

2 Corinthians - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 8:10-15 and Chapter 9: The Principles in Giving

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Chap. 8:10-15—Paul proceeds to give some guiding principles on the subject of giving. Since it is a matter between the Lord and the individual, he does not address the subject as a command, but rather, says, “Herein I give my advice [opinion].”

There Are Three Things That He Focuses on in Particular:

Vss. 10-12a—The first principle in the ministry of giving is the need for willingness. Paul says, “If there be first a willing mind.” Our generosity is not tested by our wealth but by our willingness. This comes from God touching the heart (Ex. 35:5, 29). He gives the Corinthians credit for being willing “a year ago,” but tells them that there also needs to be the “performance” of it. “Readiness to will” is one thing, but such intentions must be backed up by positive action.

Vs. 12b—The second principle in Christian giving is that it should be according to what we have. “It is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” Paul was not proposing that the Corinthians contribute to the relief of the poor saints in Jerusalem to the point where they went into unrecoverable poverty themselves; then they would become a burden to others. Paul’s point is that we shouldn’t put ourselves into financial ruin by our giving. We are not to give beyond our means, but “according” to our means. It is true that the Lord went into poverty to save us (vs. 9), but we are not to imitate Him in that. Nor should we give beyond what we can, just to look good before others; such fleshly and ulterior reasons shouldn’t enter into our giving. The principle is simple: as God increases our ability to give, we are to increase our generosity.

Vss. 13-15—The third thing is that there should be equality. That is, they should give with the understanding that it is a reciprocal thing. He says, “Not that other men be eased, and ye burdened,” but to remember that they may not always be in a position to give. The time may come when “the tables may be turned” and those in Judea may have the privilege of relieving the necessities of the Corinthians. Paul says, “Some day ‘their abundance may be a supply for your want’”—thus, the principle of reciprocal giving would be seen. If at that time the Corinthians had an “abundance” in temporal things, they should “supply” the “want” (need) of others who didn’t have enough.

To illustrate this, the Apostle quotes from the experience of the children of Israel when they gathered manna in the wilderness. Reading the account in Exodus we might have thought that gathering the manna was purely an individual thing, with each gathering according to the measure of his own appetite. But Paul shows that there was actually a mutual sharing of the manna that they gathered. The people gathered different amounts of it, but what was gathered was shared equally, so that “he that had gathered little had no lack.” Those who gathered much did not complain about those who gathered little, but willingly shared what they had gathered collectively. So it should be in Christianity in temporal things; we are to work with our hands, not only to meet our personal needs but also the needs of others (Eph. 4:28).

The Administration of Gifts

Chap. 8:16-24—Paul turns to speak of the delivery of the gift to the poor saints in Judea. If the gift of the assemblies were to reach them, they needed to have messengers to carry it. Paul speaks of this next. His point here is that the administration of the gift was to be done in a way that was above any suspicion of dishonesty. This teaches us that assembly funds need to be handled with scrupulous care.

Those involved with handling the funds of the assembly should have a genuine care for the saints and also a good report of honest dealings with all. “Titus” was an example of this kind of integrity, and he “accepted the exhortation [entreaty]” from Paul to go on this mission (vss. 16-17). Since all things in connection with assembly functions should be done in the mouth of two or three witnesses (2 Cor. 13:1), there needed to be other persons involved in the carrying of the gift. Hence Paul says that they sent with Titus “the brother, whose praise is in the gospel,” who was approved by “all the assemblies” (vss. 18-19). His name is purposely not given, but he was well known among the brethren. He was actually “chosen by the assemblies” for this work; Paul heartily consents to this choice.

The whole purpose of carefully selecting such persons was to avoid any blame for dealing underhandedly with the funds, and thus, “provide for things honest, not only before the Lord, but also before men” (vss. 20-21). Surely if the early Church needed to be careful in the administration of assembly funds, we need to be that much more careful in our day.

A third “brother” was sent with them who had “proved” to be “diligent in many things” and in whom the saints had “great confidence” (vs. 22). These three “messengers of the assemblies” were to be received by the Corinthians and the Corinthians were to show “the proof” of their “love” for the poor saints in Jerusalem by giving the messengers their contribution to the gift (vs. 24).

Chap. 9:1-5—Paul returns to the subject of the Corinthians’ readiness to give and commends them for it. The Macedonian assemblies had outstripped the Corinthians—not in desire, but in performance. He, therefore, appeals to them to justify his boasting of their desire a “year” ago and to contribute to the collective gift of the assemblies. Just having the desire to give in this way had aroused “the many” (the assemblies at large) and provoked them “unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Paul was now sending the messengers to Corinth because he was anxious to test and to justify the claim he had been making to “them of Macedonia.” It would be an embarrassing calamity to come and find the Corinthians “unprepared,” and thus be “put to shame in this confidence.” Hence, to avoid this Paul deemed it necessary to entreat these three brethren to go on in advance and collect the promised “bounty.” They would first go to the Corinthians and then bring the gift to the Apostle who would go with them to Jerusalem.

The Fruits of Giving

Chap. 9:6-15—Paul concludes his remarks on Christian giving by speaking of the positive things that this ministry produces. He calls them “the fruits of your righteousness” (vs. 10). This was mentioned to encourage the Corinthians (and us) to give liberally.

Vss. 6-8—The first thing is that the donor himself is increased in whatever way God may choose to recompense him. Paul brings in the principle of God’s government and shows that it works on a positive line as much as it works on a negative line. He refers to the natural laws of farming to illustrate this. “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully [blessing].” His point is simple: if we sow with a sparing hand in our giving, our reaping will be sparse; conversely, if we sow with a liberal hand, our blessing will be bountiful. It takes faith to see and to act on this.

It should also be noted that Paul does not exactly say that the giver will reap in temporal wealth, but in “blessing.” This could be in a spiritual sense, as well as temporally. Many Christians have been stumbled by the false idea that if they give to the cause of some church organization, they will amass material wealth for themselves. But it is covetousness. People have been encouraged by preachers to do this, and when they don’t amass the consequent wealth promised, they are often disillusioned. In the Jewish dispensation it might be so (Prov. 3:9-10), because their portion was to inherit the earth (Psa. 37:22, 29), but to import that principle into Christianity is a mistake. Paul was not encouraging the saints to be covetous.

He adds that the only thing that God requires of us is a right spirit in giving. In verse 7 he speaks of three kinds of givers whose spirits are vastly different. There are those who do it:

“Grudgingly”—being pushed into it.

“Of necessity”—being obligated to do it.

“Cheerfully”—from the heart willingly.

Paul reminds them of God’s sovereign power to recompense the giver. He says, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” Our God is a God of providence, and He can make things happen in our lives to make up to us the temporal things that we have given to others. Again, Paul is careful not to go beyond this by saying that we’ll get rich.

Vss. 9-10—Another fruit of Christian giving is that the donor reaps the lasting reward of “righteousness.” If verses 6-8 have to do with the present reward of blessing (spiritual or material) in this life, this fruit has to do with a future reward in the kingdom of Christ. Paul quotes Psalm 112:9; “He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever.” “Forever,” in the Old Testament, means for as long as time shall run; it does not take in eternity. Hence, the Lord will reward such acts of kindness (“righteousnesses” – Rev. 19:8), and they will be carried forward into the Millennial kingdom. God is well able to “multiply” our “seed sown,” and thus, “increase the fruits” of our “righteousness.”

Vss. 11-12—Another great result of liberal giving among the saints is that it produces “many thanksgivings to God.” Thus, not only are the saints helped by the practical gift, but God is glorified. The gift may be given once, but the recipients will thank God “many” times for it. Hence, through our giving we actually help to increase the volume of praise to God!

Vss. 13-15—Another result of Christian giving is that the saints are drawn closer together in affection. Thus there is a practical binding up of the members of the body of Christ in love. Even though the poor cannot repay those who give to them, such acts of grace draw out the affections of the recipients for the givers, and they return the kindness by praying for them. Paul says that the Corinthians’ “free-hearted liberality” toward the poor in Judea would result in “their prayer for you.” Thus, there would be a mutual binding together of the saints in the bonds of love.

God’s wisdom is seen here in allowing the Jewish Christians to get into straits. It created an opportunity to demonstrate the truth of the one body because both Jews and Gentiles had been brought together in one by the Holy Spirit. If the natural tendency of Jewish prejudice was still lurking in their minds toward the Gentiles, this situation gave the opportunity for those thoughts to be judged. This gift must have touched the hearts of the Jewish saints in Judea and endeared the Gentile believers to them. It would have produced a practical binding together of the two. This evidence of practical oneness in the body of Christ would result in a powerful testimony before the world. “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). It also gave the Jewish believers first hand evidence that the Gentiles had truly received the gospel and were truly converted to God.

Vs. 15—Paul closes his subject on Christian giving with a short doxology of praise, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable free gift.” He brings this in to show that perhaps the greatest thing that results from Christian giving is that there is a deeper appreciation among the saints for Christ Himself—God’s “unspeakable gift.” When we realize that these expressions of mutual love and care for one another were because of Him, He becomes more precious to us—and it results in further thanksgiving to God. What a wonderful result this is!

Paul began his treatise on Christian giving with the example of the Lord’s gift of Himself (chap. 8:9), and now he closes with the example of God’s gift of His Son. He is the greatest Gift of all; no gift could be greater.

In summary, the great results of Christian giving are:

The giver is recompensed in this life (vss. 6-8).

The giver is recompensed in the future (vss. 9-10).

God receives praise and glory (vs. 11).

The recipients are helped in their temporal needs (vs. 12).

The givers are prayed for (vss. 13-14).

The members of the one body are bound up together in mutual love (vss. 13-14).

There results a deeper appreciation for God's unspeakable gift—Christ (vs. 15).

Paul's Authority

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9: The Examples of Giving

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Chap. 8:1-9—One of the greatest ways to arouse divine qualities of love and care in the saints of God is to have them see it in action. The working of grace in others can act as a stimulus. Therefore, Paul begins by setting before the Corinthians two outstanding examples of giving—from two extremes:

The Macedonians—the poorest of givers (vss. 1-8).

The Lord Himself—the richest of givers (vs. 9).

The Macedonians

Vss. 1-2—There had been a remarkable display of grace in “the assemblies of Macedonia,” such as: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, etc. They displayed an extraordinary degree of Christian generosity. Paul pointed to them as a model of the benevolent spirit that we need to have in giving. These people were in “deep poverty,” yet it didn't hinder them from giving. They had an “abundance of their joy” in the spiritual things that they possessed and it made them hold temporal things lightly. Hence, they were willing to part with their material things in the care of others. They were a sparkling example for the Corinthians—and for us too.

Vss. 3-5—These people were so “willing” that they gave “beyond their power.” That is, they gave beyond what one would normally do in parting with things. They actually begged the Apostle to “receive the gift” they had gathered so that they could have the privilege of having “fellowship of the service which [was to be rendered] to the saints” in Jerusalem. The fact that they had to beg the Apostle to take their gift shows that he must have hesitated to accept it; he knew how poor they were.

