence that even if he boasts he will not be put to shame, Paul now explains the grounds for authentic boasting: boasting is allowed if one boasts in what the Lord has done. In Paul's case God has given him a missionary “assignment” (*kanōn*) that is revealed in the indisputable fact that he was the first to preach the gospel to the Corinthians. Consequently, when Paul boasts in his work at Corinth, he is boasting in the Lord, because this is the work that God assigned and accomplished in him (see **1 Cor 3:6**: “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*”). In light of the full quotation from Jeremiah, noted above, it now becomes clear what Paul means when he writes in **verse 12** that those who commend themselves “*do not understand*.” They do not “*know*” and “*understand*” the Lord (see **Jer 9:24**), who has acted in their midst with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.

D. (:18) Validity of God's Commendation

*“For not he who commends himself is approved,
but whom the Lord commends.”*

David Garland: All human boasting is groundless because it is based on appearances, not reality. It is also mercurial. When mortals die, their accumulated accolades usually die with them. By contrast, the Lord's glory is eternal. That is why only Christ's commendation counts. It ultimately awaits the final judgment when the Lord's scrutiny is far more exacting. Then it matters not what one thinks of himself or herself or what others might think in this life. Paul knows that he might preach to others and find himself disqualified as unapproved by God (**1 Cor 9:27**). He constantly examines

himself and urges the Corinthians to do the same (13:5). If they fall under the sway of chronic boasters, who self-assuredly commend themselves, they are liable to ignore God's measures and find themselves disqualified.

ASIDE: PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATING THAT SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY MUST BE JUDGED BY SPIRITUAL STANDARDS

1. Spiritual authority is given by God (:8,13)
2. Spiritual authority cannot be recognized through physical appearance or attributes (:7,12), rather we learn to judge as God judges and commend whom God commends (:18)
3. Spiritual authority is exercised in meekness (:1)
meekness is not timidity (:2,10,11)
spiritual leader must be strong to fight spiritual wars with spiritual weapons (:3-5)
4. Spiritual authority is given for edification (:8)
5. Spiritual authority will not be ashamed (or refuted) (:8)
6. Paul's Spiritual Authority within the field (probably geographical) God has assigned (:13)
7. Effectiveness of Spiritual Leader in a church is limited by the submission and faith of the church (:6,15)

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Christ is presented here as the epitome of meekness and gentleness without detracting at all from his strength and power.
- 2) Belonging to Christ is the great privilege and security of every believer.
- 3) Spiritual leaders in the church have been granted authority by Christ for the purpose of edification.
- 4) The Lord should be the subject of our boasting

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we have a tendency to evaluate Christian leaders on the basis of what is outwardly impressive?
- 2) Do we view the spiritual weapons at our disposal as powerful enough to tear down the strongholds of sin and bondage in our lives?
- 3) Do we have the commendation of the Lord upon our ministry? Are we overly concerned with how others evaluate us?
- 4) Do we have a heart that longs to see the Lord increase the sphere of our ministry to extend to areas that are unreached by the gospel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tasker: There is a definite break in the Epistle at the end of chapter ix as the apostle turns to deal with the recalcitrant minority at Corinth who, in contrast to the great majority of the Corinthian Christians, have not been loyal to him but are listening all too eagerly to the specious claims of certain false shepherds who have intruded into the fold of the Corinthian church.

William Barclay: He speaks of the gentleness and the sweet reasonableness of Christ. The word *prautes*, *gentleness*, is an interesting word. Aristotle defined it as the correct mean between being too angry and being never angry at all. It is the quality of the man whose anger is so mastered and so controlled that he is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. It describes the man who is never angry at any personal wrong or insult or injury he may receive, but who is capable of righteous anger when he sees others hurt and injured and insulted. By using that word Paul is saying at the very beginning of his stern letter that he is not carried away by personal anger and rage, that he is speaking with the strong gentleness of Jesus Himself. The other word is even more illuminating. *Sweet reasonableness* is the Greek word *epieikeia*. The Greeks themselves defined *epieikeia* as "that which is just and even better than just." They described it as that quality which must enter in when justice, just because of its generality, is in danger of becoming unjust. There are cases when strictly to apply the laws and rules and regulations is actually unjust. There are times when strict and impartial justice can actually result in injustice. Sometimes there arise circumstances in which the real justice is not to insist on the rules or on the letter of the law, but to let a higher quality enter into our decisions. The man who has *epieikeia* is the man who knows that, in the last analysis, the Christian standard is not justice; it is love. And by using this word at the very beginning Paul is in effect saying that he is not out for his rights, he is not out to insist in the letter of the law and to impose all the rules and regulations. He is going to deal with this situation with that Christlike love which

transcends even the purest of human justice. He is going to try to deal with the situation as Christ himself would have dealt with it.

Homer Kent: In this spiritual warfare which the true apostles of Christ waged, the particular objects of attack were the fortresses of human reasoning. These are now explained as those human philosophies regarding God and His works which are contrary to what God Himself has revealed.

Robert Gromacki: The Judaizing critic, however, delighted in making such comparisons. *First*, he compared himself with his own self-appointed standard of excellence (“make ourselves of the number,” *egkrinai*). This was introspection. *Second*, he compared himself with others (“with some that commend themselves,” *sugkrinai*). This was competition. If a person adopts low standards for himself, he can usually meet them. If a person selects someone inferior with whom he can compare himself, he is bound to see himself as better.

Steve Zeisler: Our first and deepest goal is to tear down strongholds, destroying places where evil is entrenched. Paul makes the point that evil is entrenched in the thinking of people. It is pretensions, the ideas that oppose knowledge of God, that are the ultimate strongholds. People behave the way they do because they have strongholds in their belief systems. What makes them willing to give in to the attraction to pornography is misguided beliefs about sexuality, righteousness, and who they are. It's the stronghold of misunderstanding a righteous God, his claim upon people's lives, and the idea that our sexuality should be joyful and honorable. The strongholds inside make people vulnerable to the external behavior. Our business as the Christian church is to attack the strongholds, not just the periphery. It's to march past the distant border and go all the way to the capital city, to take on the ideas on the inside and tear them down by application of spiritual weapons.

Ray Stedman: So how do we spot the phonies who are all around us?

- They commend themselves, for the most part.
- They are always boasting of their accomplishment, printing it and spreading it around so you can see.
- They do not let others speak for them, but they talk about it themselves.
- And they are not concerned about reaching the unreached. They are concerned only with having a little group of their own supporters, building that to the highest number, and paying no attention to the lost around.
- They manipulate and try to get meetings and try to set up various open doors instead of following those which God opens for them.
- Most of all, when they boast they make it clear that God is mighty lucky to have them on his side.

That is the mark of a counterfeit. He may not be a counterfeit Christian, but he has a counterfeit ministry.

John MacArthur: Paul did not specify the exact nature of the damning heresy which the false apostles concocted to seduce the Corinthians. In a sense, its identity really does not matter. Satan and his demons do not care what people believe, as long as they do not believe the truth. However several characteristics of the false teachers and the heresy designed to seduce the Corinthians can be gleaned from this epistle.

- First, the false teachers came from outside the church (**11:4**; cf. **10:14**—Paul had been the first to preach the gospel in Corinth). Little was known of their background, and the grandiose claims they made about themselves, their qualifications, and their authority, therefore, could not be verified. As the saying goes, all experts are from out of town.
- Second, they claimed superior apostolic authority to Paul. In **11:5** he alluded to those claims, sarcastically referring to them as “*the most eminent apostles.*” They attempted to support their claims with phony letters of commendation, supposedly from the Jerusalem church (**3:1**; cf. **Acts 15:24**).
- Third, they were Jews (**2 Cor. 11:22**) who claimed to truly represent the religion of the Messiah. They sought to impose Jewish customs on the Gentiles in the Corinthian assembly. In reality, however, they were guilty of preaching “*another Jesus*” and “*a different gospel*” (**11:4**).
- Fourth, they mingled elements of mysticism with Jewish legalism. They claimed to have a secret, higher knowledge, which in reality amounted to nothing but empty “*speculations ... raised up against the knowledge of God*” (**10:5**).
- Fifth, they adopted the popular sophistry and rhetoric so highly prized in Greek culture. Accordingly, they scorned Paul as being “*unskilled in speech*” (**11:6**).
- Sixth, they were libertines, promoting an antinomian ideology that bore the evil fruit of “*impurity, immorality and sensuality*” (**12:21**) among the Corinthians.
- Finally, like all false teachers, they were in the ministry for money. They mocked Paul’s teaching as worthless, since he did not charge for it. Contrasting his humility with their greed, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you*” (**11:7–8**).

Charles Swindoll: Let me share three facts about criticism that will arm you for the spiritual battle that’s coming.

1. First, no one is immune to criticism. Unfortunately, it is an unavoidable part of living among human beings. Do your best not to get paranoid. Expect criticism, but don’t obsess over it. Don’t run in fear of it. Face it with strong resolve. Since we can’t escape it, we might as well ready ourselves for it. Decide beforehand

that you will neither lie down and give up nor stand up and engage in an ugly fight over every nit-picking critique.

2. Second, criticism can be taken too lightly or too seriously. If we take criticism too lightly and let every less-than-positive comment bead off of us like rain on a windshield, we might ignore valuable instruction that could help us. Where would we be without our parents' correction? Or without that close friend who lives out **Proverbs 27:6** and points out our blind spots? Taking criticism lightly can deprive us of opportunities for personal development and growth. We will remain juvenile and immature, unteachable and stubborn.

On the other hand, if we take criticism too seriously, we could lose heart. If we obsess over every biting comment, every harsh e-mail, every disapproving frown, every anonymous letter, we might shrink back with lack of confidence in everything we do. Second-guessing every decision. Regretting every minor mistake. Crafting our messages or lessons to please individual people. These overreactions will literally demoralize a pastor and paralyze a ministry. We might eventually decide never to dream again. Worse, we might quit before finishing the task.

A **balanced approach** is to listen to legitimate criticism, but take unjust criticism with a grain of salt. Several things I have learned over the years:

- Ignore the really scathing criticisms as well as the exalted praise. Neither is helpful. You will meet people in ministry who can say nothing good. Others can say nothing bad. Almost without exception, the truth is somewhere in the middle.
- I don't read anonymous criticisms. In fact, anonymous criticisms will never reach me. If individuals won't reveal their names to you, then those persons don't really care about you; their motives are usually destructive, not constructive.
- On the other hand, anonymous compliments can be trusted because the person who shares without recognition is clearly not interested in flattery or softening me up for a favor, which adds to the likelihood that they offer a sincere message of gratitude.
- I keep a few personal family members and friends close at hand to discuss both criticisms and praises to help keep me balanced. My wife is great at this. She can often see through motives like Superman through a wall. She knows when to "toss it in the trash" or "take it to heart" like no one else in my life. We all need somebody in our lives to help guide us through such verbal minefields.

3. Third, some criticism needs to be answered; much of it doesn't. If a criticism is based on a misunderstanding, clear it up as soon as possible. Those are usually easy to dispense with, and once the air is cleared, you will gain not only a sympathizer but a supporter. If at all possible, meet in person; if not, keep the dialogue open to make sure you can avoid further miscommunication.

If it's a matter of minor disagreement, consider a meeting of the minds. If good might come from an exchange of thoughts, put your heads together and think through the major issues. Even if there is no change of mind on either side, it's a noble goal to come to a mutual understanding of each other's perspective. Sometimes you simply agree to disagree.

If responding to the criticism, however, would lead only to more argument, it might be best to let the criticism remain unanswered. You can usually tell by the level of venom involved. If it sounds mean-spirited, it probably is. Or if the critic is known as a chronic grouch, experience already has taught you that engaging in that kind of combat will result only in a stalemate. There is no need to become a pen pal with someone looking for a fight! I repeat: Let it go.

We will all face criticism in ministry (and in life). We need to prepare ourselves so we don't pass it off too lightly or worry over it too seriously. And we need to discern whether the criticism needs to be answered. When we go into ministry situations with our eyes wide open, we will be able to see criticism coming and deal with it wisely.

David Garland: May identifies five kinds of power leaders can exert.

(1) Exploitative power uses physical force or the threat of violence and leaves the other with no choice but to comply.

(2) Manipulative power uses the covert cunning of the con man rather than the gunman.

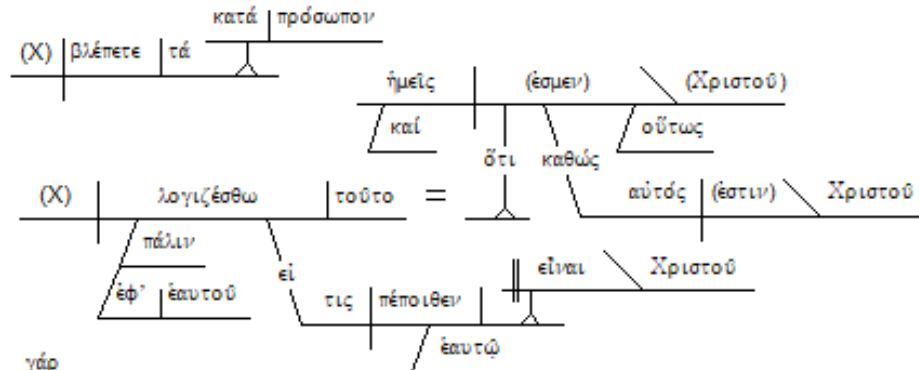
(3) Competitive power employs an "I win / you lose" strategy. Only one can win, and it results in shrinkage of community.

(4) Nutrient power is likened to the parents' care for their children; they exercise their power to do them good. Problems arise when "care" becomes smothering and when it insists on doing children good the parents' way. Such methods create dependency.

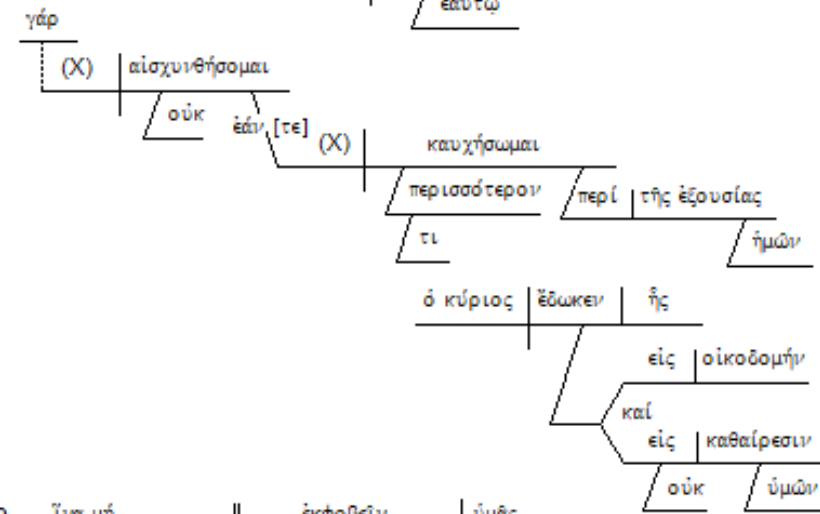
(5) Integrative power works with the other person to enable them to grow both mentally and spiritually.

As Paul portrays matters in these chapters, we get the picture that his rivals have been exploitative, manipulative, and competitive in their use of power. He insinuates that they enslave, devour, seek to gain control, put on airs, and strike the Corinthians in the face, either metaphorically with insults or literally with blows (**11:20**). Some Corinthians readily submitted to their domination, mistaking this brazen behavior for the apostolic ideal. They then interpreted Paul's gentle restraint as weakness (**10:1**). By contrast, Paul uses integrative power: "*We are workers with you for your joy*" (**1:24**; see **13:10**). These chapters illustrate that Paul asserts his authority for building up the Christian community, not himself (**12:19**; **13:9–10**); and his manner becomes a model for how to exercise authority in the church.

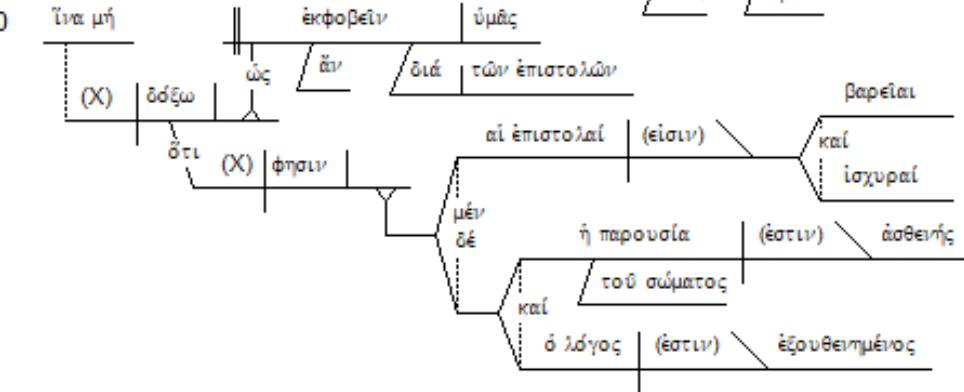
2Co 10:7



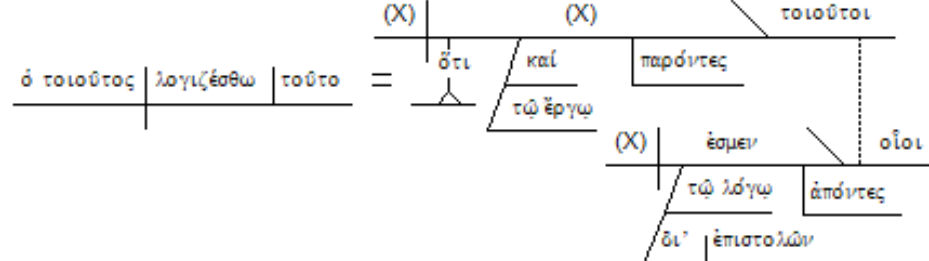
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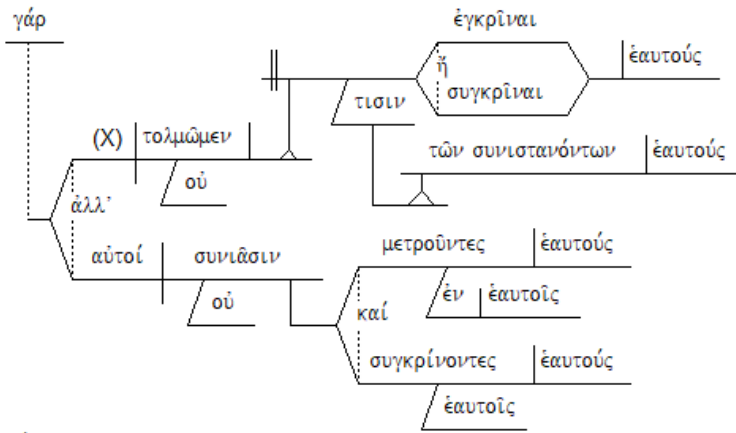
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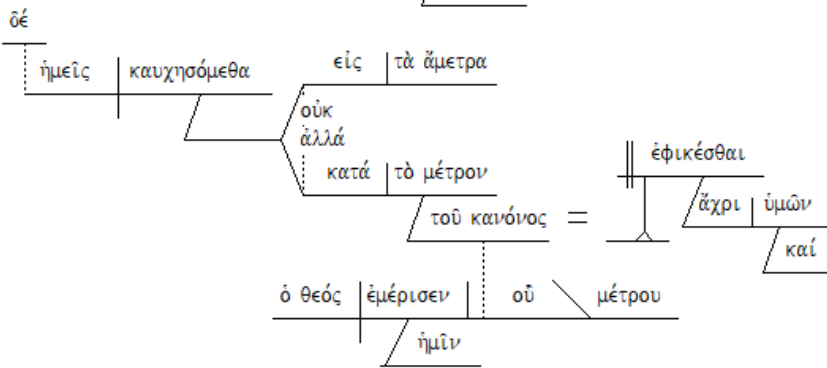
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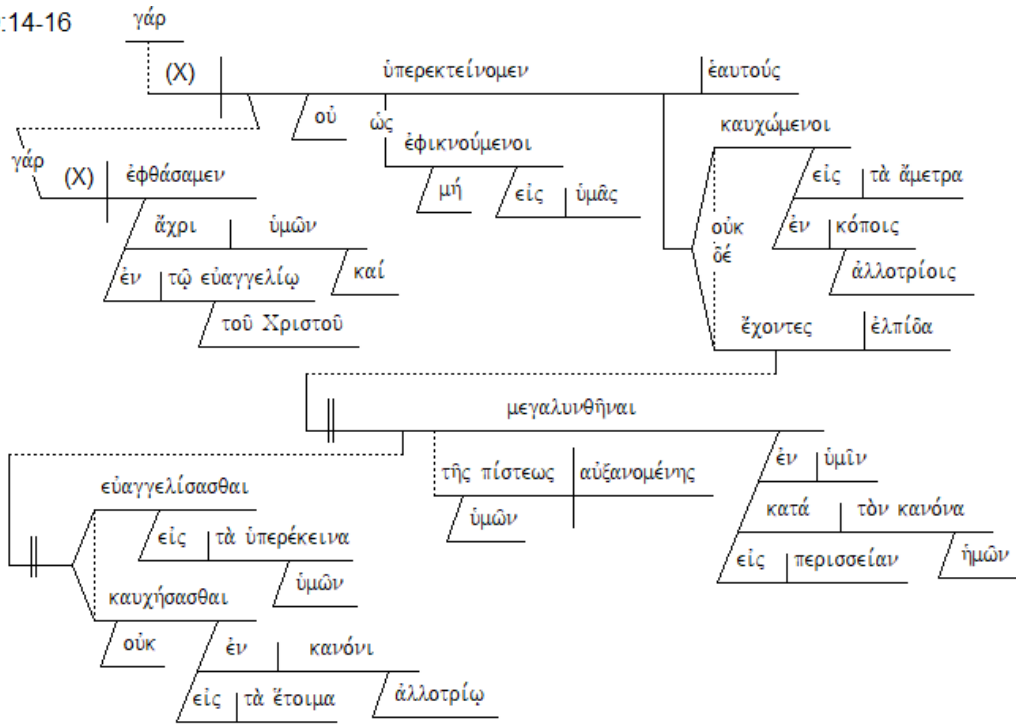
2Co 10:12



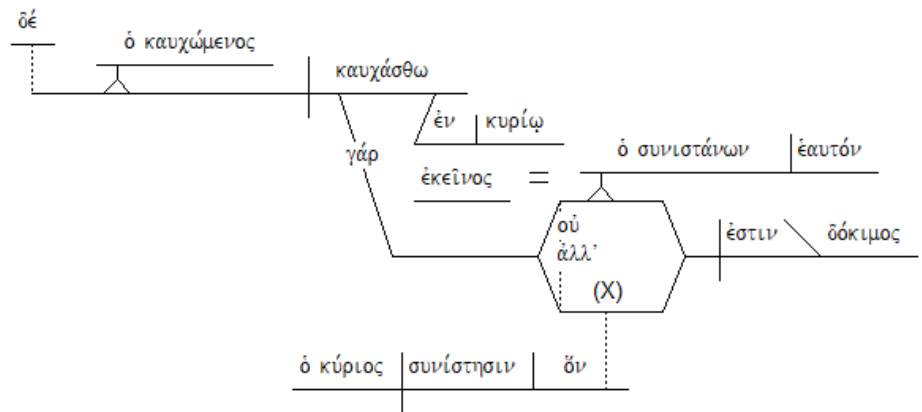
2Co 10:13



2Co 10:14-16



2Co 10:17-18



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

TITLE: MARKS OF APOSTLESHIP #1: HUMILITY IN MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:

(BASIS FOR HIS BOASTING IN HIS AUTHORITY = THE MARKS OF HIS APOSTLESHIP)

HUMILITY IN MINISTRY (DEMONSTRATED HERE BY PREACHING THE TRUTH WITHOUT CHARGE) DIFFERENTIATES THE TRUE FROM THE FALSE APOSTLE

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Beginning in **chapter 11**, Paul confronted the false apostles. Reluctantly, he compared himself to them so the Corinthians could distinguish a true messenger of God from false ones. As he began to confront the false apostles, Paul revealed that his motive for doing so was to call the Corinthians back to loyalty. He began by expressing his wish that they would bear with him in his defense of himself, which the apostle referred to as a little foolishness. He was about to answer fools as their folly deserved (**Prov. 26:5**). In reality, he would have preferred not to write this section, but the Corinthians' folly left him no choice. The apostle softened his blow by acknowledging that they were indeed ... bearing with him, an affirmation of their positive response to his prior correction of them (**2 Cor. 2:1–4; 7:6–11; 1 Corinthians**). Paul asked for the same favorable response as he defended himself against the false teachers' attacks and the Corinthians' own foolish disloyalty. . .

Sadly, **lack of discernment** had created havoc in the Corinthian church. False teachers were seeking to seduce the Corinthians and lead them "*astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ*" (**2 Cor. 11:3**). As a vigilant shepherd, Paul warned his flock of the danger they posed; in fact, this entire epistle is an antidote to their poisonous lies. In **chapters 10–13** in particular, Paul directly confronted the false teachers.

