2 CORINTHIANS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Treasure in earthen vessels: the God of all comfort, a new creation, and power perfected in weakness

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 2 Corinthians. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

God comforted me during my walk into sobriety. When I walked into my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, I sat there weeping. I expected rejection. Instead God restored me one day at a time. Now I can offer that same comfort to others who are where I was.

2 Corinthians is the most personal letter Paul ever wrote. In it he opens his heart to a church he loved, a church that had hurt him deeply. He tells them about his suffering, his tears, his weakness, and the comfort God gave him through it all. He explains what real ministry looks like, and he warns them about men who were leading them away from Christ. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 2 Corinthians. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 2 Corinthians. It is a real letter in the middle of a real relationship. Paul had started the church in Corinth, written to them more than once, visited them, been hurt by them, and was about to visit again. Many verses in this letter only make sense when we know what had happened between them. When Paul says he changed his travel plans (1:15-17), wrote a letter with many tears (2:4), or is coming a third time (12:14; 13:1), he is pointing to events his readers knew well. The Background section below lays those events out as plainly as I can, and it is worth reading before you start chapter 1.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. 2 Corinthians is a letter from a real man to a real church, and this study takes Paul at his word. When he says he was beaten, stoned and shipwrecked, it happened.

When he says he was caught up to the third heaven, I believe he was. When he says God's power is perfected in weakness, that is a promise we can stand on today.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. 2 Corinthians has 13 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirteen weeks, or about three months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together. Chapters 11 and 12 are full, and a group may want to give each of them two weeks.
- Three shorter parts: chapters 1 to 7 (Paul's ministry and his heart for the church), chapters 8 and 9 (giving), and chapters 10 to 13 (Paul's defense against the false apostles). The letter itself breaks at these points, so they make good places to pause.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 2 Corinthians touch painful subjects: suffering so heavy that Paul despaired of living (1:8-10), church discipline and forgiving someone who has hurt the church (2:5-11), our bodies wearing out and death (4:16-5:10), marriage to an unbeliever (6:14-7:1), money and giving (chapters 8 and 9), leaders who use and hurt the people they lead (11:13-20), and pain that God does not take away (12:7-10). If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Someone in your group may be grieving, sick, in a hard marriage, or hurt by a church leader. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 2 Corinthians. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians is the eighth book of the New Testament. It sits between 1 Corinthians and Galatians. It is the second of two letters to the church in Corinth that God kept for us in the Bible, but as we will see, it was not the second letter Paul wrote to them.

1 Corinthians is a letter that answers questions and corrects problems in the church. 2 Corinthians is different. It is Paul's heart laid open. In this letter we learn more about Paul as a man than in any other book. We learn about his suffering, his fears, his tears, his love for the churches, and a painful "thorn in the flesh" that God would not take away (12:7). We also see what real Christian ministry looks like. It is not polished speech, big claims, or power over people. It is weak clay jars carrying the treasure of the gospel, so that everyone can see the power belongs to God.

Paul gives us the heart of the letter in the answer the Lord gave him when he begged for his thorn to be removed:

2 Corinthians 12:9 (SLB)

"And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Several other great truths run through the letter. God is "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort" (1:3). The new covenant is far more glorious than the old (chapter 3). Our bodies wear out, but our inner man is renewed day by day, and our light affliction is producing an eternal weight of glory (4:16-17). Every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (5:10). If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (5:17), and God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (5:18-21). Giving is a grace, and God loves a cheerful giver (chapters 8 and 9).

2 Corinthians has 13 chapters and 257 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Paul's Ministry and His Heart for the Church (chapters 1 to 7)

- Chapter 1: The God of All Comfort
- Chapter 2: Forgiveness and the Fragrance of Christ
- Chapter 3: Ministers of a New Covenant
- Chapter 4: Treasure in Clay Jars
- Chapter 5: A New Creation and the Ministry of Reconciliation
- Chapter 6: Now Is the Day of Salvation
- Chapter 7: Godly Sorrow and Real Repentance

Part Two: The Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem (chapters 8 and 9)

- Chapter 8: The Grace of Giving

- Chapter 9: God Loves a Cheerful Giver

Part Three: Paul Defends His Apostleship (chapters 10 to 13)

- Chapter 10: Weapons That Are Not of the Flesh
- Chapter 11: Paul and the False Apostles
- Chapter 12: Strength Made Perfect in Weakness
- Chapter 13: Examine Yourselves

Background of the Book

Author: The letter opens with "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy the brother" (1:1). Timothy was with Paul when he wrote, but the letter is Paul's own voice from start to finish. Paul names himself again in 10:1. The early church accepted Paul as the author, and even scholars who doubt that Paul wrote some of the other letters bearing his name almost all agree that he wrote this one. The questions scholars raise about 2 Corinthians are not about who wrote it, but about whether it was first one letter or several (see below).