They truly went far beyond what the Apostle had “hoped” for. Paul reveals the key: “They gave themselves first to the Lord.” This is the greatest gift that we can give—ourselves. Their devotion of heart to the Lord was such that they had given everything that they had to the Lord—themselves and their possessions. Knowing that these things all belonged to the Lord, they were happy to see their goods used in His service. This led them to give out of their material substance freely. It shows that when there is committal to Christ, there will be a disposal of our material things in the service of Christ.

Vss. 6-8—Paul then encouraged the Corinthians to imitate the example of the Macedonians. He mentions that he had urged Titus to “complete” the work that he had begun in Corinth when he went to them with Paul's first letter. When Titus was there the first time, he told the Corinthians that they should think about contributing to the collection. Now, when Titus returned with this second letter from Paul, Paul trusted that he would be able to “complete” “this grace also.” Since the Corinthians excelled in many ways, Paul wanted them to excel in this matter of giving too, so that they would abound in every aspect of Christian experience. Paul was not commanding this but reminding them that it was an opportunity for them to “prove the sincerity” of their “love.”

The Lord Himself

Vs. 9—There was an even greater display of grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul now turns to speak of Him as the supreme example of giving. Nothing could be greater than this display of grace. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” Grace means to bestow unmerited favour on someone. In our case, the Lord gave up everything He had, as far as His personal rights of exercising His Godhead prerogatives are concerned. He became a Man to go to the cross so that we might be saved and be made “rich.” He sold all that He had to do this (Matt. 13:44). He gave Himself (Matt. 20:28; Gal 2:20; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14).

It should be noted that in both examples there was real joy in their giving. The Macedonians did it with “joy” (vs. 2), and the Lord also did it with “joy” (Matt. 13:44). This shows that there is a special joy in giving that is known only to those who do it (Acts 20:35).

Note also that, in speaking of the collection, Paul never uses the blunt word, “money.” Instead, he uses words such as: “free-hearted liberality” (vs. 2), “grace” (vs. 4), “fellowship of the ministering” (vs. 4), “bounty [blessing]” (chap. 9:5), “seed” (chap. 9:10), etc.

(Chap. 7:6-16)

Chap. 7:6-16—With things being cleared away on both sides, there was now no reason for any estrangement between Paul and the Corinthians. They had no reason not to receive him, and he had no reason now not to come to them.

In verse 5, Paul picks up the historical thread of things from which he had digressed in chapter 2:14. He praises the Corinthians for their right spirit in receiving the letter he had sent.

Vss. 6-7—Paul speaks of his anxiety being relieved by the favourable report of Titus, but he gives the credit to God. “God, that comforteth [encourages] those that are cast down, comforted [encouraged] us by the coming of Titus.” Titus reported the genuine “earnest desire” and “mourning” of the Corinthians. This shows that they had truly been exercised about the wrongs in the assembly and had mourned in repentance about it, and had set them right. This was good. Another source of joy for Paul was that, except for a faction of detractors, they had a “fervent mind” toward him. This showed that they had taken his correction in a right spirit, and desired to be reconciled to the Apostle.

Vss. 8-10—We see how tender Paul’s heart was toward the Corinthians; he almost apologizes for writing the letter. But in retrospect, he says that though he had “grieved” them “with the letter,” he did not “regret” it now because it had produced these positive results. But he admits that after he had written the letter that he had second thoughts, and actually, for a time, he had “regretted it.” We see his tender care for them in this hesitation. He recognizes that the grief he had caused in writing that severe letter was “but for a season.” Hence, the first epistle brought about two things in the Corinthians:

Repentance as to the evils Paul had denounced.

A revival of their affection (in part) for the Apostle.

In setting things right, the Corinthians had delivered themselves from being “injured” by Paul’s apostolic judgment that would have come down on them (vs. 9). As an assembly, they “sorrowed to repentance” (vs. 10). This was a collective sorrow and a collective repentance. This shows that sorrow and repentance are two different things. Godly sorrow is grief over sin allowed or committed. Repentance is to have a changed mind about a course of sin that we have pursued and to pass judgment on it.

Paul says that this repentance that led the Corinthians to correct the disorders in the assembly was “to salvation.” That is, it brought about a practical deliverance or salvation from the judgment of God on the assembly. By setting things right, they saved the assembly from judgment. Paul adds, “Not to be repented of,” because their change of mind toward what is right was not to be turned from. Once we have turned toward what is right, we should never think of repenting (changing our minds) of it and going back.

Scripture says, “There is joy before the angels of God for one repenting sinner” (Luke 15:10). Although the context of this verse in the gospel of Luke has to do with the repentance in a person getting saved, it shows that repentance is not a one-time thing, but an on-going exercise in the believer’s life. Confession is an act, but repentance is a process. This does not mean that we are to go around beating ourselves up in sorrow for the rest of our lives, because repentance and sorrow are two different things. What is to be on-going in our lives is a changed mind toward all sin that we once pursued. It is repentance, not sorrow that should be on-going in our lives. In the case of the Corinthians, if they ceased to repent concerning this matter, it would mean that they would again become indifferent toward sin in their midst.

While godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation, worldly sorrow, which is not of God, only “works death.” That is, it works to the moral ruin of an individual. The former feels sorrow because of guilt, and it leads to self-judgment; the latter is not true sorrow for sin, but grief for having to suffer the effects of one’s sinful deeds (Matt. 14:9). One is repentance; the other is remorse. The difference between them is illustrated in Peter and Judas. Peter went out and “wept bitterly” in true repentance (Matt. 26:75), but Judas was “filled with remorse” (Matt. 27:3). One led to restoration to God, the other to suicide and a lost eternity.

Seven Things That Proved That Their Collective Repentance Was According to God

Vs. 11—The fruits of repentance with the Corinthians were all good. This is seen in seven things that Paul mentions. He says:

“What carefulness”—they manifested a care for the Lord’s glory in excommunicating the wicked person in their midst.

“What clearing of yourselves”—their act cleared the assembly of its complicity with the sin.

“What indignation”—their genuine hatred of the sin.

“What fear”—their fear of God’s holiness.

“What vehement desire”—their desire to vindicate God.

“What zeal”—their eagerness to act for the Lord in the matter.

“What revenge”—their readiness to see justice done.

Vss. 12-13—The Corinthians had proved their “zeal” for God in acting to correct matters in the assembly by excommunicating the offender (vs. 11), but that was not the only reason why Paul had written to them. He says that the situation was also an opportunity for them to show their “zeal for us”—he and those who laboured with him (vs. 12 – J. N. Darby Trans. footnote). He tells them that he didn’t write to merely secure the discipline of the offender or vindicate the one offended, but that they would take that golden opportunity to show that they really cared for Paul’s love and fellowship, and be reconciled to him. Thus, the rupture in the practical fellowship among the members of the body of Christ would be healed. When Titus came and reported that the first letter had been received and acted on, Paul realized that both objectives had been secured—their zeal for God and their zeal for him. Hence, he says, “For this reason we have been encouraged.” More than that, when Paul and those with him saw the joy of Titus, they were “exceedingly the more joyed.”

Vss. 14-16—In bringing the subject to a close, Paul applies the towel of comfort to the Corinthians after washing their feet in the whole matter (John 13:5). He now tells them that, in retrospect, he was “not ashamed” that he had told Titus beforehand of his confidence in the Corinthians—to the point that he boasted to Titus that they would receive the rebuke in his first letter. Now he says, “Our boasting, which I made before to Titus, is found a truth.” Paul had told Titus that they would receive and act on it, and thus, on the strength of this, he encouraged Titus to accept the delicate mission of going to Corinth. Titus too, was deeply affected by their “obedience.”

The happy ending to the whole matter is found in Paul’s words, “I have confidence in you in all things.” The genuineness of their affection for Paul caused them to reach this happy conclusion of repentance, proved by their setting right the things that were wanting in the assembly. The breach between the Corinthians and Paul was healed, as far as he was concerned.

Christian Giving

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:5: Paul's Appeal to the Corinthians

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

(Chap. 6:11-7:5)

Based on his credentials as a true minister of Jesus Christ in the foregoing chapters, Paul now appeals to the Corinthians to “receive” him. The grounds of his appeal are: his deep and genuine affection for them (chap. 6:11-13), and the irreproachable character of his life (chap. 7:2-4).

1) His Genuine Affection for Them

Chap. 6:11-13—Paul says, “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged [expanded]. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels [affections]. Now for a recompense of the same, (I speak as unto children), let your heart also enlarge itself.” His mouth being opened to the Corinthians refers to the fact that he had frankly disclosed to them the secret springs of his actions in serving the Lord. He held back nothing in laying bare his desires and his motives before them. His heart was truly “expanded” toward the Corinthians; he genuinely loved them, and this led to his mouth being opened in sincerity to them (Matt. 12:34). He earnestly entreats them to respond in a reciprocal way, and let their affections go out to him. He said, “Let your heart also expand itself.” Any restriction of affection between the Corinthians and Paul was not on his part; he was not withholding his affection from them. The hindrance was obviously on their part.

Chap. 6:14-16—Since there was an obvious hindrance in the outflow of their affections, Paul turns to address it. He traces their restricted affections to the unequal yokes they had formed with the world. They had been careless in their associations and it had the effect of dampening their affections towards the Lord and His people. Herein lies the danger of the unequal yoke.

An unequal yoke is anything that links the believer with an unbeliever in a common purpose—whether it is social, commercial, religious, marital, or political. Such false links undermine Christian fellowship and have a way of restricting our affections toward the Lord and our brethren. We are not “of the world” because we are heavenly men through the call of the gospel. However, we have to live “in the world” (John 17:11-15), but even in this, we don’t have to be unequally yoked together with the world. We have to do our business in the world, and thus we come in contact with it, but we don’t have to become personally involved with it. Negative influences of the world do not result from contact with it, but from complicity with it. It was complicity that was the problem with the Corinthians. Therefore, Paul’s remedy for their restricted affections was, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

In these verses (14-16), Paul asks five rhetorical questions designed to show how unnatural, incongruous, and unsafe alliances with the world are. Each touches on a different realm of incompatibility in regard to believers and unbelievers:

“Righteousness with unrighteousness”—the sphere of moral behaviour.

“Light with darkness”—the sphere of spiritual knowledge.

“Christ with Belial”—the sphere of spiritual authority.

“He that believeth with an infidel”—the sphere of faith.

“The temple of God with idols”—the sphere of worship.