This passage presents in stark terms the contrast between Paul, who lovingly, humbly proclaimed the truth, and the false teachers, who deceptively abused the Corinthians. The specific point at issue was money, always a prime motivation for false teachers (**Rom. 16:18; 1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:3, 14; Jude 11; cf. 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:3**). The greedy false apostles took money from the Corinthians; Paul did not.

As he approached the distasteful task of making the comparison between himself and the false apostles, Paul listed three marks of a true apostle (humility, truth, and love) and three corresponding marks of a false apostle (pride, deception, and abuse). The same criteria may be used today to distinguish true men of God from false teachers.

George Shillington:

1. Paul opens the speech with an image of himself as a father protecting his betrothed virgin-daughter community until her eschatological marriage.
2. He fights against the cunning seduction of satanic deceivers appearing as super-apostles (11:1-5).
3. Out of love, he has declined taking money from the Corinthians, unlike the so-called ministers of righteousness (11:7-15).

Raymond Collins: Chiastic Structure

- A The Serpent and the Superapostles (vv. 1–4)
- B Response to an Accusation (vv. 5–6)
- B' Response to an Accusation (vv. 7–12)
- A' Satan and the False Apostles (vv. 13–15)

Eric Mason: Main Idea: Do not be deceived by Satan or anything that would lead you away from Jesus.

- I. God's People Reject Anything That Devours Their Commitment to Jesus (11:1-6).
- II. Godly Leaders Are Willing to Make Significant Sacrifices to Promote the Gospel (11:7-9).
- III. Satan Always Makes Deception Look, Feel, and Seem Convincing (11:10-15).

**I. (:1-4) REALITY CHECK –
DISCERNMENT SHOULD ANCHOR BELIEVERS IN THEIR DEVOTION TO
CHRIST**

A. (:1-2) Paul's Appeal Springs From Godly Jealousy Not Personal Pride

1. (:1) He Deserves a Fair Hearing

*"I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness;
but indeed you are bearing with me."*

Robert Hughes: What makes something foolish is not the truth or falsity of the boast but the self-serving attitude motivating it. Paul clarified that even his foolishness was an act (for example, 11:16-18) and exposed the behind-the-scenes truth (12:19). He desired edification, not self-exaltation. But, for the present, he asked their indulgence and was confident that he would have it.

R. Kent Hughes: However, now (unthinkably to Paul) he realizes that he must engage in the **boasting** he so abominates. The reason that Paul must indulge in boasting is that his opponents' boasting has made such deep inroads in the Corinthian church that their deadly teaching has gained a hearing. Thus Paul will be compelled to boast "*as a fool*" — "*like a madman*" as he will describe it (11: 21-23). But first he must prepare his readers for his stooping to such distasteful foolishness. So in **verses 1-15** Paul lays out the justification for his participation in boasting. Paul's reticence is obvious in his opening request: "*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!*" (v. 1). "Bear with me as I play the fool so I can expose the foolishness of my opponents."

2. (:2) His Passion is for Their Faithfulness to Christ

“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”

Robert Gromacki: A person should be jealous when he sees a loved one being turned away from obedient faith by false attractions.

Eric Mason: **Jealousy** in the Bible is God saying, “The glory and devotion that are rightly mine should be given to me and not anyone else.” That means God has the right to continue to challenge you when you put your family above him. He has the right to challenge you when you work so hard that you don’t have the energy to spend time with him. God has the right to reprimand you about anything that obstructs the depth of intimacy he has called you to because what’s rightfully his is being given to someone or something else.

That’s why Paul says, “*I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy*” (v. 2). He offers a cultural and spiritual analogy: “*Because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ*” (v. 2). He’s using rabbinic history, the way the Hebrew culture did marriage. You couldn’t just walk up on a little honey that you liked. Fathers were big in their daughters’ lives. A father would always have to know where his daughter was. He oversaw her sexuality and fought for her to remain a virgin because her lack of virginity could bring shame to the family. He could get less money through the betrothal, which points to her worth.

Frank Matera: The imagery that Paul employs here presupposes three stages in the life of the Corinthian community.

1. The first was the betrothal of the community to Christ when Paul established the church at Corinth.
2. The second is the period of betrothal or engagement in which the church now finds itself as it awaits the parousia.
3. The third will occur at the parousia when Paul will finally “*present*” the church “*as a chaste virgin to Christ.*”

To summarize, Paul asks the Corinthians to bear with him because he has a **unique relationship** to their community that the intruding apostles cannot claim. By founding the church, he betrothed it to Christ and now guards it with a “*jealousy*” akin to God’s “*jealousy*” for his covenant people, so that he may present the church “*as a chaste virgin to Christ.*” Because Paul must protect his “*virgin*” for Christ, he will engage in foolish and dangerous boasting.

B. (:3) Paul’s Concern is that the Corinthians Have Proven Susceptible to Deception

“But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Ray Stedman: You can lose it in the pressures of daily living. You can get so busy and so worried and so anxious about yourself and the things that are happening to you that you lose the sense that Christ is with you and he is adequate. This is the beautiful, "simplicity that is in Jesus." Here in Corinth they were assaulted with these teachers who were exposing them to things that caught their attention, but they were drifting from that central point. They were involved with fascinating philosophies based on the Word of God, but which went off on side tracks and rabbit paths of thought. They were being challenged with certain ego-appealing experiences which if they could just grasp would make them feel so great, so wonderful, so God-possessed -- just like people today who are invited to explore strange and wonderful mysteries all involved with Christian faith -- but which tend to move them away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Eric Mason: Paul doesn't want us to be led astray from sincerity. Some translate it "simplicity." Now simplicity doesn't mean simplistic. Rather, it means having things uncluttered, so that you can clearly see and experience Jesus Christ. In your walk with Christ, there must be a level of sincerity and commitment, purity and devotion to him. So we don't follow the advances of the enemy; we submit to the glory of the one who saved us by his mercy and grace and gave us the strength to follow him.

John MacArthur: Ever since Satan deceived Eve, false teachers, following his pattern, have portrayed the truth as error and then offered error as the truth.

Paul feared that Satan's emissaries, using the same craftiness (cf. **2 Cor. 11:13–15**) by which their evil master deceived Eve, would lead the Corinthians' minds (the Greek word could also be translated "*thoughts*") astray, thus corrupting or ruining them (the Greek term also has those connotations). Lack of discernment is a major problem for the church (cf. **Eph. 4:14**), because the spiritual battle is an ideological one. The church's willingness to tolerate error in the name of unity, coupled with a lack of biblical and doctrinal knowledge, has crippled its ability to discern. As a result, it is too often easy prey for the ravenous, savage wolves of whom both Jesus and Paul warned (**Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29**), who wound it and sap its power and testimony.

The essence of the Christian life is **simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ**. To the Philippians Paul wrote, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*" (**Phil. 1:21**; cf. **Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:4**). To not love Him supremely as Savior and Lord is an act of disloyalty. The danger false teachers pose is that they shift the focus off Jesus Christ and onto rituals, ceremonies, good works, miracles, emotional experiences, psychology, entertainment, political and social causes, and anything else that will distract people.

Loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ is nonnegotiable in the Christian life—so much so that Scripture declares, "*If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed*" (**1 Cor. 16:22**).

**C. (:4) Paul's Sarcasm Highlights Their Lack of Discernment –
3 Christian Fundamentals:**

“For if one comes and . . . you bear this beautifully”

1. Truth about Jesus –

“preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached”

Allon – another of the same kind – Why does he use this word here?

David Garland: “*Another Jesus*” refers to a different interpretation of Jesus that is not congruent with the facts of Jesus’s life and death. Paul’s emphasis in **13:4**, that Christ was “*crucified in weakness*,” suggests that the rivals presented a Jesus who was not “weak, suffering or humiliated.” They may talk about Christ, but Christ crucified is not the heart of their gospel, nor does it influence the way they live. In contrast to his attack on the Judaizers who infiltrated the Galatians, Paul does not single out any some false doctrinal assertions in condemning these Corinthian rivals. We may infer from this fact that it is primarily their haughty manner and actions that expose their faulty theological doctrine. They are self-seeking, not self-denying.

2. Truth about the Holy Spirit –

“or you receive a different Spirit which you have not received”

Heteron -- Another of a different kind

3. Truth about the Gospel –

“or a different gospel which you have not accepted”

Heteron – Another of a different kind

Paul Barnett: It is clear from this passage that the pure gospel alone joins us to, and keeps us in a right relationship with, Christ. A sincere devotion to Christ is possible only where the true and authentic gospel of Christ is taught and heard (**3**). Christians need to think about what they are being taught rather than being impressed by who is teaching them, however winsome he or she may be. . .

In these verses (:2-5) Paul gives three reasons why the Corinthians should ‘*put up with him*’, each introduced in the Greek by ‘*for*’, which the niv translates only once.

- First, as apostle and evangelist he feels divine jealousy for the Corinthians at this time of spiritual danger for them (**2–3**).
- Second, the Corinthians are vulnerable to falling away from Christ through their interest in an untrue gospel (**4**).
- Third, Paul states that he is in no way inferior to these ‘super-apostles’ (**5**).

David Garland: What are the criteria for identifying that someone is preaching a false Jesus, Spirit, and gospel as opposed to the genuine Jesus, Spirit, and gospel? For the Corinthians, the “*other Jesus*” is one Paul did not preach. The Jesus Paul preached is

Jesus Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23) and Jesus Christ as Lord (4:5). Jesus as Lord requires humble submission to the one who makes absolute demands on our lives. Any gospel that has no moral core, inspires boasting, and soft-pedals self-sacrifice is no gospel. The problem, however, does not only lie with the false preachers. The hearers are also responsible, and they are culpable when they do “*not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear*” (2 Tim 4:3).

Scott Hafemann: It is therefore important to keep the three issues of 11:4 together. The proper understanding of the mission of Jesus, the proper understanding of the role of the Spirit (not simply a human “spirit,” contra the NIV13), and the proper understanding of the relationship between the gospel of the new covenant and the role of the old are inextricably linked together. The central question is what Jesus accomplished in his ministry, how one receives and grows in the Spirit as a result, and what the conditions are for belonging fully to the people of God. In short, the issue is “what constitutes a proper manifestation of the Spirit in the ministry of the gospel. A mistaken emphasis on the miraculous by these so-called super-apostles (11:5) resulted in a construal of the Spirit as a wonder-worker rather than a guarantor of the kerygma.”

II. (:5-12) COUNTERFEIT TEST – HUMILITY IN MINISTRY (DEMONSTRATED HERE BY PREACHING THE TRUTH WITHOUT CHARGE) CANNOT BE COUNTERFEITED

A. (:5-6) Make Substance the Benchmark – Not Style

1. (:5) No Inferiority Complex ... No False Humility

“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.”

R. Kent Hughes: His opponents called themselves “*apostles*,” but Paul contemptuously called them “*super-apostles*” because they arrogated themselves over him, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

David Garland: The battle lines are drawn between Paul, the weak but true apostle authorized by God, and the super but false apostles working under Satan. The difference between Paul and the rivals is that Paul admits that what he is doing is foolish. They do not, which makes their boasting an easier target to chip away at through irony. He does not boast only about his glorious heritage and accomplishments, as they had, but also recounts a string of demeaning experiences and boldly contends that he is a better servant of Christ because of them (11:23). He is “*a better*” servant of Christ because “his suffering and weakness is the vehicle for the mediation and embodiment of the gospel and the character of the crucified Jesus despite its negative connotations.” He is governed by “a contrary set of values grounded in the story of Jesus and renounces those that are equated with status and power in Corinth.” . . .

In 11:2–6 he gives three reasons for this proposed foolishness and why they should at least humor him.

- (1) His zeal for the church whom he betrothed to Christ compels him to try to protect them from being seduced and defiled by the double agents of Satan (11:2–3).
- (2) The community’s readiness to put up with a false gospel from almost anyone who shows up should dispose them to listen again to him, fool that he is (11:4; see 11:19, they “*gladly put up with fools*”).
- (3) He is convinced that he is not in the least inferior to his opponents who so enchant them with their glitzier oral performances (11:5–6).

2. (:6) Excelling in Knowledge (and Christian graces) vs. Oratory

“But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”

David Garland: Paul is therefore more interested in proclaiming the **power of the cross** that will summon faith than in turning a sparkling phrase that will rouse applause. He is not out to amuse or to induce faith with clever arguments but to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ that confronts his listeners with a life-and-death decision. He may grant their negative judgment about his eloquence, but their evaluation is based on presuppositions he did not share. The reason he is not expert in rhetorical adornment is that such expertise inhibits rather than releases the power of the cross. He does not want to be the equal of his rival braggarts in speech. Their preaching is deceptive (11:3) and robs the cross of its power by making their brilliant eloquence the center of attention rather than what God has done in Christ. Paul “believes that unadorned speech is more appropriate for conveying the ‘folly’ of the cross, in the very weakness of which God’s power is disclosed.”

Robert Hughes: Was Paul really “*unskilled in speech*” (11:6)? He may simply have been granting it for the sake of argument, to get on the important issue of his superiority in knowledge. Paul hit at the root of the Corinthians’ gullibility: inability to see the crucial difference between medium and message, content and manner. The deceivers spoke with flair and literacy and captivated the hearers. Paul, ever the bearer of glory in an earthen vessel, reminded them that knowledge is much more important than form, content than cover. “*In fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things*” (11:6). The words were emphatic: “*in fact,*” “*in every way,*” “*in all things.*” Did the Corinthians want rhetoric or redemptive truth? Obviously, they did not know for certain, because they were dazzled by the bravura of the false apostles.

Richard Pratt: The Corinthians should not have doubted Paul’s **insight into truth**. He had made this perfectly clear... in every way. He had taught the Corinthians, written to them about complex theological issues, and led them into the mysteries of God. His great knowledge in the Christian faith that he had demonstrated time and again made up for his less impressive qualities.

B. (:7-9) Appreciate the Extent of His Humility in Ministry

1. (:7) Thesis expressed with Sarcasm

“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?”

Scott Hafemann: His point is that his willing practice of self-support (i.e., his lowering himself), which his opponents consider a “*sin*,” is in reality the very means God has used to manifest himself to the Corinthians. Paul’s lowering himself has led to his elevating the Corinthians because of his love for them (11:7, 11; cf. 1 Cor. 4:8–15; 9:12–23).

2. (:8-9) Humility Demonstrated in Allowing Other Churches to Support Work in Corinth

“I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.”

Homer Kent: The figure of robbing other churches is, of course, hyperbole. It was robbery only in the sense that the churches who gave to Paul’s support were not presently receiving the benefits and hence had no direct obligation to give.

David Garland: Given the elaborate social protocol regarding how gratitude was to be expressed, if Paul accepted the Corinthians’ gifts, he could only return the favor by heaping honor and praise upon them. In the process he would become their social inferior — something he was not prepared to do as their apostle. He cannot be free to preach the gospel with boldness if he is having to run around kissing men’s hands, sending them gifts, groveling before them, and slavishly flattering them. He is a slave of Christ, not a slave of fashion or of his sponsors. He understands himself as bound to all (12:14–15) and a slave to all (4:5; see 1 Cor 9:19), not just to the wealthy movers and shakers in the church who treat their impoverished brethren with contempt (1 Cor 11:17–22). Consequently, “Paul tried to distance himself from a burdensome web of social obligations that would hinder his apostleship, smack of favoritism, and introduce among his communities volatile strife over honor and ambitious claims to authority.” Financial dependence would mean he was socially inferior and obligated to them. He would be less independent and less free to teach what needed to be taught, to admonish those who needed it, and to do what God led him to do. In a church riven by disputes, if he accepted gifts from one party, he would be socially obligated to become their advocate and would no longer be viewed as an impartial arbiter.

Eric Mason: If you have leaders that don’t ever sacrifice, or people who are never willing to make a sacrifice so that the gospel’s hearable to you, but they’re always emphasizing what you must give to them, you’re under false leadership.

C. (:10-12) Understand the Motivation for His Humility in Ministry

1. (:10) Humility is Grounds for Boasting!

“As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.”

Paul Barnett: Paul does not give his reasons for declining to accept financial support in Corinth. One likely consideration in his mind may have been that Corinth, due to its position and wealth, was plagued with visiting money-hungry prophets and philosophers. In provincial, unsophisticated Macedonia the apostle could perhaps accept support without compromising the gospel, but not in the regions of Achaia (10).

John MacArthur: Paul was a man of impeccable **integrity**, completely faithful to his convictions, which were based on God's revelation. He typifies all true men of God who demonstrate selfless humility, and whose lives reflect an unwavering devotion to the truth that they proclaim.

2. (:11) Humility Motivated by Love

“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”

John MacArthur: That God knows their hearts is the ultimate refuge and comfort for believers when they are falsely accused (cf. 11:31; 12:2–3). Because he ministered in the sight of God (2:17; 4:2; 8:21; 12:19), Paul could appeal to Him with a clear conscience (1:12).

Richard Pratt: Anticipating a negative response from his readers, Paul raised the question he expected them to ask. Did he insist on this course of action because he did not love the Corinthians? Was he causing them this pain because he was callous toward them? Not at all. In the spirit of an oath, he swore, *God knows I do!* Some in the church must have questioned whether Paul's love was genuine because he did not accept the “super-apostles” who were so important to the Corinthian believers. Paul insisted in the strongest terms that he loved the church.

3. (:12) Humility = Distinguishing Mark of Genuine Apostleship

“But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”

David Garland: Paul offers another motive for refusing their financial support. He wants to cut the ground out from under his opponents, who claim to be his equals. He has only hinted that they are boasters in 10:13, 15, and now he says so explicitly. They boast that they are just like him. The opponents have set out to gain the support of the Corinthians at the expense of Paul. They wanted the Corinthians to withdraw their affection for Paul and exclude him from any support, which was how the nasty game of politics worked in this era. “Show your support for me by joining me against my enemies or rivals.”

The rivals sought to hoist themselves up to the same apostolic status as Paul. Paul undercuts their boast by serving the church without accepting their money. If they want to attain Paul's status, then they need to adopt his position on boasting. If they want to operate on his level of ministry, they need to abandon their self-serving ways and take the humble role of a slave (4:5). Unless they adopt his practice of preaching for

nothing, they cannot class themselves with him. **Barrett** concludes, “The real point is that the requirement of self-sacrifice . . . marks out the true apostle from the false.” Would they be willing to give up financial support and humble themselves with work to further the gospel? Paul thinks it unlikely. Their conceited boasting and self-centered ministry style expose them as false apostles. They are not apostles living out their calling in service to others but self-absorbed careerists serving their own private ends. Neither are they the parents of this community who “*will most gladly spend and be spent for*” them. Only Paul is (12:14–15). They are **parasites** who expect the church sacrificially to spend funds on them.

Scott Hafemann: Paul’s preaching for free makes it impossible for his opponents to compare their missionary practice favorably with his own. In so doing, it removes their “ground” (11:12, *aphorme*, a military term referring to the base from which an attack can be launched). Indeed, that Paul willingly suffers like Christ for the sake of others calls into question the dictum of the health and wealth gospel that Christ has suffered so that his people need not do so. That is why the opponents are denigrating Paul; they realize that his practice of self-support calls their own ministry into question. His refusing support as evidence of his love for the church destroys his opponents’ ability to demand support under the pretense of claiming to be the ones who really love the Corinthians.

III. (:13-15) DECEITFUL DISGUISE – FALSE APOSTLES MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO LOOK LIKE THE REAL THING

John MacArthur: These three verses form the heart of this section. Paul denounced the false apostles in strong, forceful language because the truth was at stake. Unlike many today, Paul was **not willing to sacrifice truth for unity**. Throughout this epistle, he had alluded to the false apostles, referring to them obliquely as the “*many*” who were guilty of “*peddling the word of God*” (2:17); as “*some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh*” (10:2); as “*those who commend themselves*” (10:12); as those who preach “*another Jesus*” and “*a different gospel*” (11:4); and, sarcastically, as “*the most eminent apostles*” (11:5). But now the time had come to bluntly and directly expose them.

A. (:13) Exposing the Counterfeits

*“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers,
disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”*

Robert Hughes: Paul’s direct, no-holds-barred exposure of his enemies is contained in 11:13-15. They were clearly boasting about being apostles of Christ. But why did Paul not come out with this exposure at the very beginning of the letter and say, “Corinthians, why are you troubling me and aligning yourselves with ministers of Satan?” Because Paul was always equally as interested in process as in result. He knew that to attack his opponents head-on would have been premature. The Corinthians

needed some preliminary truth: how to recognize boasting in appearance versus boasting in heart (**chaps. 1-5**), the strong exhortation to purity of affections (**chaps. 6-7**), and the encouragement and confidence that pervades the whole letter. But now, with such instruction behind and his third visit ahead, Paul had to make a final attempt to capture them from Satan and for Christ.

Paul then gave a threefold description of his enemies (**11:13**).

1. “*False apostles*” described them; they were counterfeits.
2. “*Deceitful workers*” defined the nature of their work. It was motivated by and resulted in deception. They had made this same accusation against Paul (**4:2; 12:16**).
3. “*Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*” fully described why they were false and deceitful. Their false front of apostleship was only their means of deceiving their listeners’ minds (**11:3**).

R. Kent Hughes: The deceit of the false apostles was fully volitional; they disguised themselves or masqueraded as apostles of Christ. The term normally means physical transformation (cf. **Philippians 3:21**) — “to transform, to change the outward appearance of a person or thing, to disguise.” . . . it was the false apostles’ deceit that was intentional and thoroughgoing.

B. (:14-15a) Explaining Their Craftiness

“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”

Robert Hughes: In **11:14-15** Paul elaborates the theme of **satanic masquerade**. Satan is behind the disguises of the false apostles. “*An angel of light*” goes back to Paul’s exhortation to separation in **6:14**: “*What fellowship has light with darkness?*” From creation to Corinth to the present, Satan has been the father of all deception and darkness. Satan appears as light, but he actually encourages fellowship with darkness. The subtleties of those false workers ought not to have been underestimated. Paul was not speaking to those who were promoting gross immorality or overtly anti-Christian teachings. They were not moving from white to black. But they were subtly involved with the grays of life. As a result, however, they were bringing the Corinthians into fellowship with darkness.

George Shillington: The idea of **disguise** points immediately to the master of disguise in Paul’s thought world: **Satan**. “According to some Jewish traditions, Satan disguised himself as an angel of light to seduce Eve” (**Furnish**, 1984:510; *Life of Adam and Eve* 9:1, 3; 12:1; *Apoc. Mos.* 17:1). By portraying his enemies as ministers of Satan, Paul puts the ultimate insult on his opponents. As Paul sees it, their play-acting as apostles of Christ betrays their real allegiance, not to Christ at all, but to his archenemy, who disguises himself as an angel of light and fools them (**2 Cor. 11:14**). Yet veiled behind the undiluted polemic of **11:15** is a faint image of Christian ministers from some quarter, having come to Corinth with a message of justice or righteousness. However

skillfully they may have expressed their message, however convincing their words in the name of Christ, Paul brands their preaching as the work of Satan’s ministers masquerading as ministers of righteousness.

The full scope of their message is difficult to reconstruct with any certainty from Paul’s rhetoric. One has to assume, however, from the consistent **theme of weakness** throughout the Fool’s Speech that one of the main features of their message contains some kind of **power theology**, whether eloquence, spiritual ecstasy, visions, miracles, or the like.

C. (:15b) Emphasizing Their Condemnation

“whose end shall be according to their deeds.”

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) In what specific ways did Christ humble Himself and prove a model for genuine spiritual ministry?
- 2) How deserving is Christ of our total faithfulness in our marriage relationship with Him as His bride?
- 3) Examine the ministry of Christ to highlight His emphasis on truth, light and righteousness – areas where the false apostles fall short when examined on the basis of their deeds.
- 4) How is the Jesus preached by Paul and the genuine apostles different from the Jesus preached by the counterfeit apostles?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of philosophies and speculations are enticing believers today away from *“the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ?”*
- 2) Do we respond with godly jealousy and righteous indignation to any adulteration of the fundamentals of our Christian faith?
- 3) Do we know anyone who is preaching the genuine gospel without cost? What do you think is their motivation today in not lobbying for rightful wages? What was Paul’s personal policy regarding being paid for Christian ministry?
- 4) What types of disguises are Satan’s workers wearing today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: All through this section Paul has to adopt methods which are completely distasteful to him. He has to stress his own authority, he has to present his own credentials, he has to boast about himself, he has to keep comparing himself with those who are seeking to seduce the Corinthian Church, and he does not like it. His whole instinct is against it, and he apologizes every time he has to speak in such a way. Paul was not a man to stand on his dignity. It was said of a great man, "He never remembered his dignity until others forgot it." But Paul knew that it was not really his dignity and honour that were at stake, but the dignity and the honour of Jesus Christ.

Ray Stedman: Now if jealousy is so bad, why is God jealous? Here Paul says that he feels "divine jealousy," a godly jealousy, literally, for these people. Surely that indicates that jealousy can be both good and bad. So when you feel jealous of someone you have to ask yourself, "Is my jealousy a rightful one, or is it false?" The difference is right here: False jealousy is always selfish; it is concerned about my feelings. It is possessive; it wants to control another person. It is therefore often dominating, even cruel and tyrannical. It usurps the rights of others and insists on its own way. It is imposed upon someone else whether he likes it or not. Because it is so vicious in its cruelty and its tyranny, jealousy perhaps is the most destructive force in the world today.