Who it was written to: Paul wrote "to the church of God which is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia" (1:1). Achaia was the Roman province in southern Greece, and Corinth was its capital. The church was a mix of Jews and Gentiles. A Gentile is anyone who is not Jewish by birth. Most of the believers in Corinth had come out of a life of idol worship (1 Corinthians 12:2).

The city of Corinth: Corinth sat on a narrow strip of land, called an isthmus, that joined northern Greece to the southern peninsula. It had a port on each side, Lechaeum to the west and Cenchrea to the east, so trade and travelers poured through it. The Romans destroyed the old Greek city in 146 B.C., and Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. By Paul's day it was large, rich, proud, and full of people from all over the empire. It hosted the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympic Games, and it had many temples, including a temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. The city was known for loose living. Corinthians also loved wisdom, fine speech, and impressive speakers, and that helps explain why some in the church looked down on Paul (10:10).

Paul and the Corinthians: Paul started the church on his second missionary journey, about A.D. 50 to 52, and stayed in Corinth a year and six months (Acts 18:1-18). Between that first visit and this letter, a lot happened. Here is the order most Bible teachers give, drawn from the letters themselves:

- Paul wrote an earlier letter, now lost, telling them not to mix with sexually immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9).
- From Ephesus, on his third missionary journey, he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8).
- He then made a short visit to Corinth that went badly. He calls it coming to them "in grief" (2:1). Bible teachers call this the painful visit. Acts does not record it, but Paul's words that he was coming "a third time" (12:14; 13:1) tell us there had been a second visit.
- After that visit, Paul wrote a hard letter "out of much affliction and anguish of heart" and "through many tears" (2:4). It grieved them, and for a time Paul even regretted sending it (7:8). Bible teachers call this the severe letter, or the tearful letter. Titus seems to have carried it.
- Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas, hoping to meet Titus with news. He did not find him, so he went on to Macedonia (2:12-13). There Titus finally came with good news: most of the church had repented and still loved Paul (7:5-16).

- Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians and sent it ahead with Titus and two brothers (8:16-24). He followed later and spent three months in Greece (Acts 20:2-3), most likely in Corinth.

What was the severe letter? Scripture does not tell us for sure, and good Bible teachers disagree. Many believe it was a letter that God did not choose to preserve, written between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Some older teachers believed it was 1 Corinthians itself, though 1 Corinthians does not read like a letter written with many tears about one person who had wronged Paul (2:5; 7:12). Others believe chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians are part of that severe letter, later joined to chapters 1 to 9. What matters most is what Paul tells us plainly: he wrote it out of love, it led them to real repentance, and he rejoiced at the result (2:4; 7:8-9).

Is 2 Corinthians one letter? Every Greek copy of 2 Corinthians we have contains all 13 chapters together, in the same order. Many Bible teachers believe Paul wrote it as one letter, perhaps over some days or weeks, and that the change in tone at chapter 10 comes because he turns from the repentant majority to the false apostles and those still following them. Others believe chapters 10 to 13 were a separate letter, either the earlier severe letter or a later one written when Paul heard of new trouble. A few also think chapters 8 and 9, or 6:14 to 7:1, were once separate pieces. This study reads the letter as it has come down to us, as one book, and notes where the views matter.

When and where it was written: Paul wrote from Macedonia, the Roman province in northern Greece, after Titus met him there (2:13; 7:5-6; 9:2-4). Philippi is one likely place. Most scholars date the letter about A.D. 56, roughly a year after 1 Corinthians, and before Paul wrote Romans from Corinth.

The false apostles: After Paul left, men came to Corinth with letters of commendation (3:1). They were Jewish (11:22), they called themselves apostles and servants of Christ (11:13, 23), they boasted of their speaking skill and spiritual experiences, they took money from the church and lorded it over them (11:20), and they mocked Paul as weak (10:10). Paul calls them "false apostles, deceitful workers" (11:13). Scripture does not give their names, and Bible teachers disagree about exactly what they taught, but Paul says plainly that they preached another Jesus and a different gospel (11:4).