The five words Paul uses—“fellowship,” “communion,” “concord,” “part,” and “agreement”—should be carefully noted. Such words imply complicity with the world. Some would like to dismiss Paul’s exhortation by relegating it to the marriage bond and making it nothing more than that, but his remarks concerning the unequal yoke go far beyond marriages with unbelievers. An unequal yoke could be a social link with unbelievers in games, clubs, associations, fraternities, etc. (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15). Or, it could be a business partnership with unbelievers (Deut. 22:10; 2 Chron. 20:35-37; Prov. 6:1-5). Or, it could be an ecclesiastical link with a sect in Christianity where unbelievers are allowed to partake in the communion services (1 Cor. 11:19). Or, it could be a marital tie (Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12; 1 Cor. 7:39). A Christian should not marry an unbeliever, but if a believer is married to one, this passage does not justify divorce (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Or, the unequal yoke could be a political link with unbelievers by joining with their political endeavours (2 Chron. 18:1-34; 25:5-10; Isa. 45:9). The point here is that there are two great opposing spheres of moral and spiritual action that cannot go on together in a Christian’s life without serious practical ramifications.

Chap. 6:17-18—To encourage the Corinthians to separate from ungodly links with the world, Paul quotes the Lord Himself, saying, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” This statement is in the aorist tense in the Greek, meaning that it should be a once-for-all thing in a believer’s life.

Therefore, the Corinthians needed to not only change their attitude toward Paul (vss. 11-13), but also toward the world (vss. 14-16). They needed to open their hearts to Paul and close their hearts to the world. We all need to treat the world as it truly is—an enemy of our souls. The soul of the Christian is ever being lured back into the world, just as Israel was constantly tempted to turn to idolatry. There are some very important reasons why separation is necessary in a Christian’s life. Without it:

Our personal holiness will be compromised by the defilements of the world (2 Cor. 6:17).

Our communion with the Lord will be seriously threatened, if not lost altogether (John 14:21-23).

Our hearts will be drawn away from the Lord (Deut. 7:2-4).

Our moral standards will become corrupted (1 Cor. 15:33).

Our spiritual growth will be hindered (Hos. 7:8).

Our spiritual energy and discernment will be dulled (Hos. 7:9).

Our personal testimony will lack power with others (Gen. 19:14).

Separation from worldly people and things does not mean that the believer ends up walking alone. The Lord makes a three-fold promise to compensate us with His personal companionship; we are given a special sense of His presence. He says:

“I will receive you.”

“I will be a Father unto you.”

“Ye shall be My sons and daughters.”

This is an incredible reward held out to those who walk in separation—the Lord promises to be our nearest and dearest Friend! It reminds us of Abram when he declined the offers of the king of Sodom as a reward for his help in the slaughter of the confederated armies under Chedorlaomer. The Lord immediately appeared to him and said, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). Could there be a greater Person in the whole universe with whom we can walk? Conversely, if a believer chooses to go on with worldly alliances and friendships, he cannot expect to have this special sense of the Lord’s fellowship in his life. It doesn’t mean that the Lord abandons him (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5), but that he is not given that special sense of His presence (Luke 24:15-16). This privilege is conditioned on obedience (John 14:21-23). There will also be other Christians with whom we can walk in the path, but that is not mentioned here (2 Timothy 2:22).

Chap. 7:1—This verse belongs with the exhortation in chapter 6. With the encouragement of the promises of the Lord in hand, Paul says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” This exhortation goes beyond not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. A person could do that and still live in unholiness. Separating from unholy outward connections with the world should be coupled with cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit within us. It shows that it’s possible to separate from things outwardly, but go on with all sorts of uncleanness inwardly in our personal lives. Hence, the exhortation would not be complete without this side of things being addressed.

Note: Paul says, “Let us cleanse ourselves ...” The cleansing that occurs when we are saved by believing the gospel is done for us by the Lord (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 John 1:7; Rev.1:5), but this cleansing is something that we are responsible to do.

2) the Irreproachable Character of His Life

Chap. 7:2-5—The second reason why he entreats the Corinthians to “receive” him is that he passed the grade on all accounts as a true minister of Jesus Christ. There is always a danger of there being some reservation toward a person who corrects us. Paul knew that this could be the case with the Corinthians and he entreats them to receive him. At the same time he confirms his love toward them by telling them that they were in his heart, and that neither death nor life was going to separate them from his love for them (vss. 3-4).

It also shows us that we can wrong someone, and though we are repentant about it, we can leave a mark on ourselves whereby people still will hold some reservation toward us. But this was not the case with Paul; he and those who ministered with him had “wronged,” “corrupted,” and “defrauded” no man.

(Chap. 6:1-10)

In chapter 6 Paul speaks of being tested and approved of God in the ministry. He and his co-workers had truly been tested under real life situations in the field of service, and they had met with divine approval.

Vss. 1-2—In chapter 5 Paul spoke of how he beseeched sinners to be reconciled to God; now in chapter 6 he beseeches the saints at Corinth to “receive not the grace of God in vain.” Such truths had so motivated him that he threw his whole life into the service of the Lord, as seen in chapter 5. Now, he beseeches the Corinthians to respond in the same way. He calls on them to respond to the grace of God that had been shown to them, and to allow the precious things conveyed to them through the ministry to affect their lives practically.

The words, “with Him,” in verse 1 (KJV), are not found in the Greek text. They make the verse to mean that Paul and his fellow-workers were workers with God. This is true (1 Cor. 3:9), but it is not the point he was making here. He desired to stir up the Corinthians to respond to the grace of God and to join the work that he and his co-workers were engaged in. Mr. F. B. Hole said, “Grace is received in vain if it does not work out to its legitimate end and effect.” Sad to say, this was the case with the Corinthians. Under the influence of the false apostles who had infiltrated their ranks, they had become “armchair critics” of those engaged in the work of the Lord, rather than “workers together” with them. They were critical of the Apostle, but had not engaged themselves in the service of the Lord in any significant way. This was a terrible inconsistency, and it is a problem that still exists in the Church today.

In a parenthesis (vs. 2), Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 to show that the time to be busy in the work of the Lord is in “the day of salvation.” Isaiah was speaking prophetically of God’s encouragement to the Messiah of Israel (the Lord Jesus) when He was rejected at the time of His first coming (John 1:11). He promised Him that His prayer in regard to Israel’s salvation would be heard in “an acceptable time,” which will be at His Appearing. God will work for Israel’s blessing in that day, and promised to assist the Lord in accomplishing it. Paul makes an application from that Scripture to show that we are to be found working in this present day of salvation when the Gospel of the Grace of God is being preached. Paul’s point here is that we can count on God’s assistance in this work in a similar way (compare Mark 16:20). He brings this before the Corinthians as an encouragement to be busy in the ministry of reconciliation mentioned in chapter 5. Instead of giving their ear to people who were opposing and criticizing Paul and his ministry, the Corinthians needed to be supporting it in whatever way they could. We need to do the same.

Vs. 3—Paul cautions the Corinthians, that being involved in the work, they needed to be careful in all of their dealings with people and not give any “offence,” so “that the ministry be not blamed.” The truth may offend (Matt. 15:12), but that is not what Paul is speaking about. He is speaking of personal offences because our own foolishness. It is extremely important not to allow anything that would be inconsistent in our lives, so that we don’t stumble those to whom we have proclaimed the grace of God. It could cause them to reject it.

Vss. 4-10—Paul brings his principles of action in service to a climax in mentioning no less than 28 things in which he and his co-workers were tested and approved of God. These testings and provings fall into three categories, each having nine items: in outward adverse circumstances, in moral ways and characteristics, and in paradoxical misunderstandings.

Nine Testing Circumstances Wherein the Minister Is to Honour God

Vss. 4-5—Paul gives a list of the outward adverse circumstances which one who faithfully ministers the truth will encounter. He begins by speaking of “endurance.” This is the quality of spiritual toughness which is needed in all the trying circumstances that one encounters in serving the Lord.

Paul then proceeds to name nine adverse circumstances. “Afflictions” refers to various troubles the servant will encounter (2 Tim. 1:8). “Necessities” are hardships (Acts 20:34). “Distresses” are trying situations (Psa. 120:1). “Stripes” refers to beatings (Acts 16:22-23). “Imprisonments” is being jailed (Acts 24:27). “Tumults [riots]” are the results of the rejection of the gospel (Acts 19:29-34). “Labours” refers to hard work of any kind (Acts 20:33-35). “Watchings” is sleepless nights. “Fasting” is not voluntary fasting resulting from soul exercise before God, but hunger through the lack of food.

In all these things, Paul and those who laboured with him faced these situations and behaved commendably as “God’s ministers” (vs. 4).

Nine Moral Characteristics

Vss. 6-7—Passing on to another area where the minister of Christ must show himself “approved unto God,” Paul speaks of nine things by which the servant should be characterized.

He begins with “purity,” which has to do with personal piety. God’s servants must walk blamelessly before their brethren and the world. Next is “knowledge.” The servant must have a sound understanding of the truth of God (Eph. 3:4), so as to be able to answer anyone who asks about the Christian faith (1 Peter 3:15). God’s ministers must also be marked by “longsuffering.” This is the quality of having a patient spirit with those who oppose the truth (2 Tim. 2:24). “Kindness” shows that they must manifest a spirit of grace towards all. Moreover, the minister of Christ is to be marked by being filled with the “Holy Spirit” at all times (Gal. 5:25; Eph. 5:18). “Love unfeigned,” of course, means that they must be genuine in their affection toward all.

Paul then says, "By the word of truth." Apparently, this means that when the servant is under pressure to give up some point of the truth to make the message more acceptable, he must hold fast to all of the truth of God. Then he adds, "By the power of God," which means that the Lord's work must not be carried out with fleshly energy, but by the power that God gives by the Spirit (Zech. 4:6). Lastly, he says, "By armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." This refers to acting with moral integrity in all business dealings so as to not give any offence to the gospel.

This shows that there is a certain character that the minister is to maintain before all so that there would be no accusations against the Lord and the truth of God. In each of these things Paul and those with him were approved of God.

Nine Paradoxical Situations

Vss. 8-10—In the last group of nine things Paul shows that the minister may be misunderstood at times, and even rejected in the service of the Lord. We cannot expect that people of the world will understand the purpose of the gospel, nor can we expect that worldly Christians will appreciate all aspects of the truth. As a result, there will be opposition and misrepresentation of the servant's motives and work. These things cannot but occur in the life of the servant who tries to honour God in his service. Consequently, he must accept the fact that he will appear, at times, in a paradoxical way before others.

Paul says, "By honour and dishonour." Among those who value the truth, the servant will be appreciated, but among those who reject it, he will be unappreciated. "By evil report and good report" means that he may be slandered, but those who value the truth will bring a good report of his character and ways. "As deceivers, and yet true" means that the servant may be accused of being an impostor, even though such allegations are not true. "As unknown, and yet well known" refers to being viewed as nothing in this world, but having the quiet confidence of the Lord's approval. J. N. Darby aptly remarked that "true greatness is to serve unnoticed and to work unseen." The servant of the Lord must be content with this. "As dying, and, behold, we live" refers to the servant's life always being in jeopardy, yet having divine mercy to continue in the path. "As chastened, and not killed," refers to the many things the servant will endure in the path of service that God will use as a discipline in His school that will ultimately be used for the servant's profit. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" refers to the sorrow the minister experiences when the truth is rejected or resisted, but there is rejoicing when it is received. "As poor, yet making many rich" refers to the expending of one's material resources to provide the means of reaching people and imparting spiritual blessing to them (Acts 20:34). "Having nothing, and yet possessing all things" means that the servant will appear to be wasting his life in a useless cause, but in reality he has gained all things—both spiritual and material (Eph. 1:3; 1 Cor. 3:22).