A true jealousy, a godly jealousy, on the other hand, as Paul felt for the Corinthians, is one that arises from a deep passion for the welfare of another. It becomes careless of self, and it is always manifested in a tenderness and a thoughtfulness about someone else. It may never cease, because it is a powerful motive, just as this one is here in the heart of Paul, as it is in the heart of God.

Steve Zeisler: A great theologian, who lived many years, wrote scores of profound theological books. At the end of his life he was asked to summarize what he had learned over his lifetime, thinking back on all of his scholarship. He said quietly, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The summary of all he had learned was simply that. Jesus loved him and he loved Jesus, and it was a relationship he was sure of because he found it in the Scriptures.

The apostle is warning the Corinthian church, and he is warning our Palo Alto church: We are always in danger of being led astray. We can lose the simple truths; we can become greater and the Lord less; seducers can win our hearts away. We must resist them and cling to the simple truth:

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Robert Gromacki: The phrase, "*the simplicity that is in Christ,*" refers to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone apart from circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law. The Judaizers taught that faith in Christ alone could not save, but that

circumcision was also necessary (**Acts 15:1**). When Eve began to reason with Satan, she at that moment failed to submit her thoughts to God (cf. **10:5**). The concept of “simplicity” is achieved when one is totally obedient to Christ through the revealed Word of God.” . . .

The Judaizers and the dissident minority viewed his refusal to take an honorarium as an “offence” (literally “sin,” *hamartian*). In the first century, professional speakers charged fees for their services. The greater the reputation, the higher the fee. The false teachers used Paul’s free speaking as an attack against his ability and his estimation of himself.”

Homer Kent: Satan carries on his works through his servants (KJV, “*ministers*”) who derive their motivation and their methods from him. They assume the guise of promoters of righteousness, but such righteousness is a masquerade, not their true nature. The “*righteousness*” they promote is a self-righteousness, a righteousness of works, and this is the opposite of the message Christ brought and the true apostles proclaimed.

Paul had no hesitancy in charging these opponents with the spiritual crimes they were committing. They were proclaiming a righteousness which was not God’s righteousness. They were false apostles masquerading as Christ’s appointees. They were exhibiting the character and practice of Satan, the supreme deceiver. And they faced the prospect of certain judgment. When God would ultimately deal with them, it would be in absolute justice and in accordance with the true nature of their deeds, not with what they pretended to be.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Should Paul’s practice be interpreted to mean he does not care for the Corinthians? Not at all! He loves them greatly, and his sacrificial lifestyle is evidence of his love for them. What Paul is doing—and fully intends to keep doing—is to distinguish himself from those who are frauds, those who are simply into ministry for the money. Paul will do everything he can to set himself apart from those who want to be considered his equals, but who are really false apostles. One thing he knows for sure—they are not going to minister free of charge. This is one area in which they will not attempt to look like Paul. By his selfless, sacrificial lifestyle, Paul sets himself apart from the greedy hucksters who take advantage of others by pretending to be servants of God. Do Paul’s opponents boast? Let them boast in ministering free of charge, or let them realize they are nothing like Paul.

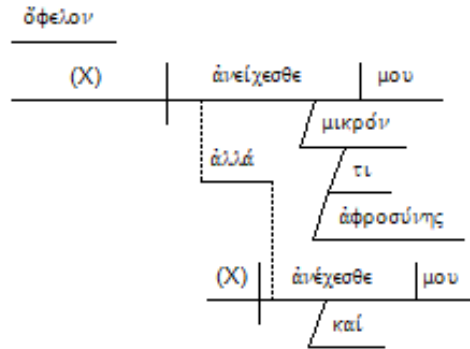
Charles Swindoll: SEVEN SIGNS OF A FAKE MINISTRY

1. Heresy—Failure to adhere to and respect classic essentials of the faith held by all Christians
2. Authoritarianism—Absolute, unchallengeable power resting in one person
3. Exclusiveness—Insistence that their group alone is the One True Church
4. Greed—Manipulation and guilt tactics to get money; no financial accountability or transparency
5. Impurity—Moral looseness, lack of personal restraint

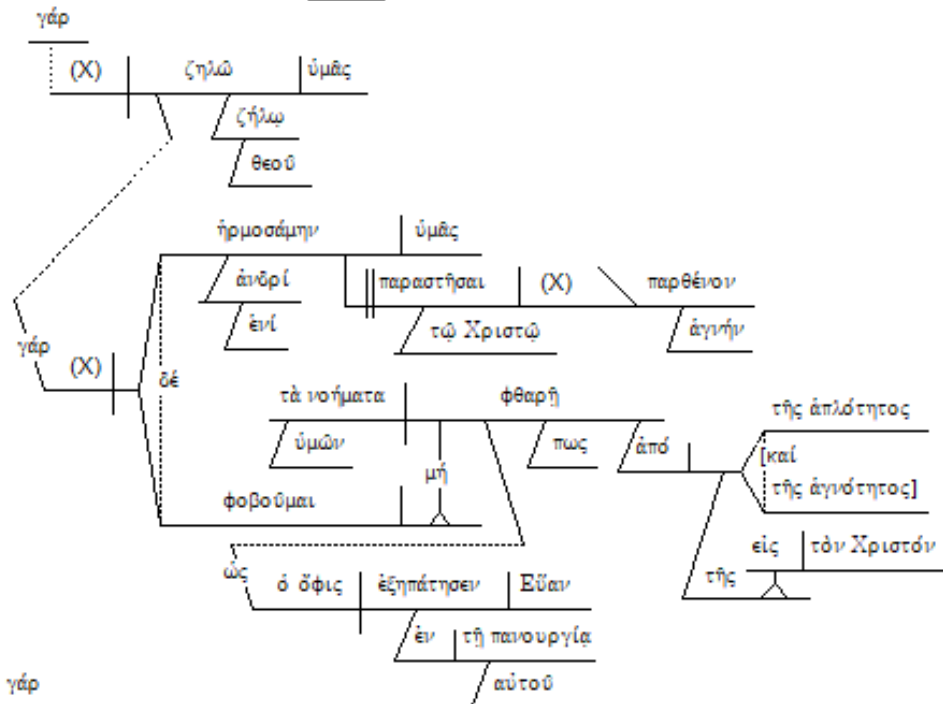
- 6. Secrecy—Lack of openness in operations, authority structures, and decisions
- 7. Rationalization—Defensiveness when confronted about wrongdoing

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

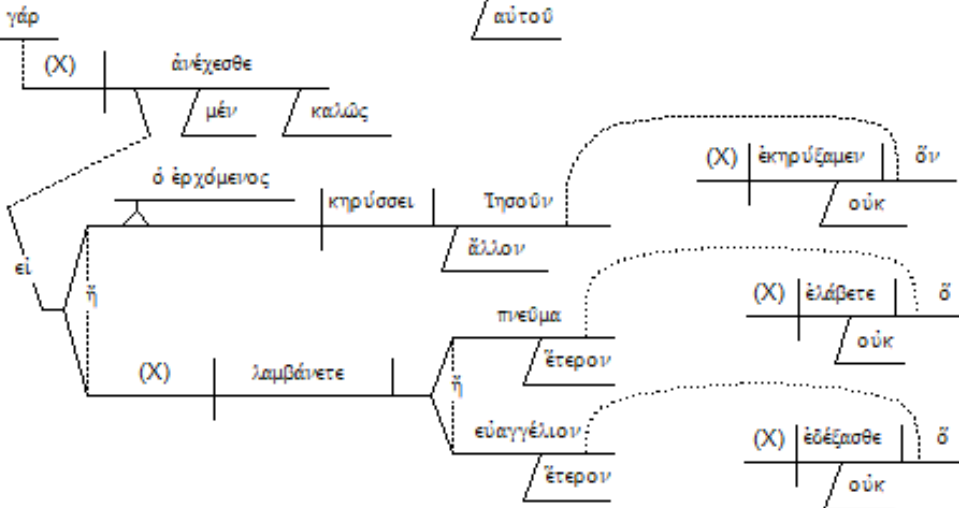
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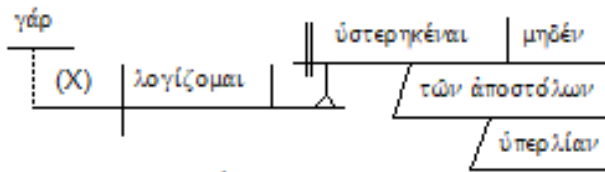
2Co 11:2-3



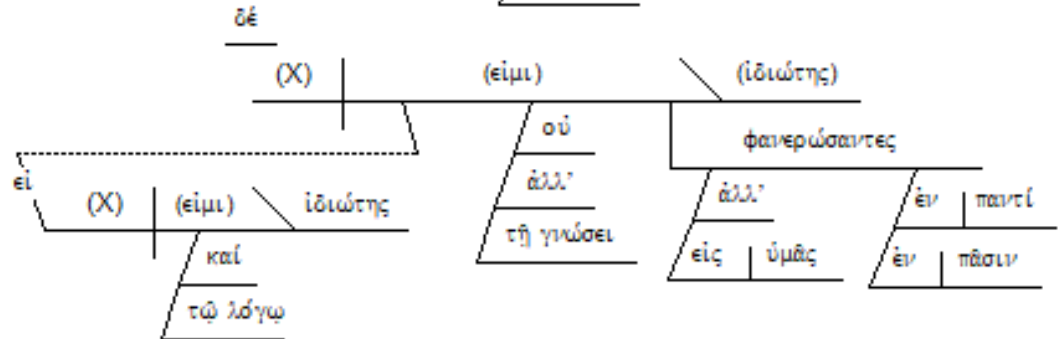
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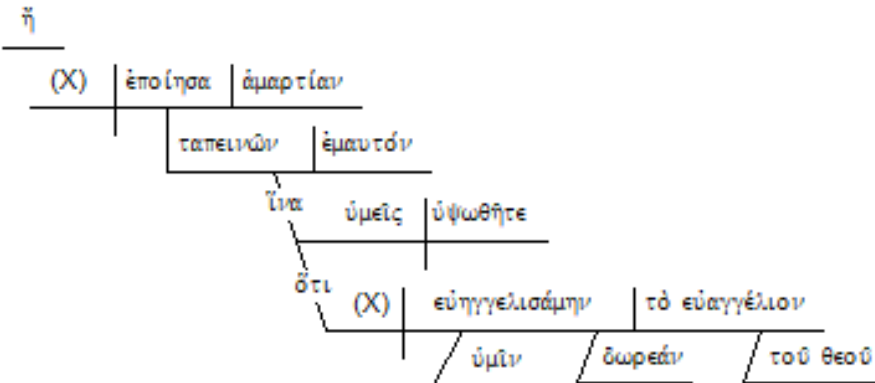
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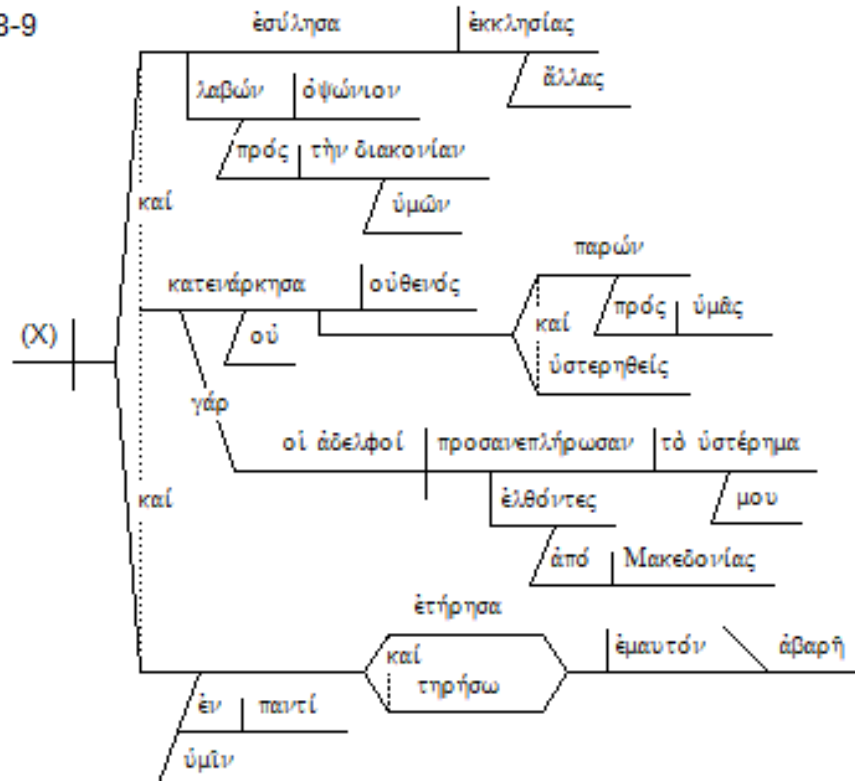
2Co 11:6



2Co 11:7



2Co 11:8-9



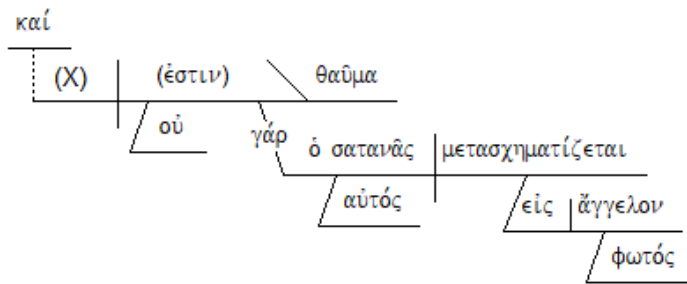
2Co 11:10 ἡ καύχησις | φραγήσεται
 αὕτη | οὐ | ἐν | τοῖς κλίμασιν
 ὅτι | εἰς | ἐμέ | τῆς Ἀχαΐας
 = ἀλήθεια | ἔστιν
 Χριστοῦ | ἐν | ἐμοί

2Co 11:11 (X) | (X) | (X) | (X) | ὁ θεός | οἶδεν | (X)
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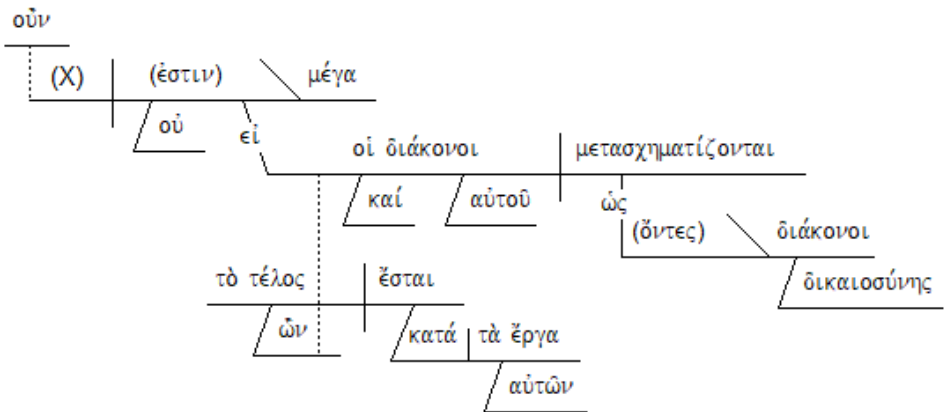
2Co 11:12 ὁέ
 (X) | ποιήσω | (X)
 καί
 ἵνα (X) | ἐκκόψω | τὴν ἀφορμὴν | (X) | ποιῶ | ὁ
 τῶν θελόντων | ἀφορμὴν
 ἵνα (X) | εὐρεθῶσιν
 (ἐν) | (X) | καθὼς | ἡμεῖς | (X)
 καὶ
 (X) | καυχῶνται | ἐν | ᾧ

2Co 11:13 γάρ
 οἱ τοιοῦτοι | (εἰσιν) | ψευδαπόστολοι
 μετασχηματιζόμενοι | ἐργάται
 εἰς ἀποστόλους | δόλιοι
 Χριστοῦ

2Co 11:14



2Co 11:15



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:13

TITLE: MARKS OF APOSTLESHIP #2: WEAKNESS FORTIFIED BY GRACE

BIG IDEA:

BASIS FOR HIS BOASTING IN HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY -- SEVERE PRESSURES IN THE MINISTRY MAKE WEAKNESS THE PLATFORM FOR EXALTING CHRIST'S GRACE AND POWER

INTRODUCTION:

George Shillington: With the rationale for this Fool's Speech now in place (11:1-15), Paul embarks, however reluctantly, on the speech proper at 11:16. Throughout the whole argument, he matches the situation at Corinth by invoking conventions from the literary world of the time—comparison, self-praise, and irony. (Missionary counterparts are using the same conventions to undermine his authority as a missionary in a congregation founded by him.) Although not convinced of the value of comparison and self-praise for a Christian apostle (10:12-18), Paul is able to use these devices in the context of irony.

Irony is “the use of words or phrases to mean the opposite of what they normally mean” (Forbes: 10). Hence, when Paul praises himself in this speech, the subject matter is the opposite of what it ought to be, weakness instead of power, trials instead of triumphs, etc. His desire is to regain his rightful place in the Corinthian congregation, but not by yielding to the same conventional ground as his opponents. The ironic fool's discourse provides Paul with a way out of this dilemma. At the same time, the weak character of a fool corresponds admirably with Paul's gospel, the social-human weakness of the cross, through which God saves the world (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Frank Matera: Paul's line of thought in 11:1 – 12:13 can be summarized in this way. Fearful that the community he has betrothed to Christ is being led astray by the intruding apostles who have commended themselves to the Corinthians and accepted their support, Paul reluctantly embarks upon a project of foolish boasting to show the Corinthians that he is not inferior to these super-apostles. In doing so, he distinguishes himself from the intruding apostles in two ways. First, whereas they burden the community by accepting financial support, he does not. Second, whereas they take their boasting seriously, Paul knows that it is foolish to boast except in one's weaknesses.

Raymond Collins: The **fool's speech** consists of an introduction, three principal parts, and an epilogue. In Hellenistic rhetoric the introduction to a speech, its *prooimion*, or *exordium*, typically establishes the speaker's ethos, the person's authority for speaking in such a way. The introduction prepares the audience to lend a sympathetic ear to the speech. Paul's introduction departs from the classic rhetorical pattern. He distances himself somewhat from what he is about to say and acknowledges that he is not speaking according to the Lord, whose authority he normally invokes. As far as his audience is concerned, instead of flattering them with a *captatio benevolentiae* (lit., “the

seizing of goodwill”), a rhetorical device used to elicit someone’s sympathy or support, he reminds them that they already tolerate fools—hardly a flattering observation!—so they might as well put up with one more fool. After all, Paul has been weak.

The Fool’s Speech

Introduction (11:16–21a)

Part 1: The List of Hardships (11:21b–29)

Part 2: The Escape from Damascus (11:30–33)

Part 3: The Rapture to the Third Heaven (12:1–10)

Epilogue (12:11–13)

The mystery of the cross can be articulated as the weakness of the crucified Christ being met by the power of God operative in the resurrection. This reality is key to the understanding of an apostolic chain. As the power of God was operative in the weakness of the cross, so the power of Christ is operative in the weakness of Paul. As the power of Christ, God’s power, is operative in Paul, so the power of Paul is operative among the Corinthians. As the power of Paul, Christ’s power, God’s power, is operative among the Corinthians, so their power is operative The apostolic chain continues to be realized in the church at Corinth. It continues to be realized in the church of today. When the church, its ministers, and its faithful are conscious of their own weakness, the power of God is effective in them.

(11:16-21a) PRELUDE: BOASTING IN THE LORD’S GRACE AND POWER CAN LOOK LIKE WEAKNESS AND FOOLISHNESS TO OTHERS

R. Kent Hughes: Fearing that some of his hearers might imagine that his boasting is anything but foolish, Paul restates his warning: *“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not with the Lord’s authority but as a fool. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast”* (vv. 16-18). Paul reasons that though he doesn’t want to be thought to be a fool, it’s okay, if the Corinthians will then listen to his boasts. And he knows that though such boasting is not something Jesus himself would have done, it is a necessary foolishness.

Paul’s loathing for what he is about to do is evident in his **biting sarcasm** as he ironically calls the Corinthians “wise” for their putting up with his enemies’ boasting: *“For you gladly bear with fools, being wise your-selves! For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face”* (vv. 19, 20). In effect, Paul says, “You are so brilliant that you put up with fools while they exploit you.” To which he adds with mock shame, *“To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!”* (v. 21a) — that is, “I was too weak to enslave you and devour your resources and ensnare you and lift myself up and abuse you. Shame on me!” The Apostle Paul knew how to make a point. Ouch!

A. (:16-18) Foolish or Not . . . Listen to My Boasting

“Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little. That which I am speaking, I am not speaking as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.”

John MacArthur: Before reluctantly launching his defense, which he regarded as foolishness, Paul distanced himself from the true fools. He did not want anyone to think him foolish like the false teachers; he was not habitually given to commending himself like they were. But if any of the Corinthians really did think him to be a fool, Paul asked that they grant him the same privilege that they did the false apostles and receive him even as foolish. The false apostles boasted incessantly; Paul would boast only a little. The apostle was no fool; he was merely answering fools as their folly deserved (**Prov. 26:5**) to protect the Corinthians from spiritual disaster. And it was their folly in being seduced by the false apostles that had necessitated Paul’s boasting (**2 Cor. 12:11**).

B. (:19-20) You Have Listened to the Boasting of the Truly Foolish

1. (:19) Sarcastic Rebuke

“For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly.”

David Garland: They appear to welcome those who enslave them and lead them around by the nose.

These rivals understand power as something to force others to become compliant slaves. It is the power of coercion, not the power of the cross. The Corinthians, however, seem to welcome being exploited. The verb translated “*exploits*” (*katesthiei*) means “devour,” and **Barrett** translates it “if anyone eats you out of house and home.” It refers to the rivals’ avarice and suggests that they, not Paul, plunder churches. To gather the fruit, they chop down the tree. They eat up the community’s resources and will earn God’s judgment who says, “*Will evildoers never understand? They consume my people as they consume bread*” (**Ps 14:4**).

The church has been “*taken in*” and “*taken advantage of*.” Paul uses the same verb (*lambanei*) in **12:16**, where he says, “*Yet sly as I am, I took you in by deceit!*” The image is one of baiting a trap and catching the unsuspecting, which is something Satan does. Paul’s rivals took the Corinthians in and took their money. He did not and refused to take advantage of them in any way.

The rivals also were **arrogant**. They put on airs and lifted themselves up. The Corinthians apparently preferred this approach to that of Paul who humbled himself so they might be exalted. The Corinthians also seemed to endure, if not welcome, being slapped in the face. This may be a reference to actual physical violence or a metaphor for verbal insults and general browbeating. The rivals may well be so puffed up with themselves that they smack anyone who crosses them. This is how superiors in the

ancient world often treated inferiors. This behavior is a telltale sign that their gospel is false.

Paul paints a picture of rivals who are aggressive, acquisitive, and authoritarian. They also attack others to build up their own authority. He has never acted this way, and some Corinthians apparently are proud of their new, more forceful authorities. They interpret the meekness and gentleness of Christ (**10:1**) that characterizes his demeanor toward them as weakness and faintheartedness. The Corinthians would not be the first to prefer tyrants to more gentle leaders. The Israelites rejected Samuel for a self-willed and despotic king (**1 Sam 8**).

2. (:20) Specific Failures in Discernment

“For you bear with anyone”

a. Bondage -- *“if he enslaves you”*

b. Destruction -- *“if he devours you”*

Robert Hughes: “*Devours*” relates to the Corinthians’ food, drink, and hospitality being freely eaten up by the false apostles. Only true apostles had a right to eat and drink from the hospitality of others, while ministering the gospel (**1 Cor. 9:4**). Those false apostles were like those “*who devour widows’ houses*” (**Mark 12:40**).

c. Exploitation -- *“if he takes advantage of you”*

Robert Hughes: “*Takes advantage of*” amounts to robbery. Paul sarcastically uses this concept in **12:16**: “*I took you in.*”

d. Pride -- *“if he exalts himself”*

e. Shame -- *“if he hits you in the face”*

Frank Matera: The list of insults that the Corinthians endure contains five items, each beginning with the words “*if someone*” (*ei tis*), each item building upon the one that precedes it.

First, the Corinthians have allowed themselves to become “*dominated*” or “*enslaved*” (*katadouloi*) by the intruders who, in contrast to Paul (see **1:24**), have apparently exercised their authority over the faith of the Corinthians. The only other occurrence of this word is in **Gal 2:4** in reference to the false brothers who “*slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us.*” One might be tempted to identify the intruders of **2 Corinthians** with the false brothers of Galatians, but there is no indication that circumcision or the works of the law were an issue at Corinth as they were at Galatia.