Purpose: Paul writes to thank God for the church's repentance and to strengthen the bond between them (chapters 1 to 7), to urge them to finish their gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem (chapters 8 and 9), and to defend his ministry against the false apostles before his third visit, so he would not have to deal harshly with them when he came (chapters 10 to 13; 13:10).

Chapter 1: The God of All Comfort

Scripture

1:1-11 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through ***the*** will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed ***be*** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those in every affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God; because just as the sufferings of the Christ abound toward us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. And whether we are afflicted, ***it is*** for your comfort and salvation, which is at work in ***the*** endurance of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we are comforted, ***it is*** for your comfort and salvation; and our hope for you ***is*** firm, knowing that as you are partners of the sufferings, so also of the comfort. For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning our affliction which happened to us in Asia, that we were weighed down excessively, beyond ***our*** power, so that we despaired even of living. But we ourselves have had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we would not be trusting in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver, in whom we have hoped that He will also still deliver ***us***, you also joining in helping for us by your petition, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift toward us through many.

1:12-24 For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in ***the*** grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you. For we write no other things to you than what you read or also understand; and I hope that you will understand even to ***the*** end, just as you also understood us in part, that we are your boast, just as you also ***are*** ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. And in this confidence I was intending to come to you before, so that you might have a second grace, and to pass through you into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be sent forward to Judea. Therefore, when purposing this, did I then use the fickleness? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to ***the*** flesh, so that with me there may be the "Yes, yes" and the "No, no"? But God ***is*** faithful, that our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you through us, through me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in Him it has been Yes. For as many as ***are the*** promises of God, in Him ***is*** the Yes, and in Him the Amen, to God for glory through us. Now the ***One*** who establishes us with you into Christ and anointed us ***is*** God, who also sealed us and gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. But I call on God as witness upon my soul, that to spare you I came no longer to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are fellow workers of your joy; for by faith you have stood.

Chapter 1 Preview

Paul opens this letter not with a complaint but with praise. He has just come through a time of suffering so heavy that he thought he would die. Yet the first thing he wants the Corinthians to know is that God is "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort." God comforted Paul, and

that comfort was never meant to stop with him. It was given so that he could pass it on to others who hurt.

In the second half of the chapter Paul answers a charge. He had told the Corinthians he would visit, and then he changed his plans. Some in Corinth said that proved he was fickle, a man who says yes and means no. Paul answers that his word to them was as solid as the gospel he preached, because every promise of God is Yes in Christ. He did not stay away out of weakness. He stayed away to spare them.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through **the** will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:*

Paul calls himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God," An apostle is one who is sent, a messenger who carries the authority of the one who sent him. Paul names this right away for a reason. Later in this letter, false teachers would claim to be apostles and say Paul was not a real one (11:5, 13). Paul did not make himself an apostle. God made him one.

Timothy is with him. Timothy had helped start the church in Corinth (Acts 18:5), so the believers knew him well. The letter goes to "the church of God which is in Corinth." Notice whose church it is. It is not Paul's church or the false teachers' church. It belongs to God. Paul also includes "all the saints who are in all Achaia," the believers in the towns around Corinth in southern Greece. A saint is not a super-Christian. Every believer is a saint, one set apart for God.

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and **the** Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Grace to you and peace." This was Paul's usual greeting, but it carries real weight. Grace is God's favor that we did not earn and could never earn. Peace is what grace brings: peace with God, and the peace of God in our hearts. Grace always comes first. There is no real peace without it.

Paul says this grace and peace come "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He puts the Father and the Son side by side as the one source of every blessing. A Jewish man like Paul would never do that with a mere man. He knew who Jesus is.

1:3 *Blessed **be** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort,*

Paul begins with worship. Blessed be means praised be. He praises "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then he gives God two names that fit this whole letter. He is "the Father of compassions." The word means tender mercy, the kind of pity a father feels when his child is hurting. And He is the "God of all comfort."

The Greek word for comfort is paraklesis. It means to come alongside someone, to encourage them and strengthen them. Jesus used a word from the same family when He called the Holy Spirit the Helper (John 14:16). Notice the word all. There is no kind of pain God cannot comfort. Grief, sickness, betrayal, loneliness, fear: He is the God of all comfort in all of them.