Hence, the servant must endure all things for the gospel's sake, and at the same time, maintain a right spirit and character as God's servant. To summarize all these things, Hamilton Smith said, "Whether in the circumstances they passed through, or in the trials they had to meet, in the spiritual exercises their service involved, in the moral qualities they exhibited, in the practical righteousness that marked them, or in the path they trod in following the Master, the Apostle and his fellow-workers commended themselves as the servants of God."

The great concluding point here is that Paul and his co-workers had shown themselves to be approved and commended of God—the highest of all authorities. What grounds could the Corinthians possibly have to reject him and his ministry if God had approved them? It is quite incredible that someone so devoted and so self-sacrificing could be accused of insincerity, self-seeking, deceit, etc. If nothing else, Paul had given his friends in Corinth, who formed the majority of the assembly, the material to reply to the false teachers who questioned his honesty and integrity.

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10: Reasons for This Session

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

There are two main reasons for this session

1) It Will Augment the Eternal Praise of God

First, as to the judgment seat's future bearing, it will result in an increase of the praise of God in heaven. All believers agree that the Lord deserves the fullest praise from every redeemed person; the immediate result of the judgment seat review will do just that. There are three ways in which this will be accomplished:

A) The Lord will magnify the grace of God before our eyes, whereby our appreciation for it will be deepened significantly, and thus, produce a greater volume of praise from our hearts.

The Lord will review our lives and we will see our sins in the light of God's infinite holiness. Things that we might think are not too terribly serious now, we will see then as sin indeed. We know our sins now as being quite an ugly pile—and we are certainly not proud of it—but in that day He is going to show us that they were a mountain! Everything will be seen in its true light then, and we will learn of the true badness of our fallen sin-natures.

Since it says, "things done in the body"—and we were all in our bodies before we were saved—this manifestation will be of our whole lives, not just after we were saved. If He didn't review certain episodes of failure and shame in our lives, there would be some reserve on our part, and God doesn't want that—and neither will we. The bright eternity before us would be clouded in part by the feeling that someday they might be dragged into the light. Therefore, God's way is to have it all taken up and put out of the way forever. (We have in hand five or six respected expositors who state that this manifestation will not be a public affair before all the saints in heaven, but a private thing with the Lord.)

Then, after showing us our sins in the light of His holiness, we are going to see the grace of God rising over the top of all of them in putting them all away on the righteous basis of Christ's finished work. We are going to understand the truth of Romans 5:20 in a deeper way, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The result will be one loud, eternal burst of praise from the redeemed company. The volume of praise will be many times greater than if we had not gone through this process of review.

B) The Lord will reveal the wisdom of His ways with us on earth.

This will also add to the volume of praise. We have all had some difficult and perplexing things happen in our lives, and have often wondered why the Lord allowed it. The review at the judgment seat will justify God in His ways with us. The Lord is going to take us through our lives, step by step, and show us that He didn't make any mistakes in what He allowed us to pass through. In that day, He is going to answer every hard question that we have about our lives, and He will show us that there was a divine purpose of love behind it and a "needs be" for it all (1 Peter 1:6). At the judgment seat, the Lord will show us that we have not shed one unnoticed tear. We'll learn that every ounce of suffering and sorrow that we have had to pass through was weighed in His divine balances in tenderest love before it was laid upon us. He will show us that it has been used to conform us to His own image (Rom. 8:28-29). And we will say, "As for God, His way is perfect" (Psa. 18:30). As a result, we will praise Him in a far greater and more meaningful way than we ever would have, if we hadn't had the experience of the judgment seat.

C) The Lord will grant us rewards for things that we have done for His name's sake.

He will use the occasion of the judgment seat to determine our rewards in the kingdom. When we receive a reward for the smallest thing that we've done for Him—even something as insignificant as giving a drink of water in His name (Matt. 10:42)—we will be taken aback by it, and we will praise Him that much more. In that day, He is going to find something to reward every believer. "Then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). He will find things done for Himself that we have long forgotten, and we'll be amazed that He would give us a reward for it.

It's even harder to believe that when we get there, He is going to praise us! "Every man shall have praise of God." We may have thought that we were going to heaven to praise Him—which is certainly true—but when we get there He will also praise us! This is astounding. It won't be in the common sense of worship, of course, but He will say to each of us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). We will be greatly humbled by His grace and goodness, and the grand result will be that we'll fill the heavens with His praise because He is worthy.

2) It Motivates Us to Live for Christ

The other purpose for the judgment seat of Christ is to motivate us to live for Christ now. This is the context in which Paul was writing in this 5th chapter. God intends that this future event would have a present effect on us. When we realize that everything we do for the Lord is going to have a reward in the coming day, and that we could lose our reward if we live for self now, it ought to motivate us to start laying up treasure in heaven for that day (Matt. 6:20-21).

It has been said that we shouldn't do things just to get a reward; all should be done out of a desire to please the Lord. This is true; our highest motive for the things that we do should be purely because we love the Lord and we want to please Him. However, Mr. Kohler used to say, "I want to get all the crowns I can get, because in that day I'll have more to cast at His feet!" (Rev. 4:10).

Vs. 11—The reality of the review before the judgment seat of Christ in the near future produced a two-fold present effect in Paul and his fellow-workers. It should do the same in us. Firstly, they were motivated by "the terror of the Lord." The thought of God's "terror" against sin made them think of unbelievers and their lot before the judgment seat. This led them to use all their energy to "persuade men" to flee from the wrath to come. Thus, Paul threw himself into the work of the Lord. Note: he was fervent in his service, not to get a reward, but rather out of concern for those who lived without reference to eternity. Secondly, the thought of the judgment seat led him to live now as "manifest unto God" and also in the "consciences" of the saints. In other words, he wanted to be transparent before God and men in regard to his motives in service. He desired that all would see that his motives were pure:

As to the world—Paul sought to "persuade men."

As to himself—Paul walked consciously under the all-seeing eye of the Lord as "manifest unto God."

As to the saints—Paul sought to walk in a way that would "commend" himself to their consciences.

Knowing that we are soon going to be "manifest" before the judgment seat of Christ ought to bestir a present exercise in us to use our energy in the service of the Lord, and also to live openly and honestly before God and men.

Vss. 12-13—Realizing what he had just said could be misunderstood as being self-praise, Paul clarifies his statements by saying that he was not trying to "commend" himself. He was, rather, letting the saints know the godly sincerity of his life and ministry, so that they would have "somewhat to answer" those who attacked him with their slanderous reports.

The zeal that led Paul to serve the Lord with all his energy led his critics to label him as a fanatic who was "beside" himself. His passionate preaching and teaching was construed as being that of a man who was mentally unstable, and thus, not to be trusted. Paul answers this insinuation by saying that if his devotion to the Lord seemed that way, in either case (either ecstatic or sober), it was because his motives were entirely unselfish. He loved God and cared deeply for the saints of God.

3) The Love of Christ Constrains Us to Live Unto Him Who Died for Us and Rose Again

Vss. 14-21—This leads Paul to speak of a third great motivating force in his life and ministry. He was moved by "the love of Christ." What a mighty power this is! His life of devotion to tireless service may have seemed like insanity to his critics, but it was really a result of the constraining power of the love of Christ.

Paul was not speaking of his love for Christ, but rather Christ's love for him. The power of that love had so captured him that it entirely altered the course of his life. It is not the glory of Christ at the right hand of God that is before us here (as in chapter 3:18), but "the love of Christ" that moved Him to die. He died not only to put our sins away, but also to transform the whole purpose of our existence in this world. In saying, "Having judged this: that if one died for all, then were all dead," Paul was stating that since Christ had to die for all mankind, it is a proof that the whole race was in a condition of spiritual death—all were but dead men before God (Eph. 2:1, 5). Though He "died for all," the effect of His death was to alter the course of the lives of those who believe.

Vs. 15—Those who have been quickened out of the state of the spiritual death (mentioned in verse 14) are to find in Christ risen the Object and End of the new life they now live. Before conversion everything in a man's life revolves around his own interests, but when Christ is his Saviour and Lord, there is an entirely new motive for living in his life. The aim and purpose of his life are the interests of Christ. This was the case with Paul and those who worked with him, and it should be the case with every right-hearted Christian. The mighty love of Christ constrained him not to live unto himself but for Him who died and rose again. We see from this that there are really only two ways that Christians can live: "unto themselves" or "unto Him." We can't do anything about the way we have lived our Christian lives in the past. If it has been for self, what has been done cannot be changed, but we all have a "henceforth." There is "the rest of our time" (1 Peter 4:2); the great question for us is what we will do with it. The choices we make in our lives from henceforth will reflect where our affections are.

Hence, in these chapters we have had:

The transformation of our moral character (chap. 3:18).

The transformation of our bodies (chap. 5:1-4).

The transformation of our purpose in living (chap. 5:14-15).

Vss. 16-17—Paul shows that the life he now lived was in an entirely new sphere. When the Lord rose from the dead He left behind the sphere that belonged to the natural existence of the flesh and became the Head of a "new creation" race of men (Col. 1:18; Rev. 3:14). As believers, we are part of this new race, and our links with one another in this new sphere are not on the lines of natural relationships and natural interests. Paul says, "Henceforth know we no man after [according to] the flesh." This doesn't mean that we no longer have natural relationships and interests, but that in spiritual things (Christian fellowship and ministry) our links with one another are on spiritual lines. Hence, our fellowship in the new creation is not based on us having similar natural interests in recreation, arts and music, family relationships, national distinctions, etc.

Moreover, as Christians, our relationship with the Lord is not on earthly lines—as He was to Israel as their Messiah. Paul says, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." As head of a new creation race, we know the Lord in a new and different way. The Lord indicated this to Mary when He rose from the dead, saying, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17). The relationship that Mary and the other disciples had with the Lord prior to His death (as Israel's Messiah) was now to be no more. There was a new creation relationship about to be established for believers with Him in connection with His resurrection and ascension. Paul brings this fact in here because the false apostles that were circulating among the Corinthians were ministering on Jewish lines with a Jewish hope after the old order of things.

Problems have arisen in the Christian testimony because Christians have not understood that they are a new creation in Christ. They have set up church fellowships where their relationships with one another are on the basis of "old things" and natural interests. The result has been the formation of parties and cliques within the Church of God that are purely along the lines of our natural likes and dislikes.