Second, having allowed the intruders to exercise authority over them, the Corinthians are now being “exploited” (*katesthieí*) by the very people whom they are supporting (see **Gal 5:15** for the only other occurrence of this verb in Paul’s writings). Thus, whereas Paul works with his own hands so that he will not be a burden to the Corinthians (**11:8–9**), the intruders exploit the Corinthians by depending upon them for support and “devouring” their goods.

Third, the intruders have “taken advantage” (*lambanei*) of the Corinthians. The verb that Paul employs here is the least descriptive of the five verbs that he uses, but it serves the purpose of reinforcing what he has just said, namely, by “exploiting” the Corinthians the intruders have taken advantage of them. Although Paul is accused of such behavior, he forcefully denies that he, Titus, or “the brother” has ever taken advantage of the Corinthians (**12:16–18**).

Fourth, having enslaved, exploited, and taken advantage of the Corinthians, the intruders are now in a position to “act haughtily” (*epairetai*). Here Paul employs the same verb as in **10:4b–5**, where he wrote, “we tear down *sophistries and every proud obstacle arising (epairomenon)* in opposition to the knowledge of God.” Whereas Paul has “abased” himself in order to “exalt” the Corinthians (**11:7**), the intruders have “enslaved” the Corinthians in order to act “haughtily” or exalt themselves.

The end result is that the intruders have abused the Corinthians. Paul’s fifth and final item, therefore, is that the super-apostles have “struck” (*derei*) the Corinthians. Whether this last item is to be taken metaphorically or literally, it is apparent that in Paul’s view the behavior of the intruders has been abusive. In contrast to them, he has acted as the father of the community who has spent himself and will willingly be spent for his children, since parents should provide for their children, not children for their parents (**12:14–15**).

Robert Hughes: These five descriptions were not overstatements. They were the bald actions of those whom the Corinthians were actually ready to defend and support against Paul. He deftly moved from asking the Corinthians to put up with him, foolish or not, to asserting that the fools with whom they gladly bore (**11:19**) were not Paul and his friends but the false apostles (**11:20**). Irony was in full force. The Corinthians thought that others could be fools, but certainly not those flashy and convincing visitors. The Corinthians submitted to the indignities listed by Paul, while naively believing them to come from superior Christians. How could such actions have been viewed as true apostolic wisdom and authority?

Raymond Collins: *Anaphora* (or *epanaphora*) is a figure of speech characterized by the repetition of the same expression at the beginning of a series of successive statements. Often the statements are synonymous. Paul’s use of this figure of speech is characterized by his use of *ei tis* (“when someone”) to introduce each of his five images in **2 Cor. 11:20**. The series uses the personal pronoun “you” in the opening and closing image. The rhetorical device generally adds gravity to an argument, but some ancient rhetoricians believed that it was used merely to embellish the argument. Indeed, some

consider *anaphora* to be contrived, an example of so-called Gorgian assonance. The kind of bombastic language used by Paul enjoyed popular appeal. **Demosthenes**, the great Athenian political orator, used anaphora to mount a successive attack (see also Longinus, *On the Sublime* 20.13). This is what Paul does in **11:20**.

C. (:21a) Weak or Not . . . Listen to My Boasting

“To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.”

Frank Matera: Before proceeding to Paul’s boasting, it will be helpful to summarize what can be said about the intruders on the basis of **11:1–21a**.

1. First, as Paul has already suggested in **10:12–18**, they have intruded upon his mission field.
2. Second, they preach “*another Jesus*.” But since Paul never explains the content of this statement, it is best not to read too much into it.
3. Third, they have accepted the patronage of the Corinthians and, to that extent, they may have presented themselves as professional orators of the gospel.
4. Fourth, they have boasted in their achievements to the Corinthians.
5. Fifth, they have imposed their authority over the community.

Scott Hafemann: In stark contrast stand Paul’s pride in, affection for, and willingness even to die with the Corinthians (**1:14; 6:12; 7:3–4, 14, 16; 11:11**). In yet another statement of biting irony, even sarcasm, Paul therefore admits to the “*shame*” he feels over being too “*weak*” to act like his opponents (**11:21a**; cf. the earlier reference to his physical weakness in **10:10**). His “*weakness*” is the strength of his apostolic calling and character; his opponents’ supposed “*strength*” reveals the weakness of their claims and the sinfulness of their attitudes and actions.

I. (11:21b-29) WEAKNESS DUE TO SEVERE PRESSURES IN THE MINISTRY

Raymond Collins: The first part of the speech (**11:21b–29**) consists for the most part of a **long list of hardships**. Such lists were a classic part of many rhetorical speeches. Speakers used them to enhance their personal ethos. Use of a catalog of hardships implicitly spoke of the speaker’s endurance, perhaps his bravery under fire. Paul uses a list of hardships to illustrate his poverty and his weakness. His mention of innumerable hardships is virtually a concession to the interlopers, who accused him of being weak in mien and poor in speech (**10:10**). He almost seems to embrace some of the charges that they have directed against him.

Frank Matera: The material may be outlined as follows:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| v. 21b | Introduction |
| vv. 22–23a | Paul’s Jewish and apostolic pedigree |
| v. 23b | Four indications of Paul’s apostolic pedigree: his labors, imprisonments, beatings, and brushes with death |
| vv. 24–25 | Five brushes with death |

- v. 26 Eight dangers while traveling
- v. 27 Four hardships resulting from labor and toil
- v. 28 Anxiety for the churches
- v. 29 Conclusion

A. (11:21b) Introduction of Personal Testimony

“But in whatever respect anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself.”

B. (11:22) Impeccable Jewish Roots

*“Are they Hebrews? So am I.
Are they Israelites? So am I.
Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”*

Richard Pratt: Paul’s Ethnic Qualifications

He began by saying that he had an ethnic background comparable to his opponents. He was a Hebrew—a term that distinguished him from hellenized Jews. He was an Israelite and a descendent of Abraham. As such, Paul was the heir of the grace of God promised to the patriarch Abraham. He was not adopted into Abraham's family as Gentile believers were (**Eph. 2:11–19**). From Paul's point of view, neither Jew nor Gentile was superior in Christ. In the outlook of his opponents, however, it seemed to matter. So Paul responded that he passed even their ethnic criterion.

John MacArthur: The term **Israelites** (**Ex. 35:29; 1 Sam. 2:14; 14:21; 29:1; 2 Kings 3:24; Neh. 11:3; Rom. 9:4**) views the Jewish people in terms of their descent from Jacob (Israel); in fact, the Old Testament refers to them as the “*sons of Israel*” more than six hundred times. It also expresses their theocratic identity as **God’s chosen people** (**Amos 3:2; cf. Ex. 19:5–6; Rom. 9:4–5**). . .

Having established that in every way—socially, religiously, culturally, linguistically, and covenantally—he was not at all inferior to the false apostles, Paul presented credentials that actually proved he was superior to them.

C. (11:23-27) Itemization of Severe Physical and Emotional Pressures as a Servant of Christ

1. (:23a) Offered as Proof of Authentic Christian Ministry
“Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so”

Frank Matera: It is clearly the fourth and final question, however, that is of paramount importance to Paul. Since the intruders claim to be “*ministers of Christ*,” can Paul claim the same? Whereas Paul does not draw any distinction between himself and the intruders in respect to his Jewish pedigree, here he does. Not only is he a minister of Christ; he insists that he is “*even more so*” (*hyper*) than they are, or claim to be. The use of *hyper* as an adverb results in an interesting play on words, since Paul has already identified the intruders as *hyperlian apostoloi* (“*super-apostles*”). Having given them

that ironic title, he now claims to be Christ's minister in a superlative manner, which he will verify by the list of apostolic hardships that follows.

Paul Barnett: This passage teaches us two things about Paul as an example. The first is that as Christians we are humbly to serve others in the gospel. Paul possessed the Christ-given authority to be an apostle. He exercised this ministry faithfully and yet he remained a humble servant and truly human. The great apostle is a good example of one to whom authority was given but who did not become manipulative or authoritarian.

The application to Christian ministers is clear. It is a temptation to use one's position (for instance, 'rector' or 'pastor') or one's gifts (such as leadership ability), or both, to create a circle of admirers. Such people exercise their ministries in the name of Christ but are really involved in an 'ego trip'. More subtly, ministers may encourage people to lean on them like a crutch, out of their own need to be needed. Alternatively, ministers are capable of being corrupted by the power given them in the church so that they become bossy authoritarians who must always have their own way. It must always be remembered that the word '*minister*' means '*servant*'.

2. (:23b-27) Manifold External Pressures – every kind imaginable

“in far more labors”

“in far more imprisonments”

“beaten times without number”

“often in danger of death”

“Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.”

“Three times I was beaten with rods”

“once I was stoned”

“three times I was shipwrecked”

“a night and a day I have spent in the deep”

“I have been on frequent journeys”

“in dangers from rivers”

“dangers from robbers”

“dangers from my countrymen”

“dangers from the Gentiles”

“dangers in the city”

“dangers in the wilderness”

“dangers on the sea”

“dangers among false brethren”

“I have been in labor and hardship”

“through many sleepless nights”

“in hunger and thirst”

“often without food”

“in cold and exposure”

John MacArthur: The false apostles had their letters of commendation (**2 Cor. 3:1**), but Paul had *“on [his] body the brand-marks of Jesus”* (**Gal. 6:17**). The first credential he listed was **suffering**, because that is what Jesus said would characterize His apostles.

False teachers, on the other hand, frequently seek a life of ease and comfort. And since they are part of his kingdom, Satan does not attack them.

D. (:28-29) Incessant Pastoring Pressures in Christian Ministry

1. (:28) Heavier in Weight than Pressure of External Circumstances

*“Apart from such external things,
there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.”*

Frank Matera: Paul now draws the first stage of his boasting to a conclusion. Having mentioned those hardships that can be seen, he turns to the kind of hardship that cannot be externally verified: the daily pressure he experiences in his anxiety and concern for the churches. The disputed phrase that begins this verse, *chōris tōn parektos*, can be taken in two ways:

1. *“apart from what is left unmentioned,”* or
2. *“apart from what is external.”*

In the first instance, Paul would be saying that he is cutting short the list of his hardships (since what he has said is sufficient) in order to go on to other kinds of hardships that he endures. In the second, he would be establishing a contrast between the visible and external hardships that he has just listed and his daily anxiety for the churches that cannot be seen. The majority of commentators argue for the first interpretation on philological grounds but the second certainly makes good sense within this context. In either case, Paul’s main point remains the same: his daily anxiety and concern for the churches is a hardship that most do not know of, even though it afflicts him every day.

Raymond Collins: The interlopers apparently boasted about many things, but it is hardly likely that they were able to boast about a concern for the churches. Paul’s reference to the churches provides a context for all his hardships. What he has endured is for the sake of the communities that he evangelized.

2. (:29) Empathy With Weakness of Others

a. Their Physical and Emotional Struggles

“Who is weak without my being weak?”

b. Their Spiritual Struggles

“Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”

John MacArthur: Paul further expressed his passionate concern for the churches by asking two rhetorical questions. The first, *Who is weak without my being weak?* expressed his **empathy** (cf. **1 Cor. 12:26**) with the pain and suffering of weak, immature believers (**1 Thess. 5:14**; cf. **Rom. 14:1**; **15:1**; **1 Cor. 9:22**). Selfish, prideful false teachers do not care about people’s struggles. Far from helping the weak, they are oppressive and ruthlessly take advantage of them (**Jer. 23:2**; **Ezek. 34:2–6**; **Zech. 11:16**; **Matt. 23:2–4**; **Luke 20:47**).

Paul was also concerned about the “*unruly*” (1 Thess. 5:14), as his second rhetorical question, *Who is led into sin without my intense concern?* reveals. *Intense concern* translates a form of the verb *puro?*, which literally means, “*to set on fire,*” or “*to inflame.*” Paul burned with righteous indignation when God’s people were led into sin, as did Jesus, who solemnly warned, “*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea*” (**Matt. 18:6**). Love is not the enemy of moral indignation but its partner. Holy indignation toward those who lead believers into sin is an expression of the purest kind of love.

Scott Hafemann: The counterpart to Paul’s weakness is his strong anger over the thought of someone falling away from Christ (11:29bc). The reference to his “*burning*” in **verse 29** is therefore an apt metaphor for the intense passion he experiences over those who are led astray (cf. **1 Cor. 7:9**).

II. (:30-33) WEAKNESS MAGNIFIES DIVINE DELIVERANCE

Raymond Collins: Paul’s **escape from Damascus** is clearly an example of his weakness. He did not escape on his own. He needed the help of others in order to escape from the clutches of the ethnarch. Because it is an example of his weakness, Paul can boast about it, as he does. He has, however, said that he boasts in the Lord (**10:17**). Paul may be boasting about his escape not only because it is an example of his weakness but also because he believes that it was the Lord who enabled him to escape as he did.

A. (:30) Boasting in Weakness

“If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.”

Frank Matera: The real function of the unit, however, may be to mark a **turning point** in Paul’s boasting. To this point (**v. 29**) he has boasted in his Jewish heritage and the hardships that show the superlative degree to which he is a minister of Christ. In effect, he has boasted in the kinds of things in which the super-apostles may also have boasted. Having boasted in his hardships and heritage, he now turns to an **episode that highlights his weakness**, an ignominious escape from Damascus that paradoxically **shows the power of God to save him despite his weakness**. Paul’s opening statement clearly introduces this theme of “*weakness*” (*asthenia*), which will be the leitmotif of the remaining units in this section (see **12:5, 9, 10; 13:4**). Moreover, the manner in which he begins this statement (“*if I must boast*”) will find an echo in **12:1** (*kauchastha dei*). For these reasons, it would appear that the function of the unit is to signal a turning point in Paul’s boasting.

B. (:31) Divine Witness to Veracity

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”

C. (:32-33) Example of Divine Deliverance from Hopeless Situation

“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.”

Anthony Thiselton: In vv. 23–33 he “boasts” of his trials and weakness. He highlights matters of difficulty and hardship: hard work, imprisonment, floggings, and threats to his life. He is again ironically inverting the ancient convention of boasting.

This reaches its grand climax in vv. 32–33. It was well-known in the ancient Greco-Roman world that special commendation was given to the brave soldier or mercenary who was literally “first over the wall,” when a city was besieged. Imagine how the besieged defenders would pour molten lead and whatever was to hand on the head of any soldier rash enough to climb rickety ladders up the wall of the city. Paul, with supreme irony, does not directly use the phrase “first over the wall,” but people would see the allusion: he points out that his travel “over the wall” was in the opposite direction: he was escaping from King Aretas (v. 32) in order to escape opposition from enemies in Damascus! He was indeed “first over the wall,” but in the opposite direction! This is a clear example of an outstanding Pauline “joke.” Many scholars, including **E. A. Judge** and **Stephen Travis**, have since made the point very clear. It may look like boasting even in a cowardly escape!

Richard Pratt: Paul introduced this boasting with an oath formula, acknowledging God as the one who is to be praised forever. Paul swore that God knew that he was not lying, and then proceeded to describe the time he barely escaped from Damascus with his life (**Acts 9:23–25**). This event demonstrated his devoted service to Christ, but it also made it clear that God cared for him and deserved all the praise.

Scott Hafemann: Hence, to wrap up his boasting in his weakness as the consequence of his calling to be an apostle, Paul provides one final and especially poignant example of his suffering. Like his suffering in Asia recounted in **1:8**, his opponents may well have used this incident against him as an example of his cowardice. But from Paul’s perspective, his narrow escape in Damascus, like his despairing even of life (cf. **1:8–11**), serves to highlight God’s deliverance and sustenance. It forms a paradigm of his calling to suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel. In **Heckel’s** words, Paul’s flight from Damascus is the “counter-history to the vision that brought about Paul’s calling.” Paul’s litany of suffering in **11:23–29** is nothing new; weakness was the contour of his calling from the very beginning of his apostleship.

III. (12:1-10) WEAKNESS KEEPS ONE DEPENDENT ON CHRIST’S GRACE AND POWER DESPITE THE MOUNTAINTOP PRIVILEGE OF VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

Charles Swindoll: Ours is the age of the **self-made person** who is more than adequate. Not only do we want to appear as though we have our lives together, but we want it to

appear that we have put our own lives together better than most. The word “adequate” originally comes from Latin and means “make level to” or “being equal to a requirement.” The common colloquialism “I’m equal to the task” would be a good way to put it in today’s idiom. But the idea of more than adequate brings with it a touch of conceit, doesn’t it? “Not only can I do it, but I can do it better than most. I’m self-sufficient.” The sense is that we can measure up to any task. We dislike the thought that we might be unequal to any challenge . . . or that someone else might be more “equal” than we are! This kind of thinking tends toward competition, rivalry, and even open conflict. We dislike the thought that we might be unequal to any challenge . . . or that someone else might be more “equal” than we are! This kind of thinking tends toward competition, rivalry, and even open conflict.

In our era of self-sufficiency, three kinds of people appear to have it all together. First, the **highly intelligent** seem to have an edge on everybody. With keen wits and a couple of academic degrees to boot, the intellectuals try to stay on top of every situation with a cascade of golden phrases meant to outdo the competition. Second, the **greatly gifted** tend to dominate pop culture. Talented musicians produce smash hits. Sports icons rake in an obscene amount of cash. Good-looking orators can demand a huge honorarium or draw votes in the political realm. For the gifted, winning comes so easy. Third, in our Christian circles the **deeply religious** appear to glide through life with an appropriate Scripture on their tongues and an abundance of faith to move mountains and create joy in their hearts. They describe their prayer and devotional lives as rich and rewarding and they exude a sense of calm and tranquility. They seem to be so aligned with the Holy Spirit that nothing could pull them off course.

What we don’t often see among the highly intelligent, greatly gifted, and deeply spiritual, however, are the great gaps of inadequacy that they live with. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 4:7**, “*For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*” That verse should cut every one of us down to size. Nobody gave themselves their smarts, talents, or spiritual devotion. Everything we have—from ability to opportunity—comes to us as a gift from God. James said, “*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights*” (**Jas. 1:17**).

So how does God remind us to acknowledge His generosity and to rely on His strength when He’s given us such marvelous abilities? How does God prevent the arrogance of more-than-enough adequacy and the sin of self-sufficiency? He gives us a thorn in the flesh. Let’s look closely at **2 Corinthians 12** to gain more insight into this significant—and often overlooked—reality.

Frank Matera: The theme of **boasting in weakness** comes to its climax in this unit with the verb “*to boast*” (*kauchaomai*) occurring five times (**vv. 1, 5** [twice], **6, 9**) and the noun “*weakness*” (*astheneia*) four times (**vv. 5, 9** [twice], **10**). Thus, Paul begins by saying that he must boast even though it is not profitable (**12:1**). Midway through the narrative he then turns from boasting in the man in Christ who was snatched into

paradise to boasting in his weaknesses (12:5). Finally, he concludes with his willingness to boast and rejoice in his weaknesses (12:9b–10).

Eric Mason: Main Idea: God does his best work when you are weak.

- I. It Is Better to Boast in Our Weaknesses (12:1-5).
- II. Thorns in the Flesh Expose Our Weaknesses (12:6-8).
- III. God's Grace Is Sufficient for Our Weaknesses (12:9-10).

A. (12:1-6) Spiritual Privilege Can Go to Your Head

(In Paul's case, Spiritual Privilege = Direct Access to Divine Visions and Revelations)

1. (:1) Visions and Revelations = New Theme for Necessary Boasting

*“Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable;
but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.”*

John MacArthur: At first glance, the story of Paul's vision seems out of place in a section dealing with his suffering and weakness. But the Greeks believed that those who truly represented the gods would experience mystical visions, which some tried to induce through drunken orgies. Undoubtedly, then, the false apostles claimed visions and revelations of their own. The Corinthians, swept away by their phony claims, groveled before those lying braggarts. Thus, it was necessary for Paul (reluctantly) to relate his own **genuine vision**.

Scott Hafemann: The striking absence of references to visions and revelations in Paul's letters demonstrates his lack of interest in sharing such private, spiritual experiences. He viewed them as without benefit either for establishing his authority as an apostle or for building up the church (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–2; 14:18–19). Indeed, that Paul would refer in 12:1 to his “*surpassingly great*” visions and revelations (12:7) and then only recount one of them is itself a reflection of his conviction that such experiences are tangential to a genuine boast in the Lord (cf. 10:17–18).

2. (:2-4) Recounting the Incredible Experience

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.”

David Garland: The use of the third person may derive from the nature of the experience itself. Such an overwhelming event — he is not sure if it was in the body or out of the body — resulted in his observing “himself undergoing the experience” as a kind of spectator.

Frank Matera: By obliquely referring to himself as “*a man in Christ*,” then, Paul is boasting in the Lord who is the source of his ecstatic experience. . .

It now becomes apparent why it is not profitable for him to boast in this ecstatic experience: Although this experience may have assured him that he was Christ's apostle, it did not provide him with any "revelation" with which he could build up the church. To that extent it is unprofitable for him or anyone else to boast in ecstatic experiences. If the super-apostles had already boasted in such experiences, Paul is surely making a pointed critique of them.

Richard Pratt: Paul described this level of heaven as paradise, the place that the dead in Christ enter (**Luke 23:43**). While there, Paul heard inexpressible things, words from angels and God that man is not permitted to tell. Paul's opponents probably spoke freely about their supposedly heavenly revelation, much like the apostle John was instructed to do when he received the revelation of the Apocalypse (**Rev. 1:11**). But Paul made the supremacy of his heavenly experience plain by saying that he was not permitted to convey what he heard there. By this means, Paul argued that his authority over the church at Corinth was far beyond any authority claimed by the false apostles. His revelation was greater than any revelation his opponents had received.

R. Kent Hughes: Biblical cosmology views the heavens as threefold. The first heaven is the atmosphere. The second heaven is the place of the stars. And the third heaven is the abode of God. The parallel designation "*paradise*" seals the locale of the third heaven as the very presence of God. The word "*paradise*" occurs in only two other places in the New Testament: **Luke 23:43** where Christ says to the repentant thief, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise,*" and **Revelation 2:7** where the Spirit says, "*To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.*"

John MacArthur: The true measure of a man of God does not lie in his claims of visions and experiences with God, or the force of his personality, the size of his ministry, his educational degrees, or any other human criteria. A true man of God is marked by how much he has suffered in the war against the kingdom of darkness, how concerned he is for people, how humble he is, and how accurately he handles the supernatural revelation found in God's Word (**2 Tim. 2:15**). Like Paul, such men patiently endure the suffering and humiliation of this life, knowing that such "*momentary, light affliction is producing ... an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison*" (**2 Cor. 4:17**).

3. (:5-6) Continued Apologies for Necessity of Boasting

"On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me."

Frank Matera: The visions and revelations came from Christ, who presumably transported him to paradise. Boasting in this man is boasting in the Lord. . .

Since Paul wants the Corinthians to evaluate him on the basis of what they have seen and heard from him—rather than on the basis of what he boasts that he has done—he writes that he is refraining from such boasting (v. 6b). This statement is also a bit off-putting, since he has in fact engaged in boasting. But here Paul seems to have in mind any further boasting about his pedigree, hardships, and revelations. Having reluctantly boasted in these, he will not boast further, except in the thorn for the flesh. Unlike his rivals, he wants the Corinthians to evaluate him on the basis of what they can see (his ministry among them) and hear (the gospel he proclaims), rather than on the basis of what he boasts about himself.

R. Kent Hughes: Paul forbids any assessment of himself and his ministry by standards other than his actions and words. This provides essential wisdom for navigating the currents of the modern church. We must understand that regardless of how great a personal claim is made to visions and ecstasies, nothing can replace conduct and speech as indications of truly following Christ.

B. (12:7-10) Physical Handicaps Can Bring You to Your Knees

1. (:7) God Can Get Our Attention -- Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

a. Privilege of the Revelations

“And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations”

b. Protection Against Pride

“for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself . . .”

“– to keep me from exalting myself.”

c. Pain in the Neck

*“there was given me a thorn in the flesh,
a messenger of Satan to buffet me”*

Robert Hughes: Because Paul had just called the false apostles *messengers of Satan* (11:14-15), some have concluded that his **thorn** was the continual distress caused by his many enemies.

John MacArthur: *Skolops* (*thorn*) could be better translated “*stake*,” graphically indicating the intensity of the suffering it caused Paul; it was not a small thorn but a large stake. . .

It is best to understand Paul's thorn as a demonic messenger of Satan sent to torment him by using the deceivers to seduce the Corinthians into a rebellion against him. At least four lines of evidence support that interpretation:

- 1) First, in the overwhelming majority of its uses in the New Testament (including every other occurrence in Paul's writings), *angelos* (*messenger*) refers to angels. An angel sent from Satan would, of course, be a demon.

- 2) Second, the verb translated *torment* always refers to harsh treatment from someone (*Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65; 1 Cor. 4:11; 1 Peter 2:20*).
- 3) Third, the Old Testament sometimes refers metaphorically to opponents as *thorns* (e.g., **Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13; Judg. 2:3; Ezek. 28:24**).
- 4) Finally, the verb translated **leave** in **verse 8** is always used in the New Testament to speak of someone departing. Likely, then, the demonic messenger was tormenting Paul by being the indwelling spirit in the leading false apostle (cf. **2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1**). Again, this is consistent with Paul's testimony that his severest suffering came from his concern for the church (**11:28-29**).