In Ephesians 2, Paul states that we have been "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:10). Paul expands on that here saying, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation],"—everything of the old order has "passed away" and "all things are become new." This does not mean that when a person is saved he no longer has a fallen sin-nature and the lusts and old habits that go with it. Many new converts have mistakenly thought that this would happen when they got saved, and they have been disillusioned when they find that they still have those sinful desires. But that is not what Paul is describing here. He is speaking of the new position and sphere in which the believer is now in; the believer's moral state and practice are another thing altogether. The misunderstanding comes from confusing Christian position and Christian practice.

Vss. 18-21—Hence, Paul says, "All things are of God"—that is, all things in the new creation have their origin in God Himself. Believers today are waiting for the fullness of the new creation. Our souls and spirits are in the new creation, but our bodies wait to be brought into it at the coming of the Lord (the Rapture). Paul has spoken of this remarkable change to our bodies earlier in this chapter, and does again in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 and Philippians 3:20-21.

Christianity is to be made known to all men by the transformed lives of believers (chap. 3:18), and also by the proclamation of the great truths of the gospel (chap. 5:18-21). Hence, in reconciling men to Himself, God has given us "the ministry of reconciliation." When Christ was here on earth, God worked through Him with a view of "reconciling the world unto Himself" (John 5:17). At that time, He was "not imputing their trespasses [offences]" because Christ had not come to "condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). But since Christ has now gone back to heaven, God has committed "the word of reconciliation" to believers. Redeemed persons are the only ones who can properly carry the message of reconciliation to the world because they have personally experienced the grace of God. This privilege has not been committed to the elect angels because they have never known God's grace in this way. These things were so pressing on Paul that he was urgent in his preaching to others.

As "ambassadors for Christ" God used Paul and those with him to preach the message—"Be reconciled to God." Verse 20 gives us:

The messengers—"We are ambassadors."

The means—"God did beseech by us."

The message—"Be reconciled to God."

In the KJV, "you" (mentioned twice) and "ye" have been put into the text mistakenly, making it as though Paul was beseeching the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, which is senseless, because they, as believers, were already reconciled to God. The verse should simply read, "God did beseech by us, we entreat for Christ, Be reconciled to God." Paul and his fellow-workers were but the instruments (channels) that God used in the call of sinners to Himself.

Vs. 21—The Apostle then explains the basis on which God reconciles sinners to Himself; it is a result of His own act accomplished in the death of Christ. God had the Lord Jesus to stand in the believer's place whereby He was "made sin for us." He was treated as sin itself under the judgment of God. How this could possibly be defies all logical explanation, and thus is best left as Scripture puts it. What we do know is that on the cross He became the great sin-offering (Isa. 53:10 - "an offering for sin;" Rom. 8:3) that satisfied the claims of divine justice, and thus is the means by which God could come out in blessing toward man. The result is that the believer is "made the righteousness of God in Him." This verse has a two-fold antithesis: the sinless One being made sin, and unrighteous ones being made righteous in Christ.

Looking back at this third motivating factor in Paul's life and ministry, we can see that "the love of Christ" had so captured him that it altered the course of his life entirely. It constrained him to live for the cause of Christ—and it can do the same to us. We may not see the evidence of the constraining power of Christ's love in the lives of all believers, as we do in Paul, but this is not because His love lacks the power to move them; it's because they don't live close enough to Him to feel its constraining effect. Like a huge magnet with plenty of drawing power, it will not pick up the smallest iron object if the object is too far away from the magnet. If we walk in nearness to the Lord, we will feel the overwhelming power of His mighty love, and it will constrain us, as it did the Apostle Paul. It will lead us to give up our own ambitions and to take a course of self-denial, which will result in being committed to the cause of Christ in this world.

A Summary of the Three Great Things That Motivated Paul in Service

The certainty of the wonderful condition of glory that is laid up in heaven compelled Paul to serve the Lord in view of those eternal things (chap. 5:1-9).

The reality of the judgment seat of Christ commanded him to use his time wisely in the service of the Lord (chap. 5:10-13).

The power of the love of Christ constrained him to live not unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again, and thus to beseech men to be reconciled to God (chap. 5:14-21).

Paul's Twelve Men: The Scriptural Meaning and Application of Some Technical Terms in Paul's Doctrine, "Outward Man" and the "Inward Man", The

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

This couplet is found in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Paul is speaking about what sustains the minister in the path of service and testimony. He and his co-workers were being continually subjected to the dangers of persecution. They lived but a step from death at any moment. Naturally, this was wearying as it went on day after day, but he explains that they were sustained by God in those trying circumstances.

THE OUTWARD MAN

Paul puts the renewal of the "inward man" in contrast to the perishing of the "outward man." The outward man is a term that he uses to denote our physical bodies. They are slowly perishing because they are mortal and have been affected by sin. Age, pain, the rigours of persecution, tribulation, and labour, wear away our bodies—the "outward man." But the Apostle tells us that he had something greater to look forward to—the glory—and so do we.

THE INWARD MAN

If the "outward man" refers to our physical bodies, the "inward man" would be our souls and spirits (vs. 16; Rom. 7:22; Eph. 4:16). Our bodies can be renewed in a measure by food and sleep, but even this is a losing battle. If the Lord does not come in our lifetime, our bodies will eventually succumb to a complete breakdown in death. On the other hand, the "inward man" is renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit through communion with divine Persons. Prayer and the Word of God are the vehicles that God uses to rejuvenate the "inward man."

As we continue in the path, our bodies will get weaker as we get older, but the "inward man"—the soul and spirit—will get stronger, if we walk with the Lord. On one hand we have our "affliction" of perishing bodies and on the other hand we have the "glory." It is striking that Paul speaks of our affliction as being "light" and the glory as a "weight." This is an intended contrast. At times we may have thought that our affliction was very heavy indeed, but in comparison to the weight of glory, it is not much at all. Elsewhere Paul said, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in [to] us" (Rom. 8:18).

Some Practical Considerations

Even though our "outward man" may be perishing, Paul mentions three things that will sustain us in the path of faith and service (2 Cor. 4:16-18). These things sustained him and his companions and they will sustain our spiritual life too. In fact, there is nothing else that will. Therefore, it is vital that these three things be found in our lives. They are:

First—The Daily Renewal of Our Souls Through Prayer and Meditation in the Word

(Vs. 16)

If Paul and his co-workers neglected the importance of this daily renewal of the souls, they would not have been able to keep going in the path of service. They are not alone; if we neglect a daily renewal of our souls we will not be able to carry on either. If we do not have this in our lives, we are going to lapse back into the world. It is the believer's spiritual lifeline.

Second—Knowing that the Afflictions and Hardships We Endure in the Path Are Working For Our Eternal Profit

(Vs. 17)

The afflictions we experience in the path are being used of God to break down the will of the flesh and to teach us submission to His divine will. Trials taken from the hand of God, in a right spirit, will form something profitable in us for eternity. We ought to prize that and be willing for everything the Lord allows in our lives in the way of affliction. The rewards that the Lord gives at His judgment seat are for the kingdom, but capacity, which is presently being formed in the saints, will be taken on into eternity (Luke 10:42; 2 Cor. 4:17).

Third—Keeping Our Eye Fixed on Invisible Things That Are Eternal

(Vs. 18)

To the man of the world this is nonsense. He asks, "How can anyone look at invisible things?" But it is with the eyes of our hearts that we look at those things. Scripture says that faith sees unseen things (Heb. 11:1). If our eyes get off the eternal goal before us, and look at the things of the world, we will surely faint by the way. But if eternal things have a place in our daily lives, we will "faint not."

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:18: A True Christian Minister Has a Ministry That Impacts His Hearers

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

(Chap. 2:14-3:18)

Having mentioned his ministry in the gospel at Troas, Paul is led to digress from the subject of their receiving his first letter to continue laying out features of a true Christian minister and his ministry. This was particularly pressing on his soul because there were "many" who were labouring with insincere and ulterior motives (vs. 17). Later in the epistle he calls them "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" (2 Cor. 11:13).

Since these so-called teachers and ministers were affecting the Corinthians in a negative way, they needed a God-endorsed profile so that they could identify a true minister of Christ Jesus from those who were false. Therefore, beginning at chapter 2:14 and continuing to chapter 7:5, the Apostle makes a long digression wherein he gives further details as to his character and ministry. Then, in chapter 7:6 he returns to his remarks concerning their reception of his first letter. The digression has four parentheses in it (chap. 3:7-16; 5:7; 6:2; 6:13).

Continuing his theme, Paul went on to speak of another distinguishing feature of a true Christian minister—he has a ministry that impacts his hearers. In other words, there is power in his ministry. It is not enough for the servant of the Lord to have a heart full of compassion, a sterling character, and good motives; his ministry must also have power. Oral ministry is not just speaking a lot of words; it is speaking by the Spirit so that the heart and the conscience of the saints are affected. It is possible to speak, but not really say anything because there is a lack of substance in our ministry. This was evidently the case with many who were presenting themselves as ministers in that day. Therefore, Paul magnifies two great features of the ministry he carried. If the Corinthians could see this, it would set him apart from the "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" who were trafficking among them (2 Cor. 11:13).

1) It Is a Triumphant Ministry

Chap. 2:14-17—The first characteristic of true Christian ministry—of which the Apostle Paul was the chief minister—is that of triumph. He says, "Now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place. We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." Triumphant Christian ministry is not being popular and having a large following of people; it's having a ministry that exalts Christ—whether all receive it or not! Christ-exalting ministry is a continual triumph.

Looking back at the whole incident regarding the coming of Titus with the good news of the Corinthians' positive reception of his first letter, Paul realized that God had marvellously overruled in the matter to the glory of Christ, and this led him to burst out in a doxology of thanksgiving to God.

God is sovereign, and all who are appointed to salvation will be saved (Acts 13:48), whether it is through us who preach the message or through someone else. Knowing this gave Paul peace as to whether he stayed at Troas to preach, or whether he left and went over to Macedonia to find Titus. To illustrate this, Paul used a figure borrowed from a Roman custom of that day. A victorious Roman general would parade through the streets of the imperial city on his chariot, crowned with a laurel, with his captives in chains. The proud conqueror and his troops would ascend the Capitol Hill with clouds of incense filling the air with perfume. As they made their triumphant march through the city, the praise of the victor was shouted by the multitudes that lined the way. The captives were there to augment the triumph, and this was demonstrated by some captives being appointed to die, and some to live. Similarly, God is making a victorious march through this world, and Paul and all who are involved in spreading the gospel are part of His triumphant army. "The savour of His knowledge" in the gospel, like the sweet perfume that rose in the march of the Roman conquerors, was being spread abroad by them "in every place" they went (vs. 14).

Paul and those who served with him were the medium by which the perfume of the gospel was diffused. They—not just what they preached—were “a sweet savour of Christ” because they had been transformed into His image by the power of the Spirit (vs. 15). Hence, they not only preached Christ; they lived Christ before the world. As the captives of the Roman conquerors were paraded into the capitol city with some appointed to die and some to live, Paul viewed the victory of God in the gospel as such; some believed “unto life” and some rejected “unto death.” Hence, there are two classes of people among whom the fragrance of the gospel circulates—those who will be saved and those who will go into perdition (vs. 16). Such are the effects of the gospel; it works either life or death in those who hear it. This shows the solemnity of preaching Christ, for eternal issues hang on the reception and rejection of the message. The immensity of this caused the Apostle to cry, “Who is sufficient for these things?” It could only be those with whom God had wrought with His divine “sufficiency” (chap. 3:5). He only can make His servants able to carry the gospel effectively by the various exercises and disciplines they pass through in His school.

Vs. 17—However, there were “many” in the ministry in that day who were shams. God had not wrought with them to make them true ministers. Such did not have the moral and spiritual qualifications of a real minister of Christ, nor did they have any real substance or power in their ministry. They were using the Word of God to serve their own ends, and had taken up the service of the Lord as a mere profession—as “a trade!” The Corinthians needed to be wary of these men, and test their reality by the profile of a true minister of Christ that Paul was giving them in describing his service for the Lord.

What distinguished Paul and his fellow workers from these false apostles was that they, with “sincerity,” ministered “in the sight of God” as representing Christ. Their ministry was triumphant because it exalted Christ—even if some didn’t believe the message.

2) It Is a Transforming Ministry

Chap. 3:1-18—Another great feature that marks true Christian ministry (of which Paul was the chief minister) is that it is effectual—it has a transforming power. True Christian ministry not only exalts Christ, but it also produces results in the lives of those who receive it. The existence of the assembly in Corinth proved this. The Corinthians were a living proof of the power of Paul’s ministry in the gospel—they had been saved through it! They, of all people, could not deny that God was working through Paul.

Vss. 1-2—This being the case, Paul asks them why anyone among the Corinthians would think that he and those who laboured with him needed to “commend” themselves to them—the Corinthian assembly was their commendation! He says, “Ye are our letter.” In bringing up “letters of commendation” Paul was addressing another criticism of his detractors. They had been saying that he had not been approved by the apostles in Jerusalem, and therefore, had no authority to be going about as he was. They fastened on the fact that he didn’t have a letter of commendation. Scripture indicates that a person should have a letter of commendation if he is going to an area where he is not known (Acts 18:24-28; Rom. 16:1-2), but Paul didn’t need a letter in Corinth, having been with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:1-17). He did not need to commend himself “as some others,” alluding to his adversaries who had come to Corinth with letters commending themselves. He didn’t need such a certificate; all men could know the character of his apostolic work by becoming acquainted with his Corinthian converts. In spite of their faults, they were the fruit of a genuine work of God through Paul. This shows that the very best credentials a Christian minister can have are found in the lives of those to whom he ministers; such prove the quality of his work. A man may have an alphabet of degrees after his name, having graduated from some revered Christian seminary, but that in itself will not give power to his ministry.

Vss. 3-5—The Corinthians were an “epistle” in two ways:

They were a commendation of Paul’s ministry (vss. 1-2).

They were also a commendation of the Lord Himself to all men (vs. 3).

The latter is true of all Christians; we are Christ’s representatives in this world. Our lives should commend Christ to all men. In that sense, we are His letter to the world. Many Christians misquote verse 3, saying, “Epistles (plural) of Christ,” but Paul was speaking of the Corinthians collectively as being one “epistle of Christ.” This is an allusion to the fact that the world should see the Christian company moving together as a whole, expressing what they truly are—the one body of Christ.

Paul goes on to speak of how Christian ministry effects transformation in believers, thus making them representatives of Christ. They are made so through an inward work in the “fleshy tables of the heart.” “The Spirit of the living God” writes Christ on the believer’s heart, and it comes out in a manifestation of Christ-like characteristics in the believer’s walk and ways. Paul adds, “Not in tables of stone,” which is a reference to the Law. This fact points to the truth that such a work is not accomplished in souls by legal means.

Since what Paul said of himself might have sounded like self-praise, he reminded the Corinthians that he and his co-workers were not “competent” in themselves. They could take no credit for what the Lord had wrought in and through them for the blessing of the saints; the “sufficiency [competency]” was all “of God” (vs. 5).

Vs. 6—Paul proceeds to call himself and those that worked with him, “New covenant ministers.” He quickly adds, “Not of letter, but of spirit,” because the “letter” of the new covenant will be made with Israel, and not with the Church. The “letter” of the new covenant is the literal fulfillment of its conditions in a coming day when a remnant of Israel are saved and brought into the kingdom (Jer. 31:31-34; Rom. 11:26-27). To apply it in “letter” to the Church would be to see it as being fulfilled in the Church in some way, which is a mistake. This is the error of Reformed Theology which imagines that the promises to Israel in the Old Testament are being fulfilled today in the Church, in a spiritual sense; hence, they speak of the Church as “spiritual Israel.” Paul did not do that with those Old Testament promises; he ministered the “spirit” of the new covenant, which is grace. He taught Christians of the spiritual blessings of the covenant that were theirs through grace, without them formally being connected with it. Hence, the gospel we preach in Christianity is not the new covenant, but it is of the new covenant order, which is grace.

The three great spiritual blessings of the new covenant are:

The possession of divine life (Heb. 8:10).

An intelligent relationship with the Lord (Heb. 8:11).

The knowledge of sins forgiven (Heb. 8:12).

These new covenant blessings are the lowest of the spiritual blessings Christians possess. But they are not exclusively Christian: redeemed Israel and converted Gentiles in the Millennium will have these blessings too. In Romans, Colossians and Ephesians, Paul unfolds the fullness of our Christian blessings—the scope of which are much higher in character and in substance, and are all said to be “in Christ” at the right hand of God. Such are distinctly Christian—only Christians have them. He then said, “For the letter kills.” If he (or we) applied the new covenant according to the letter, it would destroy the heavenly character of the Christian’s calling, and would destroy the distinction between Israel and the Church.

The first thing this great ministry produces in believers is life—“the Spirit giveth life.” As the Word is ministered, the Spirit of God works in souls to impart divine life, which has the spiritual capacity to know and enjoy divine things. Real and lasting change in souls will only result from their enjoyment of divine things. It is not what we know or what ascetic rituals we take up with that effects moral change in our lives. Men have tried all kinds of outward appliances to affect change in people, but they all fail. But God’s way is to start from the inside—with the hearts and souls of men—and work out from there.

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Vss. 7-16—Paul turns aside in a parenthesis to show that the power of this ministry to effect positive things in believers is not by legal means. To emphasize this, he contrasts the Law, which he calls “the ministration of death” and “the ministration of condemnation,” with the new covenant ministry of grace, which he refers to in the epistle under three names. Each views a different aspect of the power and working of this ministry:

“The ministry of righteousness” (chap. 3:9) tells of an accomplished work of redemption witnessed in the fact that there is a glorified Man in heaven and that the believer has a place of acceptance before God in Him. Thus, it emphasizes what Christ has done for believers.

“The ministry of the Spirit” (chap 3:8) refers to the inward moral effect of the ministry producing Christ-likeness in believers. This has to do with what the Spirit does in believers.

“The ministry of reconciliation” (chap. 5:18) is the announcement to the world of what grace has accomplished for the glory of God and the blessing of man. It has to do with what God does through believers.

Vss. 9-11—The two systems of law and grace are contrasted; one is a system of demand (the old covenant), the other is a system of supply (the new covenant). Paul focuses on one of the many contrasts between the two ministries, telling us that the ministration of death and condemnation (the giving of the Law) “began with glory” (vs. 7), whereas the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness “subsists” in a “surpassing glory” (vss. 8, 10). It is not that the old covenant was glorious, but that the system (at Sinai) that introduced it was glorious. In fact, both systems are glorious; but one so eclipses the glory of the other that they can hardly be compared.

Vss. 12-13—The glorious character of the ministry, which the Apostle was entrusted with, was so great that it influenced the manner of its presentation. Hence, Paul says, “Seeing then that we have such a hope, we use great plainness [boldness] of speech.” When Moses came to the people to minister the contents and requirements of the old covenant, he could not use boldness. He put a veil on because the condemning glory of the Law that reflected on his face terrified the people. It signified that the Law was not a full revelation from God. Hence, the people under that old covenant could not look to the “end” of it—which is the fulfillment of it in Christ. But in contrast to Moses, Paul could minister the blessings of the new covenant with boldness because what he presented was based on an accomplished work (at the cross), and thus he had a fuller revelation of the truth in Christ glorified.

Vss. 14-16—To this day, the same veil is “unremoved” when the Jews gather to read the Old Testament Scriptures in their synagogues. Those under that old covenant still don’t see its end in Christ. But there is no reason for it now because the “veil” has been “done away [annulled] in Christ.” There is now a full revelation in the face of Jesus on high in the glory. If there is any difficulty on the part of Israel now, it is not because the veil is on Moses’ face (signifying a partial revelation), but because it is “upon their heart” in unbelief of the full revelation of truth that the gospel announces.

The practical lesson we are to gain from this parenthesis is that the formation of Christ’s character in believers is not by legal means and efforts. If we think that we can accomplish it by setting out a code of rules and regulations for ourselves to keep, we will not succeed. We will be no more successful than Israel was under the law.

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Vss. 17-18—Having contrasted the two systems (law and grace) in a parenthesis, Paul resumes his subject of how the Spirit of God makes believers the epistle of Christ. He says, “Now the Lord is the spirit, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (W. Kelly Translation; J. N. Darby, “Collected Writings,” vol. 26, p. 322). The word “spirit” in the first part of this verse is not the Holy Spirit (as KJV renders it), but the spirit of the old covenant. All the forms and ceremonies connected with the old covenant prefigured Christ. He is the spirit, or the spiritual substance and essence of those things, for they all pointed to Him. This is what the Jews failed to see, and still fail to see. Similarly, Christ is “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). That is, all of the prophetic Scriptures in the Old Testament relate to Him, either directly or indirectly.

Paul’s point here is that the ministry not only imparts life to souls by the Spirit (vs. 6), but it also gives the believer liberty in the presence of God in prayer and worship (vs. 17). This is the second great thing that the ministry of righteousness does. It tells us of an accomplished work of redemption and of our place of acceptance before God in Christ, but also when received in faith, it gives the believer “liberty” to come by the Holy Spirit into the presence of God and look into the “unveiled face” of the Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. The shining of

Moses' face (the mediator of the old covenant) was the reflection of the condemning power of the Law before which Israel could not stand. Therefore, he covered his face. But what a contrast of glory in the ministry of righteousness! The Israelites could not look on the fading glory of the Law, but we can behold the full radiancy of the surpassing glory in the unveiled face of Jesus!