2. (:8) We Can't Always Get Our Way -- Prayer for Deliverance

"Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me."

3. (:9) We Need to Learn the Big Lesson of Life = Embracing the Sufficiency of God's Grace and Power

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Frank Matera: The thorn for the flesh then is the necessary antidote to the superexaltation that accompanies visions and revelations, the constant reminder of Paul's weakness and dependency on Christ. Without this antidote, it is all too easy to boast in oneself and forget the paradox of the cross that underlies the gospel message.

John MacArthur: When God declared to Paul in answer to his prayer, "*My grace is sufficient for you,*" He affirmed the total sufficiency of His grace for every need in life—to believe the gospel; to understand and apply the Word to all the issues of life; to overcome sin and temptation; to endure suffering, disappointment, and pain; to obey God; to serve Him effectively; and to worship Him. God's grace was sufficient for the deepest pain Paul (or any other believer) could ever experience.

Raymond Collins: For the Christian, the paradigm is that the Christ, who was crucified in human weakness (cf. **1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2**), was raised in power (**2 Cor. 13:4**; cf. **Rom. 1:4**). The **paradox of the cross** makes sense of Paul's weakness. The Lord is able to use Paul's weakness in order to manifest the power experienced in the faith of the communities that Paul has evangelized.

R. Kent Hughes: But what we most need to see is that **power in weakness** is shorthand for the **cross of Christ**. In God's plan of redemption, there had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection). And this power-in-weakness connection is what Paul reflected on when he contemplated Christ's praying three times amidst his weakness and powerlessness in Gethsemane before his death on the cross,

which was followed by the power of the resurrection! Paul came to understand and embrace the fact that his thorn in the flesh was essential to his ongoing weakness and the experience of Christ's ongoing power.

4. (:10) We Need to Practice Contentment in All Circumstances

“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

R. Kent Hughes: The **paradox of power** is: *“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* God doesn't need our perceived strengths, if that is what we depend upon. He wants our weaknesses, our sufferings, our inadequacies, our disabilities, our failures, our fears. Even more, he wants us to boast of our weaknesses, so that Christ in his power will pitch his tent in us.

(12:11-13) EPILOGUE -- THE MARKS OF GENUINE APOSTLESHIP SHOULD HAVE MADE SUCH BOASTING UNNECESSARY

George Shillington: Paul concludes his Fool's Speech as he opened it (**11:1-15**), with justification for his foolish boasting. The closing word echoes to the same ironic tone that has marked the speech throughout, the only new material being the signs of a true apostle (**12:12**).

Frank Matera: The material begins with a retrospective statement in which Paul blames the Corinthians for not commending him (**v. 11a**). He then explains why the Corinthians should have commended him (**vv. 11b-12**), concluding with a rhetorical question and mock apology (**v. 13**).

A. (:11) Commendation Should Have Come From Others

“I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.”

Frank Matera: Having said that if the Corinthians had commended him it would not have been necessary for him to commend himself by foolish boasting, Paul now provides the Corinthians with two reasons why they should have commended him. First, he is not inferior to the super-apostles. Second, the signs of an apostle were performed in their midst through his ministry.

John MacArthur: Instead of having to defend himself to them Paul should have been commended by the Corinthians. There was no excuse for their confusion. They should have risen to his defense; after all, he was their spiritual father (**1 Cor. 4:15**; cf. **9:2**), the one who brought the gospel to Corinth (**Acts 18:1-8**; **1 Cor. 3:6, 10; 15:1**; **2 Cor. 10:14**). The false apostles had their deceptive letters of commendation, but the

Corinthians themselves were Paul's letter of commendation (3:2). What made their failure to defend him all the more inexcusable was that the Corinthians knew that the allegations against Paul were false. They had observed his life during his ministry among them (Acts 18:11) and knew that he was above reproach. To be silent when aspersions are cast on the lives and ministries of godly men is to share in the guilt of their detractors.

Scott Hafemann: In 12:11, Paul closes his apology by returning to the point with which he began in 11:1. He has become a fool by boasting in his personal distinctives and private revelations. A desperate situation has called for desperate measures. This is the tragedy of the situation. The need to match his opponents in their boast should not have been necessary in the first place, since the Corinthians themselves should have commended Paul as his "*letter of recommendation*" (cf. 3:2; 5:12; 7:12; 10:7, 14; also 1 Cor. 9:2).

B. (:12) Authentication Should Have Been Obvious

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."

Richard Pratt: The apostle admitted that he had made a fool of himself by taking on the strategy of his opponents in boasting as he had. Yet, he insisted that the Corinthians had driven him to it. How was this so? He ought to have been commended by the congregation. They already knew him and his ministry. He was not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles" and they knew this. Of course, Paul was aware that he was nothing in himself, apart from the grace of God. Yet, the Corinthians should have remembered his signs, wonders and miracles that mark an apostle. Paul had performed miracles in many places as he had proclaimed the gospel of Christ, but in Corinth he had done these things with great perseverance. Time and again, he had demonstrated the divine authorization of his ministry before the Corinthians.

R. Kent Hughes: Of equal apostolic significance is that Paul performed these apostolic signs "*with utmost patience*" (or literally, "*with all perseverance or endurance*") amidst incessant beatings and shipwrecks and dangers and pastoral afflictions. **Calvin** comments, "Such heroic virtue is like a heavenly seal by which the Lord marks out his apostle." It was not just the signs that proved his apostleship; it was that he did them under great stress with magnificent patience and perseverance. Astonishing apostolic fortitude!

Raymond Collins: The performance of signs and wonders of itself does not, however, establish one's apostolic credentials. Since **Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; and 2 Thess. 2:9** show that signs and wonders were performed beyond the parameters of Jesus's disciples, discernment is necessary in order to interpret signs and wonders properly. Indeed, although some signs and wonders are done through God's power, others, like those done by the Egyptian magicians of Pharaoh's court, have some other power as their source.

John MacArthur: The signs that were the benchmark of a true apostle of Jesus Christ were performed by Paul at Corinth. The passive voice of the verb translated were performed emphasizes that it was God's power working through Paul that enabled him to perform those signs. The apostles were conduits for divine power, not deceptive magicians. That they saw firsthand the signs Paul performed is another reason the Corinthians should have defended him. In addition to the supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles the Bible lists several other signs, or characteristics, of the apostles.

1. First, the apostles were sovereignly chosen by God for their ministry.
2. Second, the apostles were personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Third, the apostles had to have been eyewitnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.
4. Fourth, the apostles received the gospel by direct revelation from Jesus Christ, not from other men.
5. Fifth, the apostles were the foundation of the church.
6. Sixth, the apostles were given unique ministry duties.
 - a. Their first responsibility was to be disciplined by the Lord.
 - b. A second essential responsibility of the apostles was to preach the gospel.
 - c. A third responsibility of the apostles was to exercise their divine power in the realm of the supernatural.
 - d. Finally, the apostles collectively were given the task of writing the New Testament.
7. Seventh, the twelve apostles were promised a unique place of honor in the future.

The stringent requirements for the apostolic office are such that only the Twelve and Paul qualified. Claims to apostleship made by others throughout the history of the church are therefore false.

C. (:13) Sarcasm Has Become Necessary

“For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong.”

Robert Hughes: But, at its heart, the accusation of Paul's inadequacy was actually caused by the inferiority complex of the Corinthians themselves. Paul treated Corinth just as well as any other church (**12:13**), with one exception: he did not become a burden to it. The Corinthians concluded that Paul had put them in an inferior position, lacked love (**11:11**), or, worse, had committed a sin (**11:7**). Paul was full of knowledge (**11:6**) and power, but they interpreted his reluctance to take their money as a slam against their self-worth. To this absurd conclusion Paul had given patient exhortations throughout **chapters 1-7** and, in **11:1 - 12:10**, a most intimate look into his private reasons for boasting in weakness. But he also had reserved a few sarcastic remarks, in case some still missed the message: *“Forgive me this wrong”* (**12:13**)! Paul's sarcasm, however, is always set in the context of patient and careful exhortation, never as an unthinking outburst of criticism.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) In what ways would Christ's detractors have accused Him of being foolish and weak?
- 2) What must it have been like to experience such "*direct revelations of the Lord*"? What subjects would have been covered?
- 3) How have we found Christ's grace and power sufficient in our areas of weakness? What is God's special program for humbling you?
- 4) How does a nobody like Paul become an eminent somebody in the service of Christ?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Talk about toughing it out! Just read through that daunting list of trials and tribulations. What would it take to rob us of our joy? It makes us ashamed to see how easily we become discontented.
- 2) Have we ever been confronted with a situation where it was necessary for us to defend our leadership or our ministry as Paul had to? How did we do so without coming across as prideful and arrogant?
- 3) How intense is our pastoral concern for others compared to the concern we place on our own comfort and protection?
- 4) How focused were Paul's entreaties that he could recount three specific occasions where he labored at length with the Lord regarding this thorn in the flesh (as opposed to less specific constant droning on and on about the matter)? How could this hardship be both a messenger from Satan and part of God's grand design to show His grace and power?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Stedman: But what remarkable boasts he makes, with not a word of what we might expect, not a word of what many preachers boast about today. He does not display an impressive list of scholastic degrees. He does not mention any of the famous converts he has worked with. He does not make any claims about the great crowds he

has preached to or the remarkable miracles that accompanied his ministry. He does not say anything about being an internationally known apostle. All of these things were true, but Paul did not say one word about them, in sharp contrast with many who are preaching today. Rather, he begins to boast about an incredible list of hardships -- beatings, fastings, imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, dangers from every side. Then he includes the almost embarrassing story about the night he has to be let down over a wall in a basket in order to escape a plot to take his life. That does not sound like much to boast about because it represented a collapse of all his dreams and plans. . .

Paul, of course, was not one of the original twelve, but he had seen Christ on the Damascus road. Now he tells us here that there were many occasions when he had visions of the Lord. That does not mean a fantasy or something he saw in his mind. He actually saw the Lord; the Lord appeared to him and taught him. This is the basis of his claim to be an apostle. Paul said that Jesus himself had taught him what he had learned, the truths of the gospel that he preached. That, incidentally, is an important fact to bear in mind when people are challenging the apostle's authority in these days. We must remember that he himself said that it was the Lord who taught him these things. After many years of ministering around the world, Paul had a chance one day to compare notes with the original apostles, Peter, James, John and others, and he tells us in Galatians that they could add nothing to what he had learned from the Lord himself. So here is the basis of this great apostle's teaching: It came directly from the Lord in personal appearances.

Ritchie: Weakness? Yes. Why? so that Jesus might be seen. Do you feel in your heart that somehow you got gypped, that God sent Satan's messenger to the wrong person, that he should have gone two blocks down and one over? Do you get angry and bitter at God over the "stakes" which are in your life? Don't do that. Thank God for them. "Because of that stake, and because of that buffeting," Jesus is saying "they'll see me, and that is what it's all about. Let them see me, and don't complain. I'm weaving a tapestry, and when it is all finished I'm going to let you see it. And I'll show you the very spot where you pulled it all together for me, along with the rest of your brothers and sisters."

When you see that tapestry spread out throughout eternity, you are going to stand there in your redeemed body and say, "You're too much, God; you're just too much! Thank you so much for the stake, thank you for Satan's messenger. Thank you that I learned the lesson that your grace is sufficient for me, in whatever state I find myself." And you can say right now, "I shall be content, Lord, wherever I find myself, with the insults, the difficulties, the persecutions, the weaknesses. I shall be content because I know you're in charge of the whole program."

Steve Zeisler: Paul said he worked harder and was constantly on the move, and he experienced deprivation; his reward was usually more hardship! The evidence of God's approval is not higher standing or the goods of this earth--none of the things the Corinthian opposition would have pointed to as evidence of the favor of God. For Paul,

very often doing the best meant raising the hatred of those who were dug in against Christ and his truth.

John Piper: Weaknesses here are not imperfect behaviors. They are circumstances and situations and experiences and wounds that make us look weak; things we would probably get rid of if we had the human strength.

- If we were "strong" we might return the insult with such an effective put down that the opponent would wither and everyone would admire our wit and cleverness.
- If we were "strong" we might take charge of our own fortune and turn back the emerging hardship and change circumstances so that they go the way we want them to and not force us into discomfort.
- If we were "strong" we might turn back the persecution so quickly and so decisively that no one would mess with us again.
- If we were "strong" we might use our resources to get out of the calamity or distress as fast as possible, or take charge of the situation and marshal our own resources so masterfully as to minimize its pressure.

But in reality we don't usually have that kind of human strength, and even when we may have it, Christians don't use it the way the world does. Jesus tells us not to return evil for evil (**Matt. 5:38-42**). Paul said in **1 Corinthians 4:12-13**. "*When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate.*" And then he added, "*We have become like the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things.*" In other words, this kind of lifestyle, this kind of response to abuse, looks weak and beggarly and feeble and anemic and inept--at least it looks that way to thrive on pride and equate power with the best come back.

So the answer to our first question is that weaknesses are not sins but experiences and situations and circumstances and wounds that are hard to bear and that we can't remove either because they are beyond our control or because love dictates that we not return evil for evil. . .

What is the purpose of such weaknesses? Is there a goal or an aim for why the weaknesses come? Why insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities, troubles? Why can't I find a job? Why am I trapped in this awful marriage? Why does my dad have cancer? Why can't I have children? Why do I have no friends? Why is nothing working in my life?

Paul gives three brief answers about his own experience and I think they are tremendously important for us to live by.

First, he says that Satan has the purpose to buffet you or harass you (**v. 7**). And so it is OK to pray for relief. That's what Paul did until he got word from the Lord. Pain is not a

good thing in itself. God does not delight in your suffering. Satan does and he must be resisted.

Second, God's purpose over and through Satan's harassment is our humility. Paul was in danger of pride and self-exaltation and God took steps to keep him humble. This is an utterly strange thing in our self-saturated age. God thinks humility is more important than comfort. Humility is more important than freedom from pain. He will give us a mountain top experience in Paradise, and then bring us through anguish of soul lest we think that we have risen above the need for total reliance on his grace. So his purpose is our humility and lowliness and reliance on him (cf. 1:9; 4:7).

Finally, God's purpose in our weaknesses is to glorify the grace and power of his Son. This is the main point of **verses 9-10**. Jesus says, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" God's design is to make you a showcase for Jesus' power. But not necessarily the way the market demands: not by getting rid of all our weaknesses; but by giving strength to endure and even rejoice in tribulation.

Let God be God here. If he wills to show the perfection of his Son's power in our weakness instead of by our escape from weakness then he knows best, trust him. **Hebrews 11** is a good guide here. It says that by faith some escaped the edge of the sword (v. 34) and by faith some were killed by the sword (v. 37). By faith some stopped the mouths of lions, and by faith others were sawn asunder. By faith some were mighty in war, and by faith others suffered chains and imprisonment (see also **Phil. 4:11-13**).

The ultimate purpose of God in our weakness is to glorify the kind of power that moved Christ to the cross and kept him there until the work of love was done. Paul said that Christ crucified was foolishness to the Greeks, a stumbling block to the Jews, but to those who are called it is the power of God and the wisdom of God (**1 Cor. 1:23f.**).

The deepest need that you and I have in weakness and adversity is not quick relief, but the well-grounded confidence that what is happening to us is part of the greatest purpose of God in the universe--the glorification of the grace and power of his Son--the grace and power that bore him to the cross and kept him there until the work of love was done. That's what God is building into our lives. That is the meaning of weakness, insults, hardships, persecution, calamity.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Paul is very concerned that others not judge his spirituality and standing before God on the basis of his glorious experience in receiving this vision. Here is another example of how different Paul and his fellow-apostles are from the false apostles—the intruders, as **D. A. Carson** likes to call them. They cannot wait to make their public proclamations of glorious spiritual experiences. Paul can hardly be forced to speak or write about them. Why? Why does Paul not wish to tell the Corinthians about his wonderful vision? I think the reasons are clear and simple.

1. First and foremost, telling of his experience would draw attention to himself, rather than to Christ. Paul preaches Christ crucified. He refuses to change his message or his methods so that the messenger becomes more prominent than the message, and especially the Messiah.

2. Second, telling of his experience is impossible, since the words (and the visible images he saw) are inexpressible.
3. Third, telling of his experience detracts attention from the gospel. Paul is concerned that people hear the gospel and be saved, not that they hear his experience and try to replicate it.
4. Fourth, making much of his experience emphasizes the sensational aspects of the Christian experience, rather than the normal Christian life. It might lead some to conclude that spirituality and significance are linked to such spectacular experiences, when the more accurate test is suffering unjustly for the sake of the gospel, and our Lord, of whom the gospel speaks. The Corinthians are already caught up with the sensational and disinterested in the painful aspects of the Christian life. Triumphalism is all about the sensational, and maturity is all about steadfast perseverance in the midst of adversity and suffering, and stability in the face of false teaching (see **Ephesians 4:10-16**).
5. Fifth, Paul's experiences are personal and impossible to verify or test. Visions cannot be verified; only the teaching or message they are said to convey can be tested by Scripture.

Will Pounds: The more weak and contemptible Paul was in the eyes of the Corinthians the more they must be compelled to glorify Christ by whom he was strengthened in his spirit and made successful. If Christ might receive more glory by means of these thorns, he was not only willing to endure them, but ready to glory in them even unto death. Paul remained as weak as ever; but, being persuaded that Christ's power should be the more magnified through his weakness, he was satisfied. If we are conscious that we are wholly without strength, and can do nothing of ourselves, we shall be more simple and uniform in our dependence on Christ. In our weakness we find His strength and He alone is glorified.

Paul says I use my thorns for God's glory and my personal growth. What do you do with your circumstances? Let God speak to you through them. Let Him use them to conform you to the image and likeness of Christ.

Robert Gromacki: The church willingly submitted itself to those with whom it was impressed (**11:20**). They were awed by strong, authoritative personalities, not by humble servants. In appearance, the Judaizers were like the former and the apostle like the latter.

With sarcasm, Paul pointed out five ways in which they were impressed with religious braggarts and tyrants.

1. First, the Judaizers had enslaved them . . .
2. Second, they exploited the church . . .
3. Third, they took from the church, but never gave anything in return . . .

4. Fourth, they exalted themselves over the church. . .

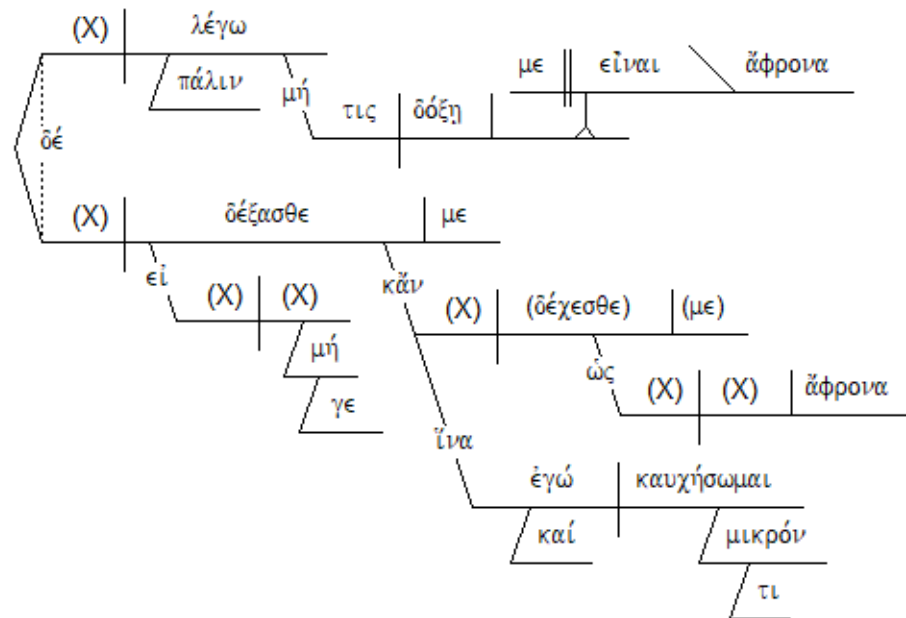
5. Fifth, they insulted the church . . . they humiliated it.

Charles Swindoll: SEVEN WAYS GOD TEACHES HIS CHILDREN

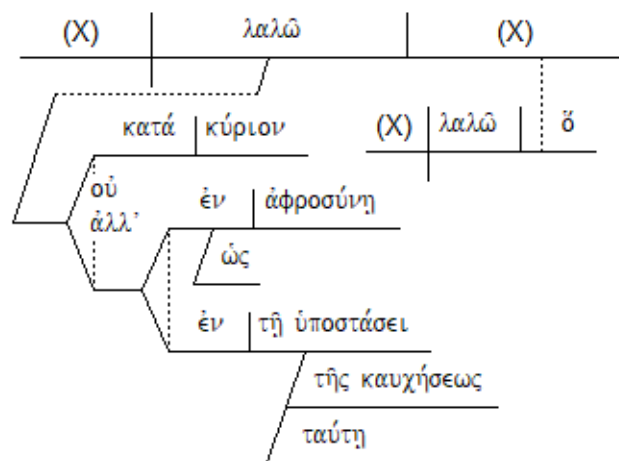
1. By meeting our needs when we are helpless, He teaches us trust.
2. By making us wait for what we need or want, He teaches us patience.
3. By stretching us beyond the realm of the familiar, He teaches us vision.
4. By taking us through the consequences of wrong choices, He teaches us values.
5. By allowing us to fail and make periodic mistakes, He teaches us wisdom.
6. By permitting pain and affliction, He teaches us humility.
7. By involving us in the lives of difficult people, He teaches us unselfishness.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