When we take advantage of this privilege and spend time in the presence of God, beholding "the glory of the Lord," a third thing results—we are "transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit." This is called "the ministration[ministry] of the Spirit" (vs. 8). When the Spirit of God is free to work, He occupies the believer with Christ in glory; at the same time, He does His silent work of writing Christ on the fleshy tables of the heart. When Christ is impressed upon the affections of the believer, Christ's character comes out in the believer's walk and ways. The Law regulated outward conduct through legal means, but the ministry of the Spirit effects an inward work, transforming the believer from within; it results in an outward change of character.

Paul says, " ... into the same image." Image, in Scripture, has the thought of representation, which is what God's purpose in transformation is—to make us true representatives of Christ in this world. This process is "from glory to glory." That is, it's a gradual thing; the change takes place one degree of glory at a time. Also, it is not something that is produced by self-effort, but "by the Spirit." Hence, the Lord is the Object of our faith and the Spirit is the power for our transformation.

Looking back over the chapter (excluding the parenthesis in verses 7-16) we see the effectual working and glorious power of the new covenant ministry. It accomplishes three great things in the saints by the power of the Spirit, whereby they are made suitable representatives for Christ in this world as His "epistle." The Spirit of God works in the ministry to give:

"Life," and thus, capacity to know and enjoy divine things (vs. 6).

"Liberty" in the presence of God (vs. 17). The ministry of righteousness, which Paul announced tells of a Man on high in the glory in the presence of God, and it gives us to know our acceptance in Him. Thus, we have liberty to come into the presence of God to behold the glory of the Lord.

"Transformation" of character (vs. 18). As we are occupied with the Lord in glory, the Spirit writes Christ on our hearts and we are thus transformed into His image.

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 2:1-13: A True Christian Minister Is Faithful to Confront Matters That Affect the Lord's Glory

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

(Chap. 2:1-13)

Paul turns to address another matter that concerned the assembly at Corinth. The Corinthians needed to know what to do with the man they had excommunicated, who was now repentant. Paul turns to address this in chapter 2. At the same time, he clears away another misunderstanding they had of him. In doing this Paul touches on another characteristic that should mark a true minister of the Lord—faithfulness to confront issues among the saints that affect the Lord's glory.

Some of the Corinthians were saying that Paul was a hard and callous man. Writing such a stern letter as he did (the first epistle) and demanding the excommunication of the immoral man in their midst confirmed this in their minds. They may have thought that calling the man a "wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13) was overly critical—even cruel. This criticism, no doubt, came from that same element of opposers who sought to discredit the Apostle's ministry. Therefore, he undertakes to explain his actions.

Vss. 1-3—Paul restates his purpose of not coming to Corinth "in heaviness [grief]" and exercising apostolic discipline on them. He sent the letter of correction instead. In retrospect, by things turning out the way they did, it only confirmed the wisdom of handling the matter in that way. Furthermore, the Corinthians themselves, in a sense, had acknowledged the wisdom of it! They received the letter and had set things right in the assembly that were wanting, and by doing so, they were really agreeing with his course of action in not going to Corinth when he planned to and sending the letter instead.

The first epistle had made them "sorry," as he had intended that it should. They "sorrowed to repentance" after "a godly manner" and set right the disorders he pointed out. This was good, and it worked for the "salvation" of the assembly from the judgment that would have come on it by God directly, or by the hand of the Apostle (2 Cor. 7:9-11).

While the contents of the first letter made the Corinthians "sorry," the Corinthians' repentance made Paul "glad." The "same" ones (the Corinthians) who were made sorry by him, now made him glad. (The word "he" in verse 2 is not in the original text, and could mislead us to think that Paul was speaking about the offender who was excommunicated. However, he was speaking of the assembly as a whole.)

He sent the letter on ahead so that when he did come, it might be with "confidence," and not with sorrow, and the result would be that his "joy" would be their "joy" (vs. 3).

Vss. 4-5—He goes on to show that he was not an insensitive person without feelings for the saints. It pained him greatly to address them in the way that he had in the first letter. It had not been an easy thing for him to do because he loved them deeply. He says, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears." The truth is that he wrote that letter of correction out of faithfulness to the Lord. It had to be done for the glory of God. Those evils in their midst simply could not go on in association with the Lord's name. He didn't "sweep it under the rug," but faithfully confronted the issues that were wanting in their midst. He had no joy in telling them that they had to put that man away, but faithfulness to the Lord demanded it.

Paul was not trying to grieve them for no reason, but that they would “know the love” that he had toward them “abundantly.” Love will speak faithfully. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). However, in being faithful with the Corinthians, he was misunderstood, but this is often the case. It can be expected that if we are faithful about matters in the assembly, we could quite possibly be misunderstood.

Those who had sinned in their midst hadn’t just grieved Paul, but “in part” had grieved them “all.” Such were bringing trouble on all in the gathering. Because of their association with the evil-doer, God held the whole assembly responsible (1 Cor. 11:30). This is illustrated in the account of Achan. When he sinned, the Lord said to Joshua, “Israel hath sinned” (Josh. 7:11). His personal sin of covetousness and deception had troubled all Israel, and it cost him his life (Josh. 7:25; 1 Chron. 2:7).

Paul said, “in part” because not all of the saints at Corinth were grieved about the dishonour it had brought on the Lord’s name. However, the assembly was still responsible to deal with it, and thankfully, they did. This shows that it is not necessary to have unanimity in an assembly before it can act administratively in a binding assembly decision.

Vs. 6—The Apostle now indicates that the assembly needed to receive the man back into fellowship who had been put away. This certainly showed that he cared for the man, and that he wasn’t cruel and unforgiving. He says, “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment [rebuke], which was inflicted of [the] many.” The censure placed on him had worked to bring him to repentance before the Lord, and it was now time to receive him back into fellowship. This is a happy moment for an assembly.

Paul said, “inflicted of the many.” J. N. Darby’s Translation footnote on 2 Corinthians 2:6 indicates that “the many” is the body at large—the mass of the saints universally. He cites 2 Corinthians 9:2 as an example of its usage and meaning. The point here is that if a local assembly should make a binding decision in putting someone away from the fellowship, the body at large acts in concert with that local assembly and recognizes the action, so that the person “put away” is regarded as “without” in all other gatherings too, not just in the locality where he resides. Hence the offender is made to feel the rebuke by more than just those in his local assembly. We do not say that the man in question actually went to other localities and felt the “rebuke” from them, but that the carrying out of the action was expressed universally—by the body at large. If a person were to be put out of the fellowship in a particular locality, he is to be regarded out of fellowship everywhere on earth, because what is done in the name of the Lord in one local assembly in practice affects the whole. It shows that the assemblies that meet on Scriptural ground, as gathered to the Lord’s name, are not autonomous. They act together, expressing the truth that they are one body (Eph. 4:4).

Vss. 7-8—Paul tells them, firstly, to “show grace” to the man, and “comfort [encourage]” him in the Lord. He would have them to “confirm [affirm]” their “love toward him.” This was the Apostle’s sanction in now allowing the repentant man to have fellowship with the saints. The fact that the man was expressing “sorrow” over what he had done indicates that repentance was working in his soul. Paul says, “Ye ... ” which is in the plural. This means that all the saints were to unitedly show grace toward the repentant offender; this was not to be done by a few who felt like it, but by all the saints. Sometimes in these kinds of situations it becomes evident that there are some who have an unforgiving spirit and hold back, but that is not what Paul desired here.

The word “forgive” in verse 7 (in the KJV) should really be translated “show grace.” (See also Luke 7:42.) Later, in verse 10, another word is used in the original language that is rightly translated “forgive” in the KJV. This refers to administrative forgiveness—the official lifting of a censure placed on a person in excommunication, whereby he would be once again in full fellowship as before. The fact that showing grace is mentioned before and separate from administrative forgiveness indicates that the assembly has the option to exercise grace toward a repentant person before it actually lifts the administrative judgment. The assembly could choose to allow a person, whom they are seeking to restore, to move among the saints again, without him having the privileges of full fellowship in partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Under normal conditions, the two things would be done together, but there may be certain cases where the assembly needs to observe the person’s depth of repentance before it is comfortable receiving him or her back into fellowship, and these verses allow for it. A word of caution here; if an assembly elects to handle a case in this way, it should attempt to have all in the assembly act together by making an announcement to that end.

There is a type of these two steps in restoration to the Lord’s Table, in Leviticus 14, in the cleansing of the leper. After the leper was cleansed, he was given liberty to come into the camp of Israel again, but he was not allowed to return to his original position right away. He was to “tarry abroad out of his tent seven days” (Lev. 14:8). Then, after some further washing and shaving (which speaks of self-judgment), he was allowed to return to his tent.

Vss. 9-10—Paul states that how they handled the matter of restoring the repentant offender to fellowship would be a “proof” to him whether they were “obedient in all things.” He added, “To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also.” “Ye” in this verse refers to the Corinthian assembly. By this, he indicated that the assembly at Corinth was to lift the censure placed on the man, since they were the ones who had placed it on him. While Paul had authority to act apostolically in this matter and restore the man to fellowship, he chose to wait until the assembly at Corinth acted, and then he would move in accord with them and forgive the person also. We have great instruction here. We learn that the local assembly (where a binding judgment is made) is to act first in lifting the censure they have placed on an offender, forgiving him administratively. The saints abroad (the body at large) are to then act in concert with it, and forgive the person also. If the restored offender were to visit other assemblies abroad, they would receive him. By doing this, the truth of the “one body” is expressed practically.

The saints in the body at large are not to meddle with another assembly in its administrative responsibility. They are not to go ahead of the local assembly by receiving a person because they believe that he is repentant; it leads to confusion. While the person may very well be repentant and ready to be received (as was the case here), still the saints must act together in the matter. God’s way is that the local assembly that enacted the censure should act first on behalf of the body at large. The voices of brethren from abroad could make their exercises known to that assembly, as illustrated by the Apostle Paul encouraging the Corinthians to receive the repentant man, but the actual lifting of the action (loosing) is purely the responsibility of that assembly (Matt. 18:18).

Vs. 11—Paul went on to say, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” He didn’t say, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of you”—the Corinthians. “Us” refers to the saints at large in the “one body.” Paul knew that one of Satan’s tactics is

to divide the saints in whatever way he can, and these delicate inter-assembly matters are a place where he is likely to work. It is one of his "devices" that we should not be ignorant of.

Knowing that Satan will attempt to use these circumstances to divide the saints, Paul shows in his actions how we are to act in these matters of loosing assembly judgments (exercising administrative forgiveness.) Even though he, and perhaps others, knew that the man was repentant and should be restored to fellowship, he didn't go ahead of the assembly at Corinth by acting independently. By acting together in these inter-assembly matters, "the unity of the Spirit" is kept in "the uniting bond of peace." Divisions among the assemblies gathered to the Lord's name have resulted from well-meaning persons acting independently in these matters.