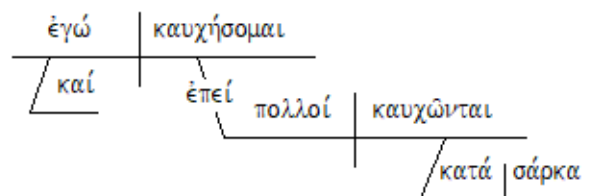
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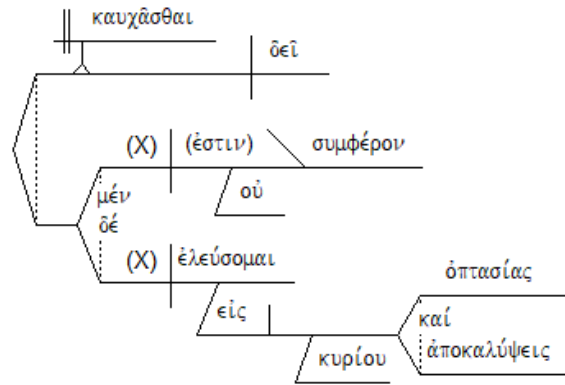
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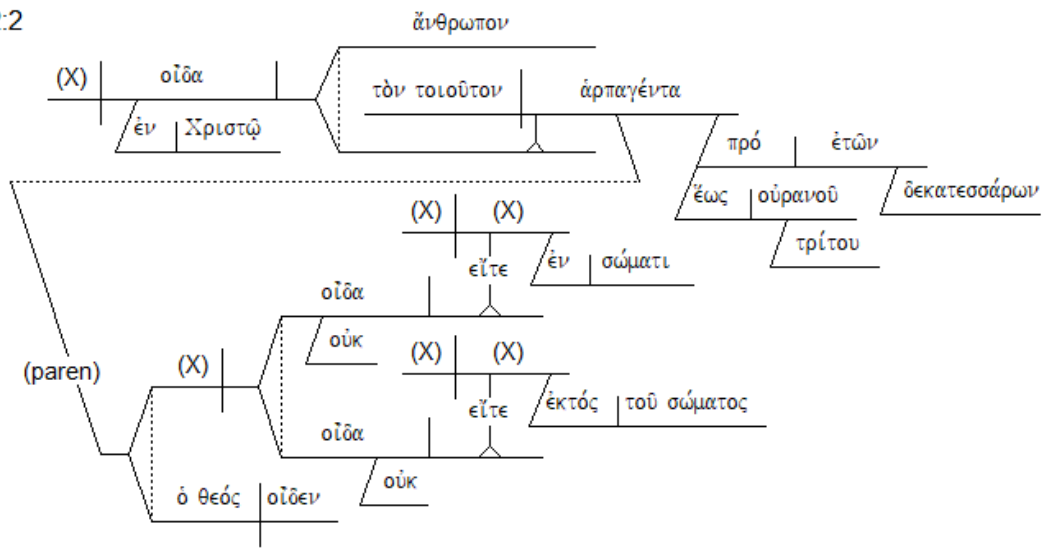
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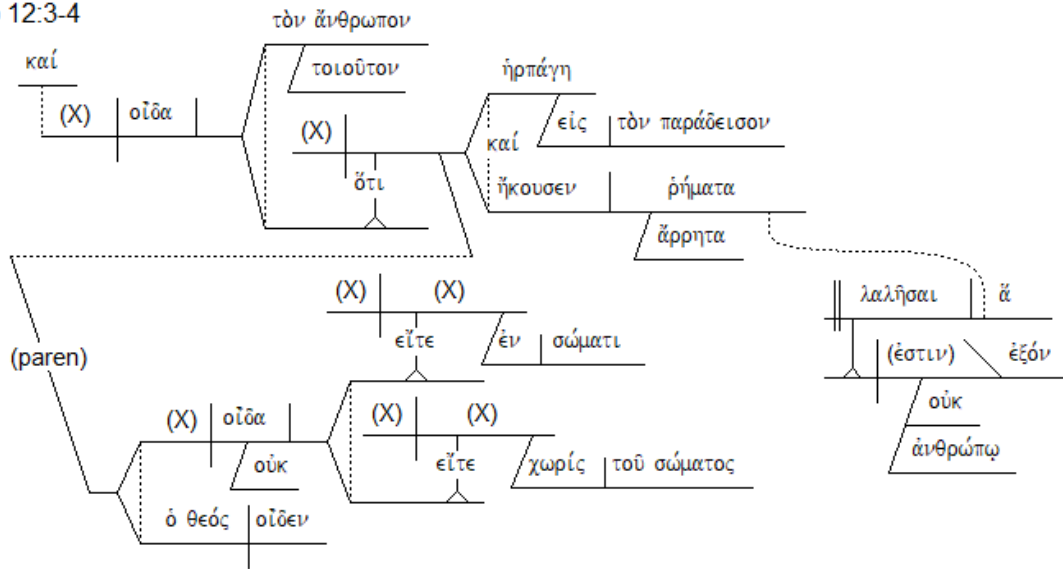
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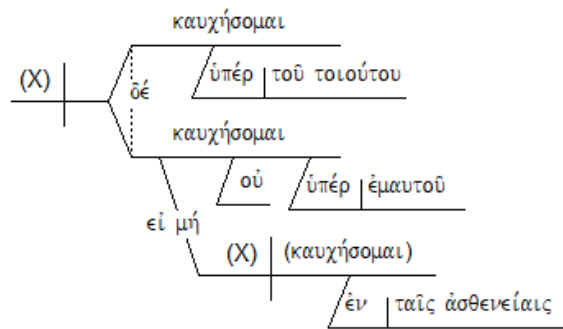
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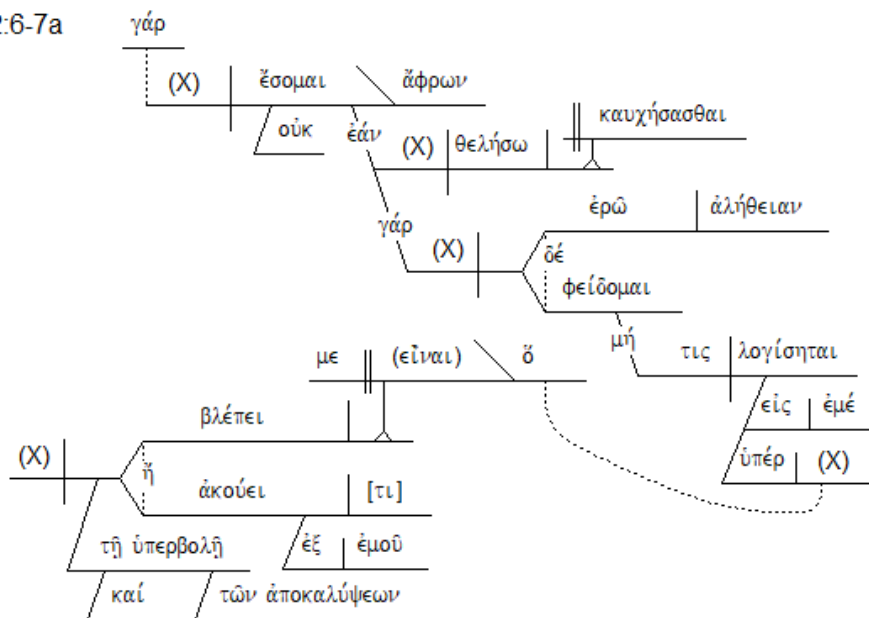
2Co 12:3-4



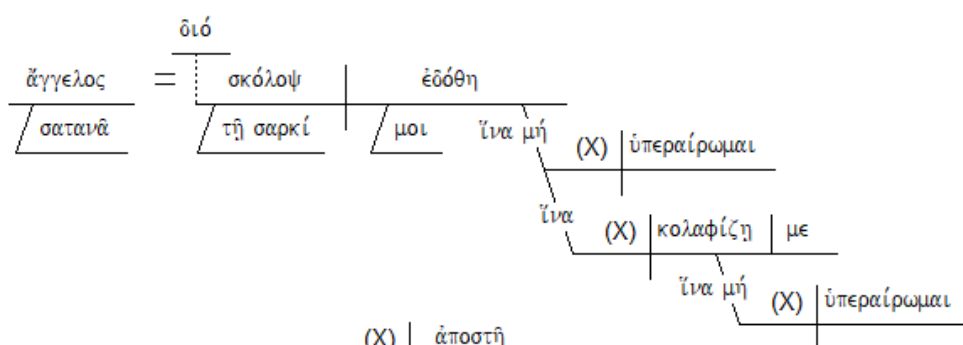
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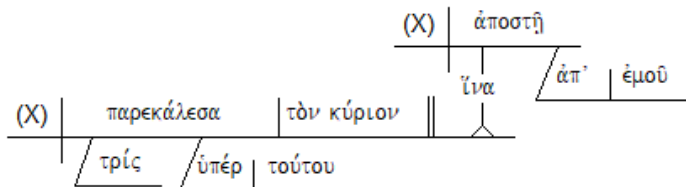
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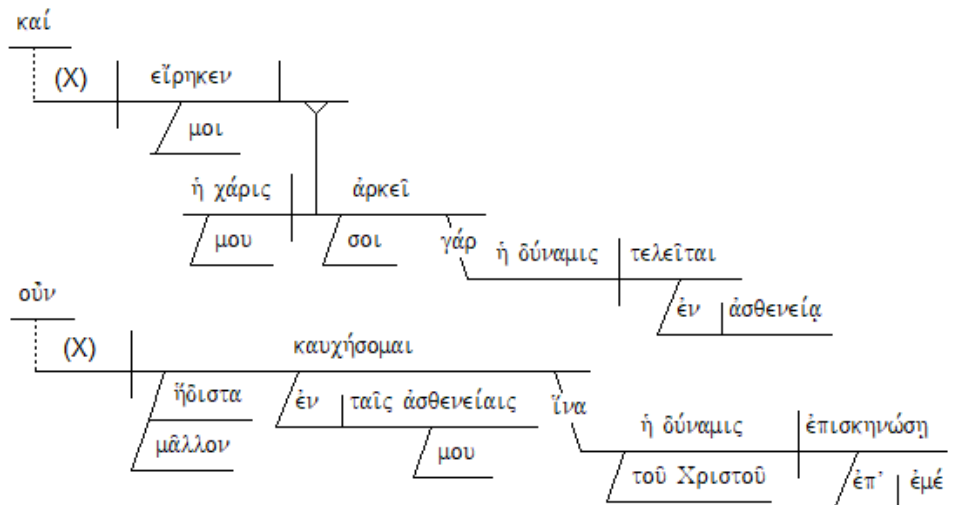
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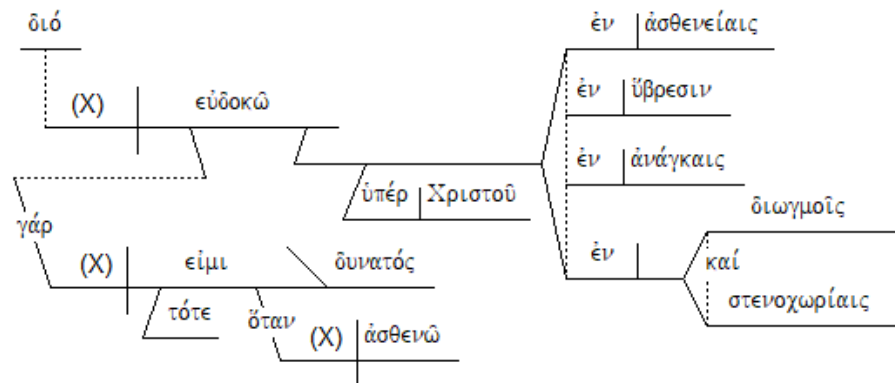
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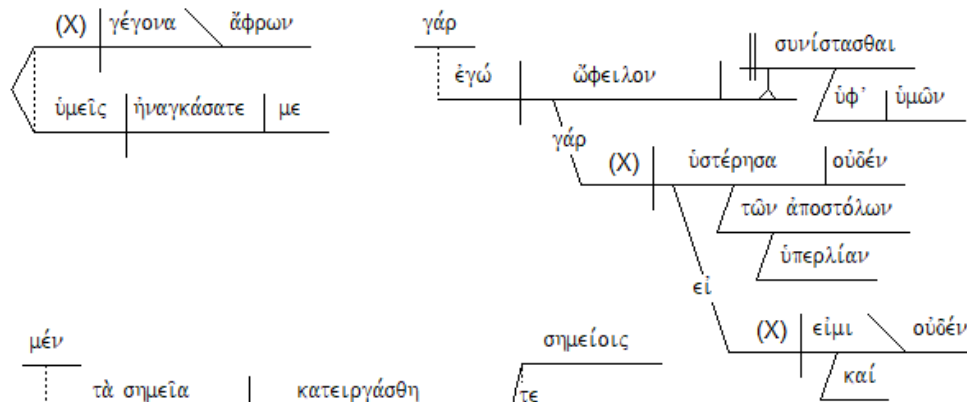
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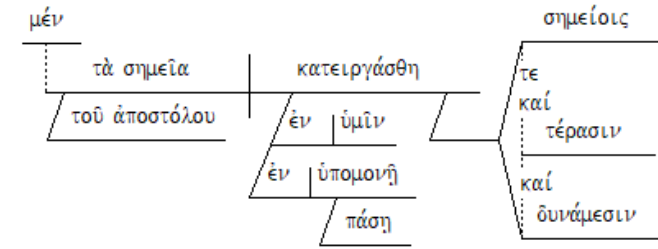
2Co 12:10



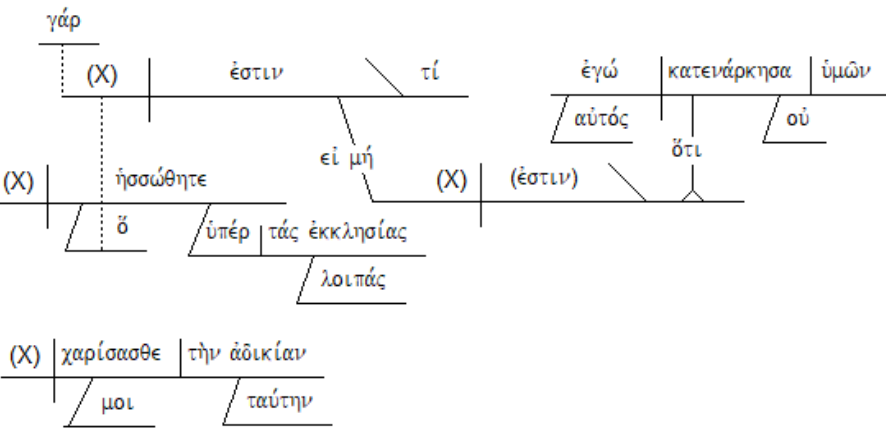
2Co 12:11



2Co 12:12



2Co 12:13



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 12:14 – 13:14

TITLE: *YOU'RE MESSING WITH THE WRONG DUDE*

BIG IDEA:

SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FOR THE PURPOSE OF LOVING EDIFICATION (INCLUDING DISCIPLINE WHEN NECESSARY)

(Preparations for Paul's Third Visit to the Corinthian Believers)

INTRODUCTION:

Scott Hafemann: **Second Corinthians 12:14–21** is the last section of Paul's **extended defense** of his legitimacy as an apostle, which extends from **10:7 – 12:21**. Having completed his argument, Paul returns in **13:1–10** to the exhortations with which he began in **10:1–6**. The admonitions of **10:1–6** and **13:1–10** thereby frame the apologetic of **10:7 – 12:21**. Moreover, these last two sections of Paul's letter, both of which are introduced by a reference to his third visit (**12:14; 13:1**), do not introduce new material but conclude Paul's letter by recalling earlier discussions. In doing so, Paul highlights what he considers the central issues in the conflict. In **13:11–14**, he then ends his letter with a final word of exhortation and a closing benediction.

Frank Matera: The material of **12:14 – 13:10** is the third and final section of **10:1 – 13:10**, which, in turn, is the third and final part of **2 Corinthians**. In the first section (**10:1–18**), Paul warned the Corinthians of the boldness with which he is capable of acting when present, despite accusations that his bodily presence does not match the boldness of his letters (**10:1–11**), and he criticized those who had intruded upon his missionary assignment (**10:12–18**). In the second section (**11:1 – 12:13**), Paul called the intruders "super-apostles" who are, in fact, false apostles. Insisting that he is not inferior to these super-apostles (**11:5**), he reluctantly engaged in a project of foolish boasting in order to show the Corinthians what they should have known: that he is not inferior to these super-apostles (**12:11**). With this boasting behind him, and having established his superiority to the super-apostles, in this section (**12:14 – 13:10**) Paul turns his attention to his third and final visit to Corinth, a visit to which he had already alluded in the first section (**10:1–18**), when he warned the Corinthians of the boldness he will exercise if necessary when he comes to Corinth (**10:2, 11**).

This final section (**12:14 – 13:10**) of Part 3 consists of two units (**12:14–21** and **13:1–10**), each of which begins with an announcement of Paul's impending visit (**12:14; 13:1**). In the first unit (**12:14–21**) Paul begins with the question of financial support, insisting that he will not burden the community financially by his visit and that neither he nor his associates have taken advantage of the Corinthians (vv. **14–18**). He then expresses his fear that, because of the moral laxity of many, the Corinthians may not be prepared for his visit (vv. **19–21**). In the second unit (**13:1–10**) Paul warns those who have not yet repented of their moral laxity that he will not spare them (vv. **1–4**). He then

calls upon the community to test and examine itself (**vv. 5–9**), so that he will not have to act severely when he comes (**v. 10**).

George Shillington: Paul has rounded out his Fool’s Speech in **12:11-13** and now launches a substantial conclusion to his entire defense of his status as God’s minister. The conclusion of this Letter of Defense has two parts.

1. First, Paul treats his relationship to the community by using the analogy of the parent-child relationship: the loving parent supports the child, not the child the parent. The apostle will continue to serve his community unconditionally without accepting financial support from them (**12:14-21**).
2. Second, he points to the relationship of the community to the living reality and power of the once-crucified Christ, and to the responsibility of both apostle and community for maintaining a right relationship with God in Christ (**13:1-10**).

Both stages of the conclusion are couched in the **promise of a third visit** that will bring with it Paul’s apostolic judgment and correction. He fears the worst in the community, and thus inserts a list of vices that he suspects will characterize the Corinthians who have themselves come under the spell of Paul’s opponents. Paul also fears for his own reception at Corinth. Yet he will not spare his converts the necessary correction, even if his discipline will mean his humiliation.

The projection of the third visit, in which the warning is couched, has a **judicial ring** to it. Paul cites the legal text of **Deuteronomy 19:15** about two or three witnesses as foundation for his investigation of the community’s life. Even this weighty conclusion, in the form of a projected judicial third visit, Paul laces with the ironic thread he wove into the earlier parts of this Letter of Defense (**2 Cor. 10-13**). The analysis that follows is again suggestive of the movement of thought that runs through this concluding text.

OUTLINE

Parent-Apostle Related to His Family at Corinth, **12:14-21**

- **12:14-18** Loving More, Not Taking Advantage
- **12:19-21** Saving the Community, Not Self-Defense
-

Corinthians Related to the Living Christ Crucified, **13:1-10**

- **13:1-4** Apostolic Responsibility to Correct Members
- **13:5-10** Members’ Responsibility for Self-Correction

Richard Pratt: In this passage the apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he would visit them as soon as he could. He longed to fellowship with his brothers and sisters in the church, and he hoped the visit would go well. But Paul realized that it could also be a time of sadness. If the Corinthians prepared for his visit by listening to his instructions, it would be an opportunity for tenderness and affection. But if they continued to ignore his instructions, this visit would be a time of bitterness. The choice was theirs.

I. (12:14-18) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FROM PURE MOTIVES -- MOTIVE OF LOVE VS. EXPLOITATION

Richard Pratt: The false apostles apparently had warned the Corinthians that if Paul returned he would drain their financial resources. Paul pledged that he would not take money from the church at Corinth for himself.

A. (:14-15) Demonstrated Commitment of Love

Raymond Collins: After having his say, Paul shares with the Corinthians his decision to come visit them. The introductory “*now*” (*idou*, “*behold*”) indicates that Paul is moving on to a new topic. Paul visited the Corinthians for the first time when he evangelized the community (1 Cor. 2:1–5; Acts 18:1–17). His second visit (cf. 2 Cor. 13:2) was a painful experience, to which he briefly alludes in 2:1. The pain of that visit was such that Paul put off a third visit (1:23 – 2:1). Paul is already in Macedonia, where he has learned about the Corinthians’ longing for him (7:5–7). Earlier he had told the Corinthians that he would pass through Macedonia on his way to visit them (1 Cor. 16:5–6). The conditions were ripe for another visit, perhaps one that would enable him to spend some time with the Corinthians, as he had hoped to do at one time (1 Cor. 16:7). But there remains the issue of Paul’s self-support

1. Commitment to Visit Them Personally and Repeatedly

“Here for this third time I am ready to come to you”

Eric Mason: This is what a disciple maker does: **goes the extra mile** to close relational breaches. . . Paul had been with them two times already. Have you ever gone where you knew you would encounter relational conflict and opposition, but you still went anyway? Paul is willing to go again a third time because he says, “I’m going to go one more time, and that’s it. I’m going to try again for you to interpret my commitment to you a different way.”

2. Commitment to Not Sponge off Them

“and I will not be a burden to you”

3. Commitment to Seek Intimacy with Them

“for I do not seek what is yours, but you”

4. Commitment to Provide for Them

*“for children are not responsible to save up for their parents,
but parents for their children.*

And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.”

Robert Hughes: His reason for not accepting support from the Corinthians (11:12) rested on a more intimate reason: parental relationship (12:14). Parents support their

children, therefore Paul would not be a burden to the Corinthians. This relationship explained his actions and validated his love. He would spend time and money, and he himself would also be gladly spent. He allowed his personal strength and emotional resources to be drawn upon. This continued the image of a loving parent/child relationship (12:15).

R. Kent Hughes: True ministry selflessly seeks the spiritual welfare of others, gladly spending and being spent. This is true whenever you serve, be it with believers or unbelievers or children or students or the ill or in the pulpit or in world missions. This is what is most needed if authentic ministry is to take place — joyously seeking the best for others and gladly spending self. This is Christlike, apostolic, true ministry.

Paul willingly spent everything for the Corinthians — all his material resources and all his energies. The price he paid was impoverishment, poor health, premature old age, and, as we know, a martyr's death. . .

Paul's apostolate and his ministry to the Corinthians was one of hard-working sacrifice from beginning to end. He had sought nothing but their spiritual well-being. In fact, he was spending everything he had for their souls. He was ministering like Christ, for Christ. Therefore, to reject the apostle was to reject Christ himself.

Eric Mason: In other words, you disciple makers want to exhaust yourselves, even if you never are encouraged by hearing gratitude for doing it.

Frank Matera: Paul's argument contains an implicit sylllogism that, when reconstructed, can be stated as follows:

- Major premise: It is the duty of parents to store up treasures for their children.
- Minor premise: Paul is the parent of the Corinthians, and they are his children.
- Conclusion: Therefore, rather than burden them by seeking their financial support, Paul will store up treasure for the Corinthians to the point of spending himself and being spent for their sake.

5. Continued Sarcasm to Press Home His Commitment of Love

“If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?”

B. (:16-17) No Possible Charge of Exploitation

*“But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself;
nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.
Certainly I have not taken advantage of you
through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?”*

Scott Hafemann: In 12:16–18, Paul presses home his point. Those Corinthians who are still rebelling against him must now make a final decision. Are they right that Paul's practice of self-support was simply a smokescreen to cover up his attempt to defraud them, an accusation that Paul parodies in 12:16 (cf. 8:20–21)? Was Paul skimming off the collection to line his own pockets? Regardless of the Corinthians' perspective on

Paul's practice of self-support ("Be that as it may," v. 16), they cannot deny that Paul did not burden them by asking for their money (12:16a).

John MacArthur: Paul was saddened but undeterred by the Corinthians' disappointing response to his sacrificial love for them. But be that as it may—despite their unreturned love for him—Paul would still not be a burden to them. Their love may have diminished, but his would not. Despite their diffidence, coldness, and disaffection, he would continue to love them sacrificially.

C. (:18) Consistency of Motive and Conduct Among Paul's Fellow Workers

"I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him.

Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he?

Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?"

Raymond Collins: Asking the Corinthians to consider that he acted in a way similar to the way that his emissaries acted, Paul uses a pair of metaphors. In Greek, Paul's "acted" is *periepatēsamen*, literally, "walked." He uses a common Semitic idiom. His "spirit" does not refer to the Holy Spirit; rather, it is his way of referring to the human sense of responsibility and integrity. The parallel question continues the metaphor for following an example (cf. **Rom. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:21**). Paul asks, "*Haven't we walked in the same footsteps?*" I have rendered the elliptical question -- the verb "walk" must be supplied -- "*Haven't we followed the same path?*"

Frank Matera: Paul assumes that the Corinthians can evaluate his character by evaluating the character of his delegates. Once more his reasoning depends upon an implicit syllogism that, when made explicit, can be set forth in this way:

- Major premise: Paul's delegates represent him in word and deed.
- Minor premise: Paul's delegates did not defraud or take advantage of the Corinthians.
- Conclusion: Paul did not take advantage of the Corinthians.

II. (12:19-21) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY FOR PASTORAL PURPOSES -- PURPOSE OF EDIFICATION AND CORRECTION NOT PROMOTING SELF

Richard Pratt: In the preceding chapters Paul had spent much time boasting about himself. He made sure this boasting would not be misinterpreted. . .

The apostle wanted to make doubly clear that he felt no need to defend his own integrity or authority for his own sake. He had stooped to this strategy only for the Corinthians' strengthening. Paul believed that all things in the life of the Christian church should be done for edification. This was his motivation as he defended his ministry against the false apostles.

A. (:19) Purpose of Edification Not Promoting Self

“All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.”

David Garland: He abandons the fool’s speech and now is “*speaking in Christ*” (12:19; see 2:17; 11:17). The fool who seems so debased and weak has changed his guise and now aggressively puts the Corinthians on the defensive. He insinuates that they have failed in their duty to love and honor him by entertaining slander against him and failing to defend him against those who disparage him. He now says he fears that they will add insult to injury when he will be humiliated by his next visit. The feared humiliation will not come at the hands of any individual as before (2:1) but will come from the shabby spiritual state of affairs in the Corinthian church.

John MacArthur: The tender term **beloved** reminded the Corinthians that though he was at times exasperated with them, Paul nevertheless loved them as his spiritual children. It was not his intent to use his apostolic authority to destroy them; God gave him that authority “*for building [them] up and not for destroying [them]*” (2 Cor. 10:8; cf. 13:10). The Corinthians were not Paul’s judges, but they were his spiritual responsibility.

That reality marks the transition to the closing section of this epistle, which deals with the edification of the church and the sanctification of its members. The elements of a sanctified church will be the theme of the closing chapters of this volume.

Eric Mason: Paul called them “*dear friends*” (v. 19). This wording is amazing. They were loved by God and by Paul. Even in the midst of this conflict, they’re loved. Don’t let opposition and hurt from a disciple make you treat them tragically. He still calls them dear friends.

B. (:20-21) Anticipation of Need for Further Correction / Repentance

*“For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;
I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”*

Paul Barnett: Paul’s final visit to Corinth is now imminent. This part of the letter is obviously preparing the way for what will almost certainly be a tense arrival. Twice the apostle expresses fear. He is afraid that because they will not be as he wants them to be nor he what they want him to be, there will be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder (20). Paul, it seems, anticipates that the third visit, like the second, will prove to be painful. He also fears that because many

continue unrepentant of gross sexual offences he will be grieved for them (21). This serious situation he had observed and learned about on his second visit (13:2).

Raymond Collins: Vices That Undermine the Unity of a Community

- division (*eris*): 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; Rom. 1:29; 13:13; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:15
- envy (*zēlos*): 1 Cor. 3:3; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:20
- anger (*thymoi*): Gal. 5:20
- strife (*eritheiai*): Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:17; 2:3
- slander (*katalaliai*): Rom. 1:30 (a related form)
- gossip (*psithyrismoī*): Rom. 1:29 (a related form)
- conceit (*physiōseis*): The noun is found only here in the NT, but the related verb appears in 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; cf. Col. 2:18
- unruliness (*akatastasiai*): 1 Cor. 14:33

Frank Matera: The three vices that Paul lists in verse 21 appear frequently in his writings, and all three occur in a slightly different order in the vice list of Gal 5:19–21 (see v. 19).

1. The first, “vileness” (*akatharsia*), refers to “a state of moral corruption” (BDAG), especially in sexual matters. It also occurs in Rom 1:24; 6:19; Gal 5:19; Eph 4:19; 5:3; Col 3:5; and 1 Thess 2:3; 4:7. The last reference is especially interesting, since Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God did not call them to *akatharsia* but to holiness.
2. The second, “immorality” (*porneia*), is a general word that covers a wide range of sexual misconduct, as well as idolatry, which is often associated with it. It stands at the beginning of the vice list of Gal 5:19–21. In 1 Cor 6:18 Paul exhorts his converts to flee all *porneia*, and in 1 Thess 4:3 he appeals to them to abstain from *porneia* because God’s will for them is their sanctification. *Porneia* also occurs in 1 Cor 5:1; 6:13; 7:2; Eph 5:3; and Col 3:5.
3. The third item, “licentiousness” (*aselgeia*), refers to a “lack of self-restraint which involves one in conduct that violates what is socially acceptable” (BDAG). Such conduct is often sexual in nature, as seems to be the case here. The term also occurs in Rom 13:13; Gal 5:19; and Eph 4:19.

Joined together, as they are here and in Gal 5:19, the words of this list suggest that there is still a serious problem of **sexual immorality** at Corinth, despite Paul’s strong admonitions in 1 Cor 5–6.

III. (13:1-10) SPIRITUAL LEADERS EXERCISE THEIR GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY THROUGH SEVERE DISCIPLINE WHEN NECESSARY

Richard Pratt: Paul encouraged the Corinthians to prepare for his upcoming visit. He wanted them to repent of their sin and to think rightly about Paul and those who would accompany him so they would be well received.

A. (:1) Context = Anticipation of Third Visit

“This is the third time I am coming to you.

Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

Reference to **Deut. 19:15**

B. (:2-4) Loaded for Bear

1. (:2) Last Chance to Repent

*“I have previously said when present the second time,
and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the
past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again,
I will not spare anyone.”*

Bob Deffinbaugh: Here Paul changes from a defensive posture (which is really for the Corinthians’ sake) to an offensive posture. Paul is not on trial; the Corinthians are the ones on trial. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ, and as such, he sets down truths the Corinthians should accept and abide by. Those who are doing wrong are not Paul and his associates, but a number of the Corinthians who use their opposition to Paul’s apostleship as a smoke screen to cover their own sins. Paul now brushes the smoke screen aside and presses his own attack. It is the Corinthians who must prove themselves, not Paul.

Paul does not fear that the Corinthians will fail to approve of him, but that they will not respond adequately to his rebuke and thus be found continuing in sin (verse 20). Paul fears that when he does arrive at Corinth—for the third time—he will find them other than he wishes. Consequently, if Paul is not happy with what he sees when he arrives, they will not be happy to see him. Paul knows the kinds of things he is likely to find of which he will not approve: *“strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances.”* In addition to these, Paul has every reason to expect that he will find *“impurity, immorality, and sensuality.”* He has good reason to expect these things, for they are the very things he found it necessary to rebuke in his first epistle, specifically or more generally. These are the sins he exposed and rebuked in the past, and he fears some may not have repented of them. Even more distressing, these are also manifestations of the flesh as opposed to the fruit of the spirit.

Eric Mason: The message of Christianity is remarkable. Difficulty doesn’t necessarily mean you’re off course. Difficulty can mean you’re absolutely, unadulteratedly right on course. Isn’t it remarkable that you can be in the middle of a storm—the worst storm of your life—and God is right there with you? What a wonder that the power of the gospel and the voice of the Spirit can speak to us in the midst of our suffering. This is a confrontational letter, so it ends the same way—fairly confrontationally. Christianity is not a sucker religion. It’s not a weak religion. It is a faith where you sometimes find God in your face, telling you about yourself, so that you can grow.

2. (:3-4) Power of God on Tap Through Union with Christ

*“since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me,
and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.
For indeed He was crucified because of weakness,*

*yet He lives because of the power of God.
For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him
because of the power of God directed toward you.”*

David Garland: They have demanded proof that Paul is sufficient for his task as an apostle. Paul will turn the tables on them and demand proof that they are truly in the faith. The important question is not whether Christ is speaking in Paul but whether Christ is living in them. When Paul does not spare those who have sinned, they will get all the proof they want that Christ speaks in him. It will not be something either of them will welcome. They already have plenty of proof that Christ speaks through him if they would only reflect on what Christ has done among them already. They need to “*look at what is obvious*” (10:7). “*He is not weak in dealing with you, but powerful among you.*” It is a miracle of God that a church was planted and grows in such an environment as Corinth. They cannot deny that they have experienced the power of Christ through signs, wonders, and mighty works (12:21; 1 Cor 12:4–11). How did these experiences of Christ’s power transpire? Was it not because Paul was the first to come to them with the gospel of Christ (10:14)? The proof that Christ is speaking in Paul is evident in the results of his preaching.

Robert Hughes: The Corinthians could not understand the **combination of weakness and strength**; they were only comfortable with strength. Paul presents a mixed picture because Christ did also. Weakness caused His crucifixion. On the cross He appeared weak and subject to all the trials and troubles of the world, but through that weakness God redeemed humanity (1 Cor. 1:21-24). Christ’s weakness is now replaced by a life in the power of God. Paul now moves on to compare Christ with Christians.

“*We also are weak in Him*” shows that believers, while on earth, share in Christ’s past earthly weakness and thus participate in “*the sufferings of Christ*” (1:5). But the Christian’s weakness will cease, as did Christ’s, “*because of the power of God.*” The power of God is in the living Christ, not in the outward appearance of believers. Their appearance is one of weakness, which masks the internal glory of the living and powerful Christ. This point was also made earlier in 4:7.

R. Kent Hughes: There is biting irony here. Paul’s critics were so far from Christ in their thinking that they rejected Christlike humility and gentleness as evidence that Christ was speaking in Paul. So the irony is that if the only proof that will convince them of the authenticity of his words is power, they may get far more than they bargained for. Ironically, in holding up Paul’s alleged weaknesses as reason to reject his authority, they were actually challenging Christ, who had come himself in weakness.

Christ’s power. The Corinthians’ understanding of Christ’s power was confused and outright wrong. They viewed Christ’s power through their triumphalist lens as displayed in health and wealth and showy displays of power. Their views of power were Corinthian, not Christian. So Paul gives them the corrective on Christ: “*He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God*” (vv. 3b, 4a). Paul says that **both the cross and the**

resurrection display God's power. Only an all-powerful God could be strong enough to live out the weakness of the cross. Christ's taking on frail human flesh was a testament to his power, as were his arrest and beatings and crucifixion and becoming sin and death. Christ's weakness demonstrated his power. And further, his weakness was the platform from which his mighty resurrection was launched. Both Christ's suffering and resurrection demonstrated his power.

Paul's power. Paul's point is that his very own experience of weakness and power reflect that of Christ: "*For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God*" (v. 4b). Paul's ministerial style was that of a humble servant — ostensible weakness. He sought no prominence. He rejected show. He sought only their souls. He spent himself for the Corinthians. However, just as the crucified, weak Jesus gave way to the powerful, resurrected Christ who will come again in judgment, so also will Paul come in Christ's power to judge the Corinthians if they do not repent. Just as his former visit appeared to be one of weakness, his enemies will find his next visit to be marked by power.

Frank Matera: In saying that Christ now lives by reason of the power of God, Paul has the power of the resurrection in view. There is a certain correspondence then between this text and that of **Rom 1:3–4**: "*the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David, according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead.*" Descended from David according to the flesh, Christ was crucified by reason of weakness. He now lives, however, by reason of the resurrection of the dead.

Having established the **fundamental paradox** that undergirds his gospel, Paul applies the paradox to himself. In doing so he emphasizes his relationship to Christ as well as to the community. Because he is in Christ, Paul shares in the weakness of Christ. This is why he always bears "*the dying of Jesus*" in his body "*so that the life of Jesus*" might be manifested in his body (**4:10**). But though he is weak in Christ, he knows that he "*will live with Christ by reason of the power of God for you.*" The final words of this phrase, "*for you,*" indicate that Paul is not thinking of life after death (**Lambrecht**, 221). Rather, he has in view that resurrection life that is an eschatological reality for those who are alive in Christ. It is precisely this life that enables him to make the power of Christ present to the community despite weakness.

C. (:5-6) Self Examination

*"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!
Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you –
unless indeed you fail the test?"*

David Garland: The summons to test themselves will therefore authenticate Paul's ministry to them when they conclude that Christ who is in them is also in him. **Barnett** is correct: "Their verdict about themselves will likewise be their verdict about him." As they belong to Christ, so does Paul (**10:7**). If Christ is in them, they should remember that Paul first preached Christ crucified to them so that they became "*the church of*

God” (1:1). Paul has spelled out another criterion earlier in the letter for determining if one is approved: “*I wrote for this purpose: to test [hēdokimē] your character to see if you are obedient in everything*” (2:9). If they are to pass the audit as those who are approved, they will be obedient to Paul, particularly in his commands about appropriate Christian conduct. Christian behavior is the touchstone for determining whether those who claim to be Christians really are. Hanson comments, “A Christian’s conduct, then, is a very good ready reckoner for determining his relationship to Christ, and a much better one than his religious experience.” . . .

They should now know that he is genuine and not counterfeit. If they recognize his genuineness, they will respond accordingly to what he demands. If they do not, they call into question the authenticity of their faith and their spiritual discernment.

Bob Deffinbaugh: It is assumed that some members who profess to be born again believers are not. It is apparent that some in the Corinthian church are actually regarded as having apostolic authority, and yet Paul’s words describe them in such a way that we must wonder if they are even saved (2 Corinthians 11:12-15). Elsewhere, the apostles make it even clearer that there are those in the church who profess salvation but do not possess it (see 2 Timothy 3:1-9; James 1:19–2:26; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 6-11; Jude 17-19). As far as outward appearances are concerned, the difference between a disobedient Christian and a professing unbeliever may be very slight.

Ray Stedman: The thing that really marks it is if Jesus Christ is living in you. A true Christian is someone in whom Christ dwells. And the person in whom Christ dwells will have certain inescapable evidence of that fact given to him or her.

That is what Paul is suggesting we ask ourselves. Do we have the evidence that Jesus Christ lives in us? Has a fundamental change occurred at the very depths of our being? It is actually the question, of course, “Are you really born again?” That is a term that has fallen into wrong use these days. Many people who merely change their actions for a little while are said to be “born again.” People are using that term about everything today. But this is the question that Paul is asking, “Are you truly and permanently different because Jesus Christ has come to live within you?” . . .

Scott Hafemann: In view of Paul’s imminent return to bring God’s judgment to Corinth, his commands in 13:5 again contain a **severe warning**. In the past, he postponed his return in order to give the Corinthians time to repent, since his primary goal as an apostle of the new covenant is the ingathering of God’s people (cf. 1:23–2:4; 5:18–20; 10:8; 12:19). In his next visit, however, Paul will carry out both aspects of his apostolic calling by being a fragrance of both life and death to those he encounters with the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18 with 2 Cor. 2:15–16a). Like the prophets of the old covenant, Paul thus announces the coming judgment in advance in order to bring about the repentance of those who are truly God’s people (cf. 10:1–6). He does so by calling the rebellious in Corinth “to examine” or “test themselves” to see if they are truly “in the faith” (13:5). The goal of the test is to make it clear that Christ is indeed in them (cf. 7:11–12; 8:7–8).

Frank Matera: Confident that the Corinthians are in the faith because Jesus Christ is in their midst, Paul calls upon them to examine themselves in order to determine this for themselves. Unless they have failed the test, they will discover that Jesus Christ is indeed in their midst, and when they realize this, then they will know that their apostle has not failed the test.

D. (:7-9) Concern for Their Spiritual Maturity

“Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.”

John MacArthur: His prayer was that the Corinthians’ obedience would make it unnecessary for him to come to wield his authority and discipline them, or if he came, they would have repented so there would be nothing to confront. Paul’s deepest desire for the Corinthians, as it was for the Philippians, was that they would *“be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness”* (**Phil. 1:10-11**). Like a loving father, he was more concerned with his children’s obedience than his own reputation.

Ray Stedman: Paul explains that he is not looking for an opportunity to come and demonstrate his authority as an apostle by judging them; he takes no delight in flexing his apostolic muscle. He would be quite happy if they would judge themselves and stop their evil behavior, leaving nothing for him to do when he comes but to rejoice with them. In fact, he says, “I would be quite willing to let you go on thinking that we are kind of weak as an apostle, that we do not really amount to very much, that we are only a paper tiger, as long as your behavior changes in line with who you really are.” What he wants is their moral improvement, not an opportunity to personally exhibit what a true apostle he is.

Robert Gromacki: In the long run, truth will win. Paul spoke the truth. He lived “for the truth.” He wanted the church to recognize truth and to stand for it regardless of the opinions of others. He knew that God would vindicate the spiritually minded believers and himself.

David Garland: This parenthetical statement [:8] asserts that true apostles are controlled by the truth and not preoccupied with themselves. Paul will not tamper with the truth (**2:17; 4:2; 6:7**) to make things easier for himself (see **Gal 2:5, 14**) or more palatable and easier for his congregations. He cannot change his spots as a weak apostle and will not change his mode of working or preaching to please them. He also cannot amend the truth to excuse the Corinthians’ sins and errors.

E. (:10) Summary

“For this reason I am writing these things while absent,

*in order that when present I may not use severity,
in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me,
for building up and not for tearing down.”*

Robert Hughes: Paul reminded them once again that his authority was for building up, not for tearing down (**13:10**; see **10:8**). Why this reminder? Because the Corinthians saw authority only as a self-exalting tool for power. Paul repeatedly informed them that true apostolic power was for edification. This also explains why severity in discipline was always the last measure, and in Paul’s case something he approached with fear and much sorrow. Because upbuilding was Paul’s continual goal, he was never interested in rushing into discipline, but tried several other measures first: staying away, sending associates, and ministering through letters. This entire letter was designed to answer Paul’s prayer for their completion, which he hoped would occur before his arrival (**13:10**).

Richard Pratt: His primary desire, however, was to build up the church through positive means. He felt the best way to build up the church was to exhort them to repent and to discipline them only if his words failed to bring about change. Paul preferred a gentle touch, but he was ready to do whatever was necessary to rescue them from sin.

(13:11-14) FINAL CHARGE / GREETING / BENEDICTION

Scott Hafemann: Unlike other ancient letters, in which the closings were curt and only linked to the body of the letter in a general way, Paul expands the letter closing significantly, strategically employing it to echo specific themes from his letter. Paul’s closings are not merely ways to end his letters; they are summations of his arguments. As **Weima** puts it:

“Every one of Paul’s letter closings ... relates in one way or another to the key issue(s) taken up in their respective letter bodies.... The closings serve as an hermeneutical spotlight, highlighting the central concerns of the apostle in his letters and illumining our understanding of these key themes and issues.”

The closing to **2 Corinthians** supports this thesis. Paul closes his letter with additional commands (**13:11**), greetings (**13:12**), and two farewell benedictions, one for peace and one for grace (**13:11, 13**). In each case, his closing highlights a main theme of his letter. As in **1 Corinthians 16:13–14**, here too Paul begins his closing with five commands:

1. to rejoice,
2. to aim for restoration,
3. to encourage one another,
4. to be of one mind, and
5. to live in peace.

The first three commands focus on the Corinthians' relationship with Paul as their apostle; the last two refer to their life together as those who have been reconciled to God.

In particular, the commands to rejoice and to aim for restoration pick up Paul's reference in **13:9** to his own joy over the strengthening of the Corinthians' faith and to his prayer for their restoration. In the former case, Paul calls them to manifest their unity with him as their apostle by joining him in rejoicing over the strength they have derived through his weakness. In the latter, his exhortation that they be restored becomes the instrument by which his own prayer to that end will be fulfilled. So too, Paul's call that they encourage or admonish one another recalls his earlier appeals in **5:20**; **6:1**; and **10:1**.

We must be careful not to gloss over these commands, as if they were merely some "closing remarks" thrown in only to fulfill a rhetorical or literary purpose. From Paul's perspective, there is much at stake in issuing these exhortations. Moreover, the structure of his closing again reveals the structure of his theology. In particular, the movement from the admonitions of **verse 11a** to the benediction in **verse 11b** demonstrates that God's continuing presence among the Corinthians is inextricably linked to the purification and repentance of his people (cf. **6:14 – 7:1**). Even in his closing Paul wants to make it clear yet again that the blessing of God's presence is contingent on the obedience of his people.

John MacArthur: As he drew this magnificent letter to a close, Paul gave a final summary of his concerns for the Corinthian church. He was not primarily concerned with their prosperity, success, health, comfort, self-esteem, or prestige. Instead, he listed three worthy goals that every pastor should have for his congregation: perfection, affection, and benediction. Along with repentance (**2 Cor. 12:20-21**), discipline (**13:1-2**), submission to authority (**13:3-4**), self-examination (**13:5-6**), obedience (**13:7-9a**), and integrity (**13:9b**), they form a strong defense against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

A. (:11) Final Charge

1. Finality of the Charge

"Finally, brethren"

2. Five Imperatives for Spiritual Maturity

a. *"rejoice"*

b. *"be made complete"*

c. *"be comforted"*

d. *"be like-minded"*

e. *"live in peace"*

3. Faithful Blessing

“and the God of love and peace shall be with you”

B. (:12-13) Final Greeting

1. Directed to the Corinthians

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

David Garland: The holy kiss becomes a token of the joy, love, reconciliation, peace, and communion that Christians know in Christ and with one another.

We need not speculate that genders were separated from one another in the early church gatherings. The holy kiss would have been extended to male and female alike. Qualifying it as “*holy*” removes any dimension of erotic kissing. Something holy, however, can easily be perverted into something unholy like the kiss of Judas (**Luke 22:48**). A holy sign can become an unholy sin. Concern for any impropriety with the kiss is expressed by **Athenagoras** who quotes a lost apocryphal text claiming that if it is made with the slightest ulterior motive it excludes one from eternal life. Many modern Christians living in a highly sexualized culture would be uncomfortable with the kiss as part of worship or greeting. **Hodge** comments that “the spirit of the command is that Christians should express their mutual love in the way sanctioned by the age and community in which they live.” The key is that **mutual love is expressed in some tangible way**.

2. Delivered to the Corinthians

“All the saints greet you.”

C. (:14) Final Benediction

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

Paul Barnett: The three persons of the Trinity are mentioned, but in the order which reflects Christian experience. First, there is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which is encountered in the ‘message of reconciliation’ (**5:19; 6:1**) and through which we are made ‘*rich*’ (**8:9**). Then, as a consequence, we come to know the love of God from the one Paul has just described as ‘*the God of love*’ (**11**). Finally, also as a consequence, we experience the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which refers to the Spirit’s fellowship with our spirits (cf. **Rom. 8:16**) and also the fellowship which exists between those in whom the Spirit of God dwells (**1 Cor. 3:16**).

Robert Hughes: All attempts at achieving unity and reconciliation in Corinth would be futile if they did not result from the “*fellowship of the Holy Spirit*” (**13:14**). The completion for which Paul prayed (**13:9**) had to be produced by the Spirit, who is the present pledge for future heavenly fellowship (**1:21-22; 5:5**), and the Lord in the church, who alone is able to transform it from glory to glory (**3:18**). He alone shines the light of the gospel glory on the darkness of unbelief and on the deception dwelling

in a worldly Christian. The grace of the Lord forms the context and definition of the love of God. The Spirit is the potent presence of God, making real the promises of His grace.

* * * * *

PREACHING CHRIST:

- 1) Do ministers of the gospel today have Christ speaking through them in the same sense that Paul refers to Christ speaking through him?
- 2) What does it mean that “*Jesus Christ is in*” all genuine believers? What type of test is there to see if we are in the faith?
- 3) How does Christ make Himself mighty and powerful in your life?
- 4) Do we seek the ultimate blessing of “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*” upon all our brothers and sisters in Christ?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What spiritual leaders have you known that modeled for you this type of servant spirit where they constantly sought to enrich you without being a burden in any way? How should the parent-child relationship model this commitment to provide for needs, etc.?
- 2) Why did Paul resort to so much sarcasm at the end of this letter? What was he trying to achieve? When is sarcasm appropriate?
- 3) Are all of our efforts directed towards building up the body of Christ rather than tearing it down? What types of things have we witnessed that are destructive?
- 4) What does Paul mean by the desire to see these believers “*be made complete*”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steve Zeisler: Four Ingredients to Spiritual Accountability –

Paul is coming to Corinth, and he is afraid there may be difficulty. He wants them to understand the basis on which he is coming, which is as a loving parent who is ready to expend himself for them. He wants only their best. He has not been defending himself throughout this letter in order to promote himself. Instead, he wants to do everything to

offer the best possible hope that they will receive his words as he intends, which is to strengthen and correct them, that they will respond rightly and their lives will become what they ought to be. But he realizes that when he comes as a parent it may not go well. There's still uncertainty as to how the Corinthians are going to accept being made accountable. . .

What can we draw from this section that will help us understand **how to accomplish spiritual accountability well**? I see four ingredients. The first one I would call **competence**. Not just anybody ought to be bustling around looking into other people's lives, giving advice, attempting to change their behavior, etc. Paul says, in **verses 11** and following, "*I ought to have been commended by you.*" He shouldn't have to defend himself or compare himself to the super-apostles. The Corinthians should have voluntarily and gladly received him. He is the proper person to have this responsibility. In particular, the things that mark an apostle -- signs, wonders, and miracles -- were done among them with great perseverance. He is saying that everything they would expect in an apostle they saw in him. The Lord had authenticated his ministry by healings, signs, and miracles, and they didn't miss out on any of that. (Now, authenticating signs always diminish in their importance; they are a beginning point that testifies as to the individual speaking. Having done that, they become less important as the character, witness, and reality of the speaker gain more importance.) He was competent to do these miracles and signs, and he was a man of great perseverance; he was willing to take all the time necessary with them. On the other hand, Paul doesn't have an ego problem of his own, and he's not a neophyte or someone without wisdom. He is not without the blessing of God. On every count he is an appropriate person to delve into the lives of the Corinthians.

The question of competence is the right question to ask. If there is going to be an examination of the life of either a church or an individual, those who take on the role of the examiner ought to be competent to do it. Not just anybody is. Brand-new Christians, for example, probably aren't in a position to give good advice or helpful counsel as those calling for accountability.

A second ingredient is that **love** needs to be at the heart of the relationship. When an apostle comes to his church as a father to his children and wants to know how they're doing, he needs to be an individual who loves those he is seeking to correct. It's very clear here that Paul loves these people. In **verse 14** he reminds them that his unwillingness to take their money was not because he was proud or because he wanted to put them down, but because he didn't want them to be confused as to the role of money in their relationship. He didn't want them to think that their money was too important, that it could somehow sway his thinking, or that they could gain standing by the amount of money they gave. He deliberately refused to accept their money on account of their immaturity. He says, "What I want is not your possessions but you." As long as money is allowed to get in the way, they will never understand how much he loves them, how much he is willing to expend himself for them. They were so used to having spiritual leaders take from them! He says he is not defending himself; rather, he

wants to strengthen and build them up. It's clear again that Paul is the right person to hold this church accountable because he loves them very much.

The third ingredient for successful accountability is **honesty**. The father coming to visit his children should be an honest man. In sarcasm Paul expresses his accusers' contention that his honesty is a ploy something like the quip we hear, "Be sincere whether you mean it or not." They say he is tricking them to get their money, that although he says he doesn't want it, he's sending Titus and others to come and somehow take it from them. Paul says that's not true; he really doesn't want their money. The love is genuine, and what they have seen in him is the real Paul; he has no hidden motives beneath the surface. So if we would be in a relationship of examination, of bringing into the light difficult things, it's important to be competent, motivated by love, and honest to the core.

Lastly, he says there must be **follow-through**. He isn't just making noise when he raises these issues. He is going to come; this isn't an idle threat. It might be difficult. He might end up looking like a fool again because they fight against everything he has said. It might be that there will be tension as there was before. But he isn't going to fail to come for those reasons. He has a commitment to godliness, and that means he is going to come and they are going to deal with it.

Geoff Thomas: "*you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me,*" he said to them. So he gives them proof. Whether they were any happier by his answer we are not sure, but his reply is the only one. His approach is the following.

1. THE DIVINE MODEL IS STRENGTH ATTAINED BY WEAKNESS.

How does Paul answer them? He doesn't deny the evident weaknesses of a sinner saved by grace, of a mortal man growing old and frail, of a much persecuted victim. He makes no attempt to exalt himself. He admits anything they may have to say about his deficiency in natural dignity and elocution. So what proofs that Christ was actually speaking through him does Paul offer his critics? The apostle takes them back to Jesus, and he directs their attention to the life of the Son of God on this earth. What he is doing is to ask them this kind of question, "Where has that power of God (that has transformed your lives) been seen most clearly?" He tells them the answer: "In the life of the Lord Jesus." We can all be "sure" of that; Paul says, "for to be sure, he was crucified in weakness" (v.4). There can be no argument about that historical reality. The Corinthian church believed it. The 'super-apostles' believed it. Paul believed it. We all believe it today. The divine Messiah himself, incarnate Jehovah, the Creator of **Genesis 1**, was crucified in weakness. . .