Vss. 12-13—To show the genuine concern that Paul had for the Corinthian assembly, he tells them of the anxiety he had in regard to how they would receive his first letter. Even though there was "a door" opened to him "of the Lord" to preach the gospel in Troas while he waited for Titus to come with the news of how they received the letter, he had no rest in his spirit until he knew that the matter was settled. Therefore, he left that work and went across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia to meet Titus who was coming up the coast with the report. Chapter 7:6-7 tells us that Titus met Paul in Macedonia with the good news that the Corinthians had mourned over their wrongs and had set things right in the assembly.

By reiterating this to the Corinthians, Paul showed the depth of his concern for them. He wasn't a hard and critical man as some of them imagined him to be. On the contrary, he had such care for them that he elected to forego gospel work to learn of their response to his first epistle! His pastoral concerns had prevailed over his evangelistic fervour. Paul had been a faithful minister to point out their wrongs, but he was also a caring and loving minister who had their good at heart.

This teaches us that matters which pertain to the assembly should take precedence over service in the gospel. That which pertains to the unity of the assembly must be of utmost concern to us. Many think that gospel work is the highest service that we can render to God, but in reality, to hold and maintain the truth of the Church that was once delivered to the saints should be our first concern (Jude 3). Unfortunately, some who know this use it to dismiss gospel work from their activities altogether, but this is an imbalance in the opposite direction.

Thus far, if the Corinthians had read this letter properly, it would have been abundantly clear to them that they had held a wrong impression of Paul—they had totally misunderstood him. An element among them had insinuated that he was a troublesome fellow who got into numerous scrapes with the authorities, but he has shown that, really, God had allowed him to get into those situations for their profit (chap. 1:3-11). They had also accused him of fickleness in his plans to come to Corinth, but he has shown that it was because of his desire to spare them from judgment that he didn't come; it wasn't that he was a double-minded person (chap. 1:12-24). They had also insinuated that he was a harsh and callous man calling for the immoral man in their midst to be excommunicated—even calling him a wicked person, but he has shown that it was out of faithfulness to the Lord that he had called for that action against the man (chap. 2:1-13). Learning of Paul's explanation of these matters would greatly help to restore their confidence in him as a true minister of Christ.

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: The Characteristics of a True Christian Minister, 2 Corinthians 1:3-11: A True Christian Minister Is Filled With the Compassions of God

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(Chap. 1:3-11)

The Lord's people are continually passing through suffering and trial; if the servant of the Lord is going to minister to them effectively, he must have a heart like God's—filled with compassion. God is "the Father of mercies [compassions]," and He wants that very characteristic in His ministers. This, then, is the first great feature that should mark every Christian minister—a heart full of the compassions of God.

This was something that characterized the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ—our Model Servant. It says that when He saw the multitudes, "He was moved with compassion" (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark 1:41). Without this important personal quality, the servant of the Lord will lack power and effectiveness in reaching the hearts of people who are passing through trial and affliction.

This important quality, however, is not acquired by studying books; we cannot get it by going through seminary, or by studying J. N. Darby's "Synopsis of the Books of the Bible." It is a trait that does not come to the human heart naturally, for we are naturally more concerned with ourselves than we are with the welfare of others. God Himself forms this important quality in our souls in the school of affliction. He prepares His servants (ministers) morally and spiritually by passing them through trying circumstances (trials) whereby they learn valuable lessons and obtain grace from Him in the path of life. If we scan the Scriptures, we will see that virtually every servant that God called and used, He first educated Him in secret, in what we might call "secret history with God in the wilderness." By it the servant is enabled by God to minister effectively to others by entering into their trials and genuinely sympathizing with them in their difficulties.

Experiencing trials in life is God's appointed way of training His servants in His school; it is how His compassions are formed in them. The Lord makes no mistakes in His lessons. Everything that He allows in our lives is for our moral and spiritual development. Elihu rightly said, "Who teacheth like Him?" (Job 36:22). The purpose of the teaching in His school is that He would have a larger place in our affections and that we would have no confidence in the flesh. Scripture speaks about being "emptied from vessel to vessel" in describing these exercises (Jer. 48:11). It has been said that no servant has been used of God who hasn't suffered. This being the case, many may envy a servant's ministry, but none will envy his discipline. Much of the work of God in His school is occupied with whittling us down to a useful size in which He can use in His service. With all of us, this is a work in progress. The amazing thing about this is that God uses vessels that He hasn't finished with, as far as their personal development is concerned.

Vss. 3-11—Paul blessed God for the divine comfort he received in his personal trials and afflictions (vss. 3-7), and for the divine deliverance he received when God brought him out of those trials (vss. 8-11). Understanding that these things all work together for the glory of God and for the ultimate comfort of His people, Paul speaks with praise of “the mercies [compassions] of God” in times of affliction. He exults: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies [compassions], and the God of all comfort [encouragement]; who comforteth [encourages] us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort [encourage] them which are in any trouble [tribulation], by the comfort [encouragement] wherewith we ourselves are comforted [encouraged] of God.” In this short blessing, he traced true comfort to its divine source—God Himself. Satan is the god of all discouragement, but our Father is “the God of all comfort [encouragement].” Paul could bless God for all that had come to pass in his life because he knew that it was working something in him that would ultimately help him to encourage the saints.

Hence, Paul gloried in “tribulations” (Rom. 5:3-5). It takes faith to be able to honestly thank God for every trying situation that He puts us into, yet this is what the Apostle did. It is easy to bless the Lord in good times, but faith blesses Him at all times—even when times are tough. David could say, “I will bless the Lord at all times” (Psa. 34:1). Likewise, Paul said, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

It is significant that the word “comfort [encourage]” occurs ten times in five short verses (vss. 3-7). This repetition tells us that the Lord’s people need much encouragement. God, therefore, had a definite purpose in imparting His consolation to the Apostle. He wanted him to “comfort [encourage] them which are in any trouble [tribulation], by the comfort [encouragement]” that he had received from the Lord (vs. 4).

He calls the sufferings which he endured, “the sufferings of Christ” (vs. 5). He meant that the persecution and the hostilities that he endured were of the same character as those that the Lord Himself endured when He ministered on earth. These are part of the Lord’s martyrdom sufferings. If we are faithful, we will share in these sufferings of the Lord (Mark 10:39), but we can never share in His atoning sufferings (Mark 10:38).

As mentioned, the comforts that Paul received from God in his afflictions were ultimately for the good of the Corinthians. He said, “Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation [encouragement] and salvation” (vs. 6). They were the ones who would benefit from his afflictions, because he was able to minister the comfort of God to them more effectively. Paul added, “Our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation [encouragement]” (vs. 7). His “hope” for them was that they would profit from his sufferings by receiving his ministry.

The experiences which Paul passed through in trials produced in him a three-fold effect:

It gave him a fresh cause to bless God (vs. 3).

He gained an understanding of how God gives consolation to His people in times of trial (vs. 4a).

It enabled him to comfort and encourage others who were passing through trial (vss. 4b-7). His “hope” was that the saints would profit from the results of his trials in his ministry.

Vs. 8—He goes on to give them an example of the affliction he passed through by pointing to the trouble he endured “in Asia,” which was well known among the saints generally (Acts 19:22-41). He says that they were “pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” In his first epistle, he referred to this same conflict, saying that he “fought with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Cor. 15:32). Men in that region were so vehement against the truth of the gospel that they behaved like wild beasts.

Paul had a definite reason for telling the Corinthians this; there were some among them who had been saying that he was a troublesome fellow and that he stirred up trouble and controversy everywhere he went. They accused him of constantly getting into trouble with the authorities and of being a public nuisance, and this particular incident was used to make their point. But this was not the case. The afflictions that he passed through in Asia were legitimate sufferings for the gospel’s sake and were not because of any personal wrong doing. Some of the Corinthians were criticizing the Apostle for the troubles he had gotten into, but in reality, God had ordered it so that they would ultimately get a blessing out of it! They would be the recipients of the grace and comfort that Paul received from God in those troubles through his ministry of comfort to them. Learning this must have taken the Corinthians aback.

Vs. 9—Suffering affliction in this way was obviously not a pleasant thing. Paul says, “We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.” He and his co-workers had come close to death (martyrdom) on that occasion, but they fully understood that they were men who had a rendezvous with death for the Christ’s sake; it was just a matter of time before it happened.

Regardless of the misunderstandings of his detractors (wilful or otherwise), this particular trial had taught Paul some valuable lessons that we all need to learn. They were:

Not to trust in himself, but in God (vs. 9). One of the great lessons in the school of God that the servant of the Lord must learn thoroughly is to not trust in himself (Jer. 17:9; Prov. 28:26; Isa. 2:22). The Lord knows how to take self-confidence out of us by placing us in difficult circumstances in life where we are pressed out of measure. The result is that we lean more fully on Him, and thus our ministry is more sincere and effective.

To have an experimental knowledge of God’s preserving care in real life situations (vs. 10).

To experience the fellowship and comfort of the saints’ prayers in times of need, whereby there develops a deeper bond of love and appreciation for our brethren in the Lord (vs. 11).

Vs. 10—Paul then speaks of the faithfulness of God in delivering him and his co-workers from their near-death experience. He says, “ ... who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” They had a deep sense of God’s preserving care, having learned to trust Him in such difficult circumstances.

Some have thought that this verse is referring to the three aspects of God’s complete salvation—salvation from the penalty of our sins, salvation from the power of sin in our lives, and salvation from the presence of sin, as presented in the epistle to the Romans. However, the context of this passage shows clearly that Paul was speaking about a temporal deliverance, not soul deliverance. He was actually speaking of three different tenses of temporal deliverance. That is, deliverance in a literal sense, akin to what Israel knew in Old Testament times when they were delivered (physically) from the Egyptians and the Philistines, etc. God had delivered Paul and his co-workers from the danger of martyrdom, and He was continuing to deliver them from that danger presently, and Paul was trusting that God would do so in the days to come, as they preached the gospel among hostile people.

Vs. 11—Paul gave the Corinthians credit for their part in the present deliverance that he and his fellow servants were experiencing from God. He assumes that the compassion, of which he has been speaking, was in their hearts toward him, and that they were praying for him in his labours. He uses a little irony here, for they had been critical of him and it was questionable whether they even remembered him before the throne of grace.

We can learn from this that we shouldn’t despise the trials and tribulations that we pass through because God has a definite design in them. He is forming something valuable in us, which He can use to help His people. Every one of us is in His school; if we gain from the things that we pass through, we will be a help and a blessing to others who are passing through difficulties. The greater the suffering that we are called on to endure, the greater the opportunity we have in learning the comfort of God. He wants to fill us with His compassion, and there is no better way than to be placed in trying situations where we need compassion ourselves, and have Him tenderly minister it to us. If such is the case, what will come from our hearts in ministry will have power with those to whom we minister. They will see that we genuinely care about them and are interested in their blessing. Consequently, they will receive our ministry.

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