2. OUR OWN MODEL IS THE POWER OF SERVICE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH WEAKNESS.

Two things again:

i. The Christian serves in weakness.

Paul was weak in Christ. He says that clearly, "*Likewise, we are weak in him*" (v.4).

Paul's body was covered in scars. He had frequently faced death, he had been beaten by

rods, flogged and stoned. He had been often hungry and cold, thrown into prison, shipwrecked, surviving by clinging to driftwood a night and a day. What weakness in service. Neither was Paul a superman psychologically. There was a time when he was immeasurably pressed down with a huge weight of concern so that he was in despair. He bore the cares of all the churches. There were times when he was fighting on many fronts while at the same time inwardly afraid. Paul was weak, and that consciousness kept him going to the Lord and saying, "I can only cope by your help." . . .

ii. By God's power we live with God to serve the church. (v.4).

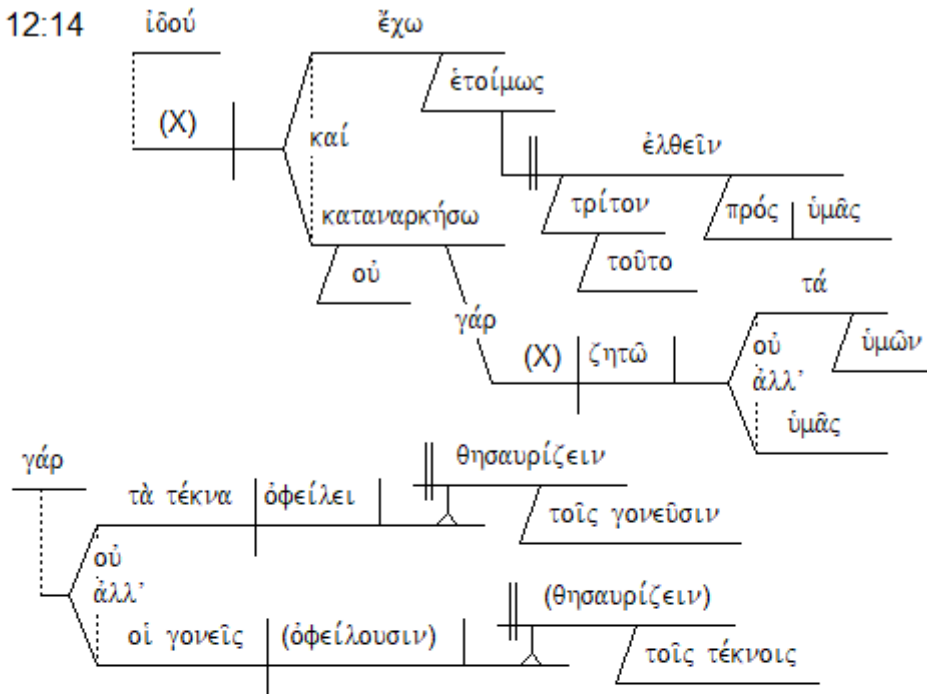
So, here is a man living by the power of God. There is blatant sin tolerated in the Corinthian church. Paul will not ignore it. . .

This truth of our felt weakness being the grounds of receiving strength from Christ will accomplish all things. Supported by its power, "*he that is feeble shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God.*" They "*shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea,*" and it shall be done. "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" We are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

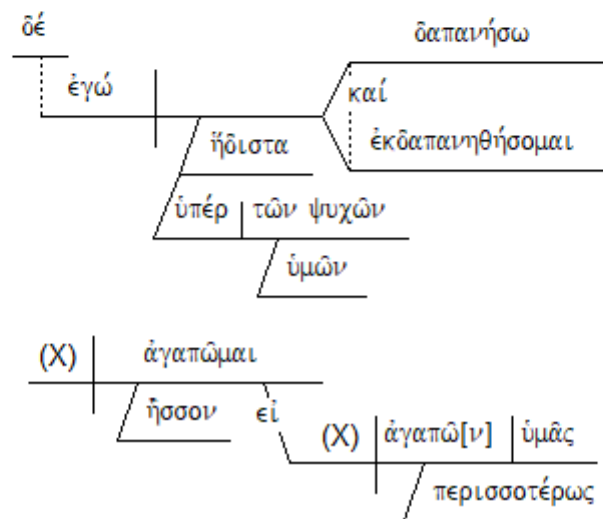
William Barclay: He finishes with a **warning**. He is coming again to Corinth and this time there will be no more loose talk and reckless statements. Whatever is said will be witnessed and proved once and for all. To put it in our modern idiom, Paul insists that there must be a showdown. The ill situation must drag on no longer. Paul knew that there comes a time when trouble must be faced. If all the healing medicines fail there is nothing for it but the surgeon's knife. No one ever cured trouble by running away from it.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

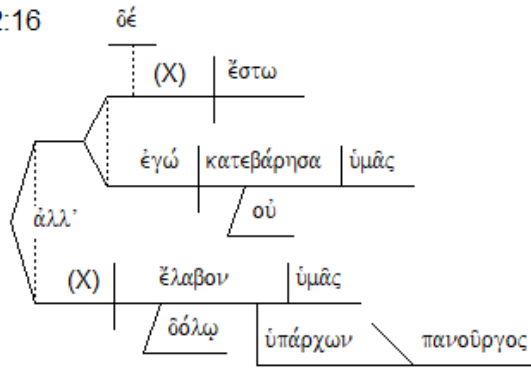
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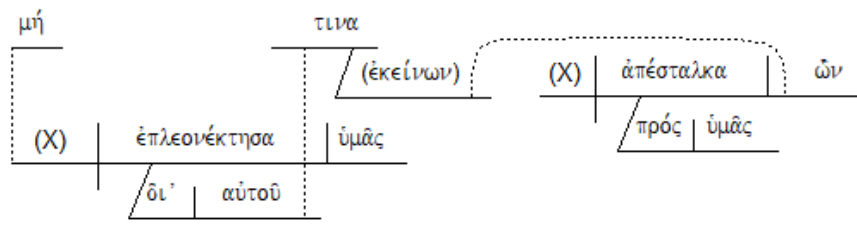
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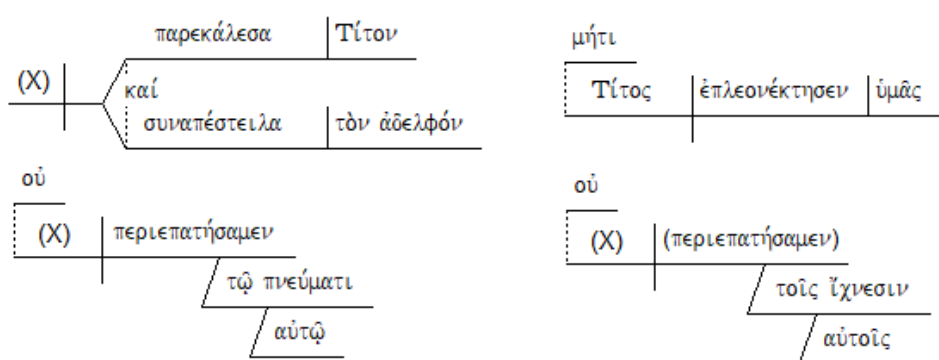
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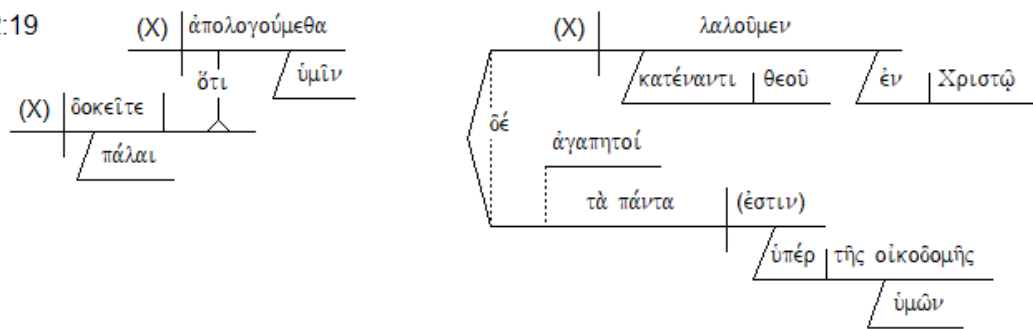
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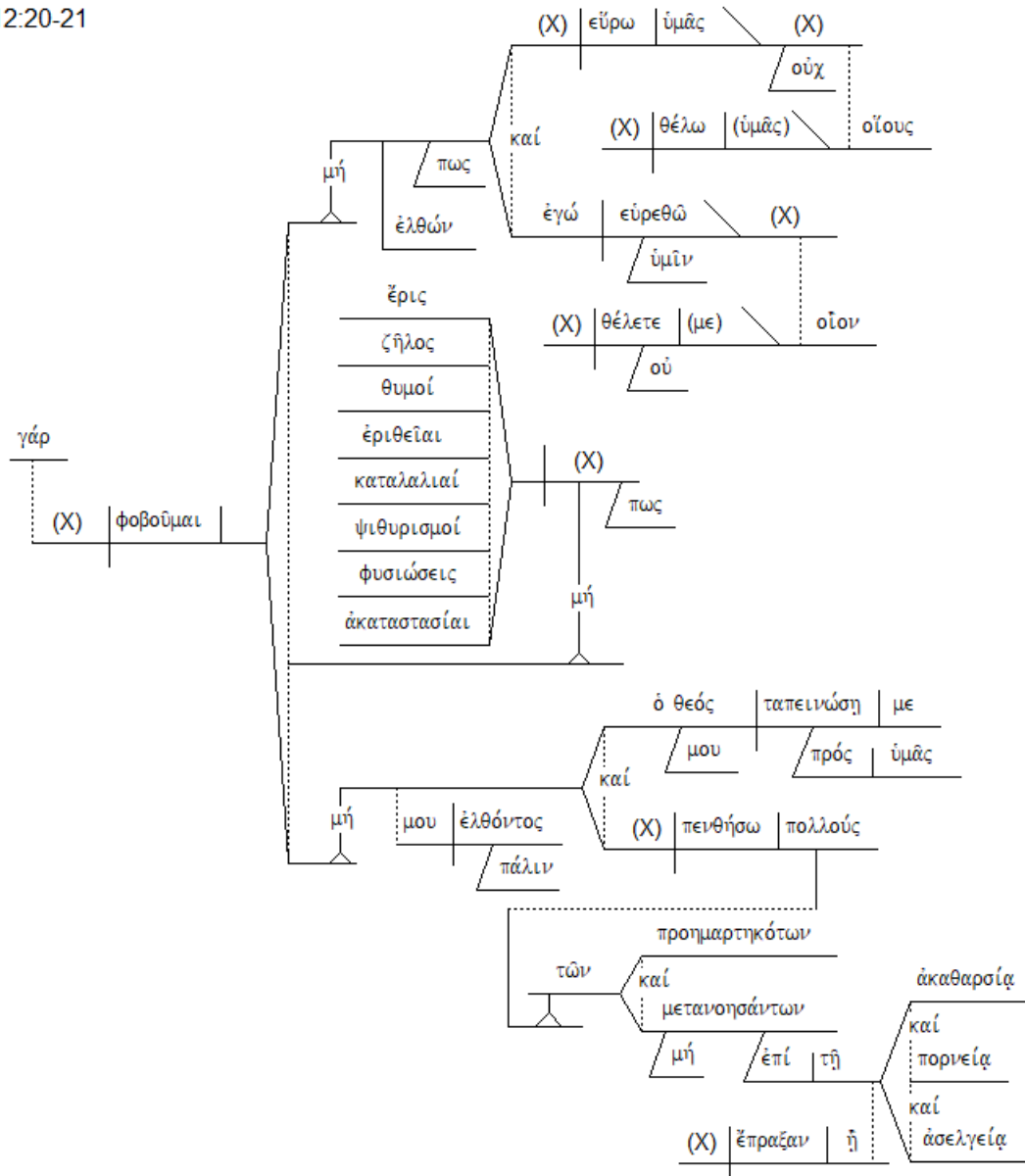
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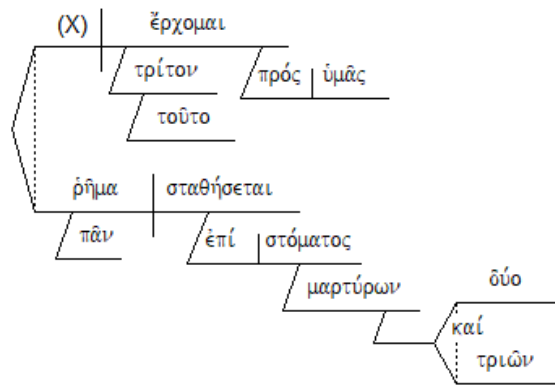
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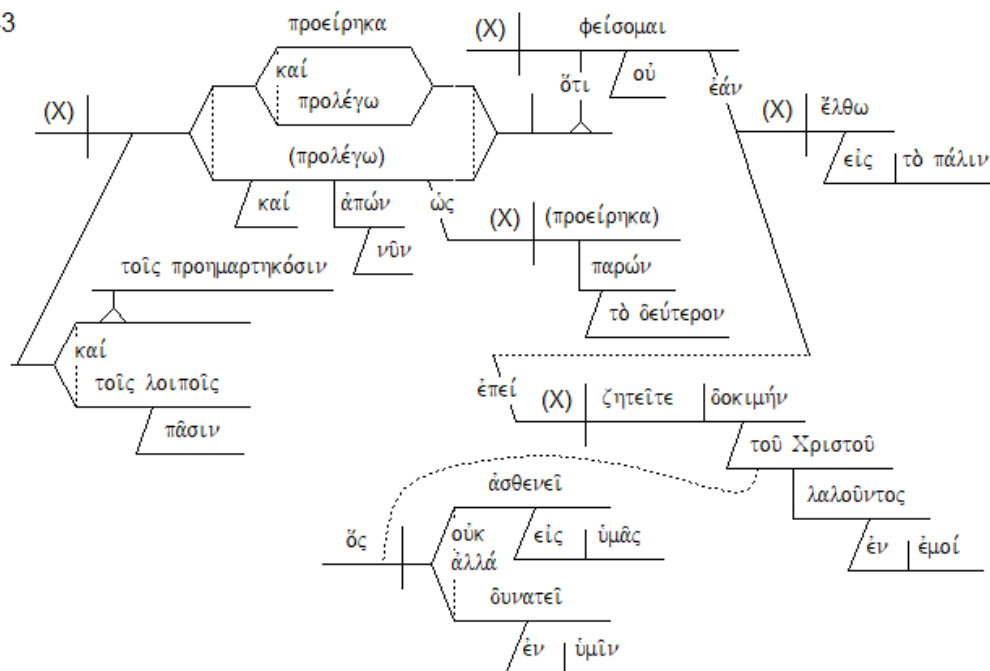
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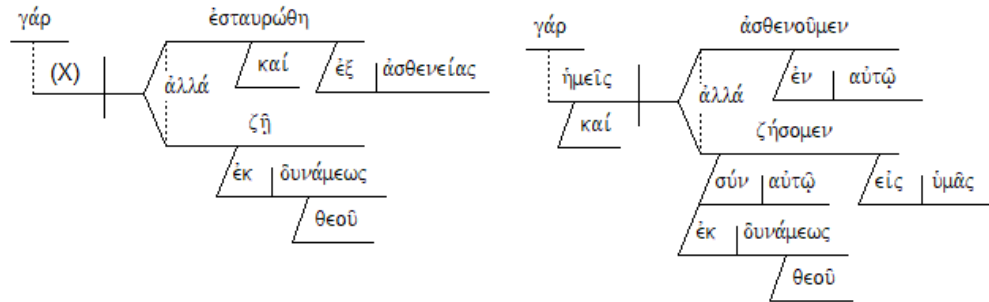
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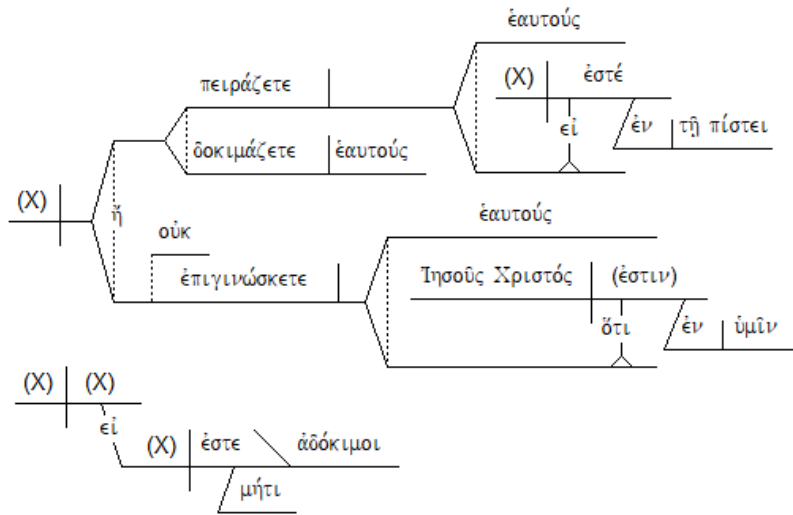
2Co 13:2-3



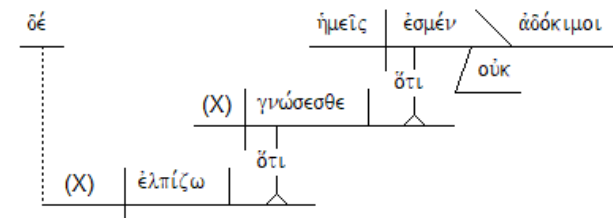
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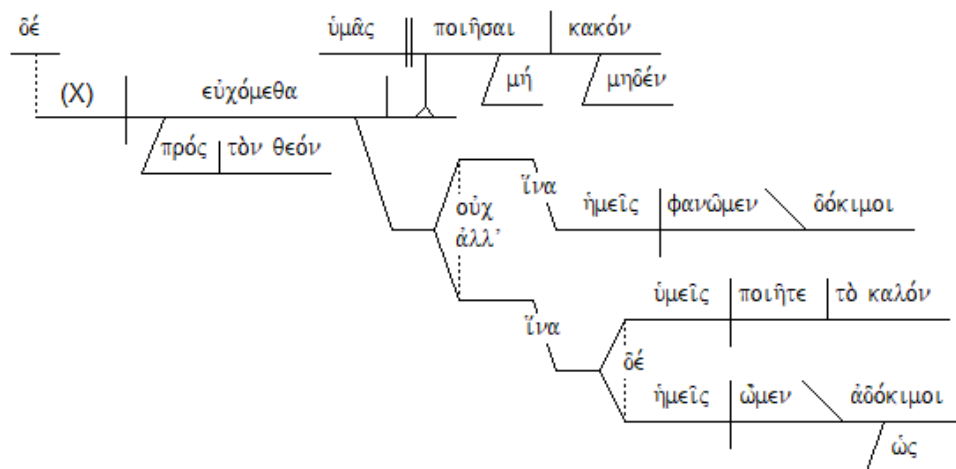
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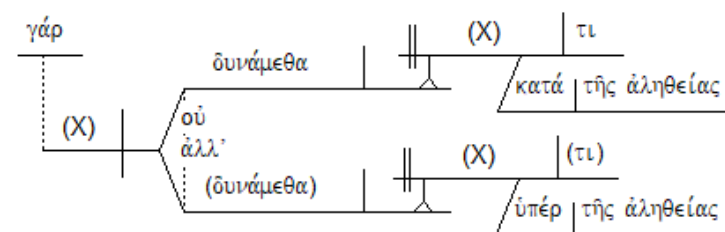
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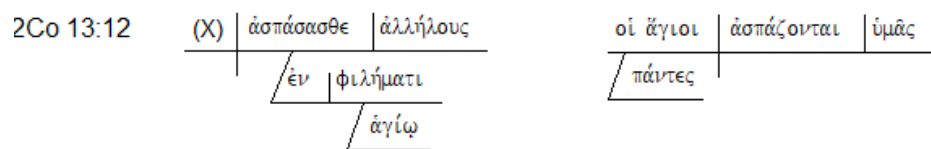
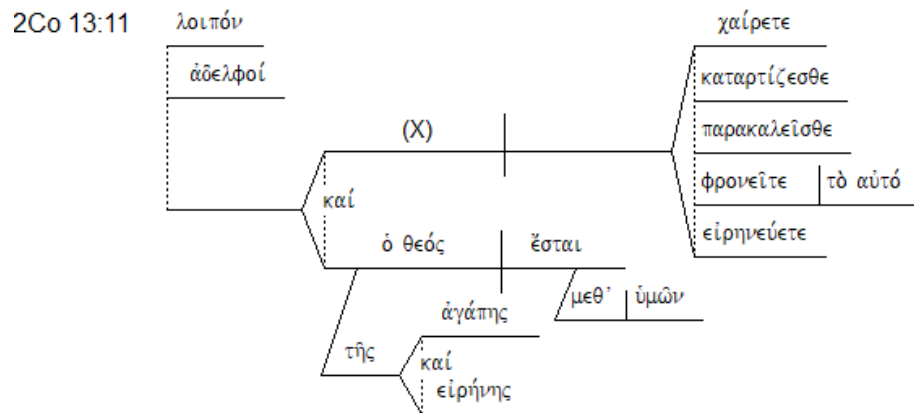
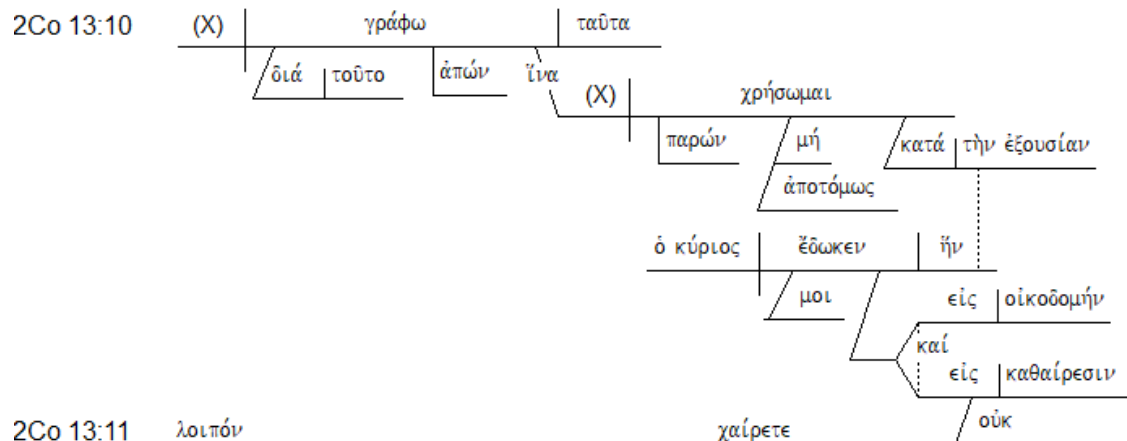
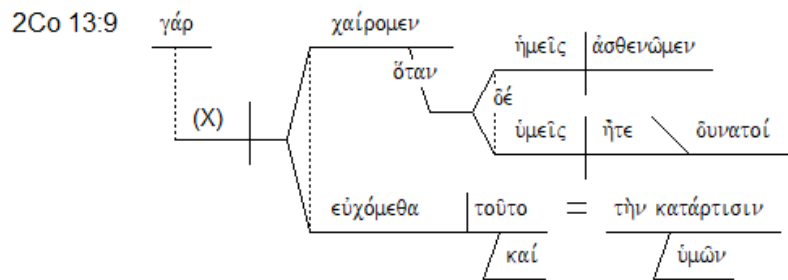


2Co 13:7

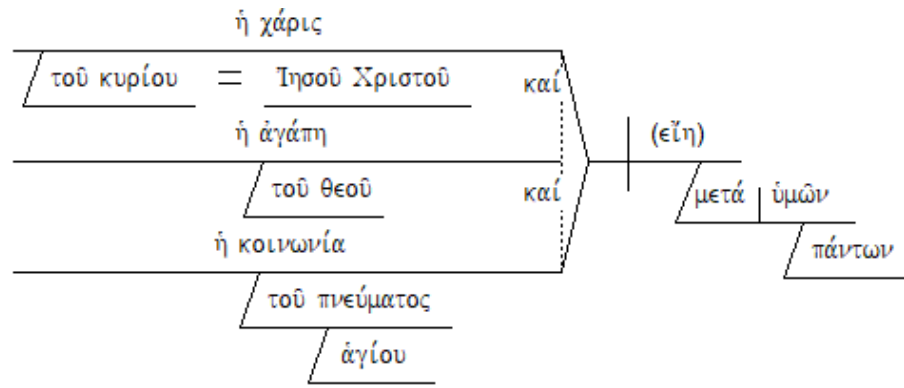


2Co 13:8





2Co 13:13



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