1:4 *who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those in every affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God;*

God "comforts us in all our affliction." Affliction means pressure, the feeling of being squeezed and crushed. Paul does not say God keeps us out of affliction. He says God comforts us in it. That is an honest promise. The Christian life is not free of trouble, but we never face trouble alone.

Then Paul tells us why God comforts us: "so that we may be able to comfort those in every affliction." God's comfort is not meant to stop with us. It is meant to flow through us. The person who has walked through cancer, the loss of a child, or a broken marriage, and found God faithful, can sit with someone else in that same place in a way no one else can. Have you been comforted by God? Then someone near you needs what you were given.

1:5 *because just as the sufferings of the Christ abound toward us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.*

"Just as the sufferings of the Christ abound toward us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ." The sufferings of Christ here are the sufferings that come to us because we belong to Him and serve Him. Jesus told His followers that the world would hate them as it hated Him (John 15:18-20). Paul is not saying our suffering adds anything to the cross. Christ's work for our salvation is finished. He is saying that those who walk with Christ will share in the world's hostility toward Him.

The good news is in the second half of the verse. The comfort keeps pace with the suffering. When suffering overflows, comfort overflows too, and it comes through Christ.

1:6-7 *And whether we are afflicted,* ***it is*** *for your comfort and salvation, which is at work in* ***the*** *endurance of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we are comforted,* ***it is*** *for your comfort and salvation; and our hope for you* ***is*** *firm, knowing that as you are partners of the sufferings, so also of the comfort.*

Paul looks at both sides of his life and sees the Corinthians in each one. If he is afflicted, it is for their comfort and salvation. If he is comforted, that is for their comfort too. Everything that happens to him, good or hard, God uses for the good of others.

That comfort "is at work in the endurance of the same sufferings which we also suffer." Endurance means bearing up under a load without giving up. God's comfort does not always remove the load. Often it gives us strength to keep carrying it.

In verse 7 Paul says, "our hope for you is firm." He was sure that since they shared in suffering for Christ, they would also share in His comfort. The two go together for every believer. If you are suffering for Christ, the comfort is coming too.

1:8 *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning our affliction which happened to us in Asia, that we were weighed down excessively, beyond **our** power, so that we despaired even of living.*

Now Paul gets personal. "We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning our affliction which happened to us in Asia." Asia was the Roman province on the west coast of what is now Turkey, where Ephesus was. Scripture does not tell us exactly what happened. Some think of the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41), others of a severe illness, an imprisonment, or a time of fierce persecution. Paul does not explain, because the Corinthians probably already knew.

What he does tell us is how it felt. "We were weighed down excessively, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living." Paul, the great apostle, thought he was going to die. He was crushed beyond what he could bear. It is good for us to see that honesty. Mature believers are not people who never feel crushed. They are people who know where to turn when they are.

1:9 *But we ourselves have had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we would not be trusting in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead,*

"But we ourselves have had the sentence of death in ourselves." Paul felt like a man who had already been condemned to die. Then he tells us why God allowed it: "so that we would not be trusting in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead."

This is one of the most helpful verses in the Bible for hard times. God sometimes lets us come to the end of our own strength so that we stop leaning on it. As long as we think we can handle things, we trust ourselves. When we cannot, we learn to trust the God who raises the dead. And if He can raise the dead, there is nothing He cannot do for us.

1:10 *who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver, in whom we have hoped that He will also still deliver **us**,*

God "delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver, in whom we have hoped that He will also still deliver us." Look at the three tenses. God delivered in the past. He does deliver in the present. He will still deliver in the future.

Paul's hope is not a wish. It rests on what God has already done. When you look back at how God has carried you before, it gives you reason to trust Him now and for whatever is ahead. And for every believer, the final deliverance is certain. Even death itself cannot hold us, because the God we trust raises the dead.

1:11 *you also joining in helping for us by your petition, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift toward us through many.*

Paul says the Corinthians were "joining in helping for us by your petition." A petition is a prayer that asks God for something. Paul believed their prayers really helped him. Prayer is not a nice extra. God uses the prayers of His people to do His work.

And when God answers, "thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf." When many pray, many also give thanks when the answer comes. Prayer draws the church together, first in asking and then in praising. Who are you praying for today? Your prayers may be part of how God carries someone through.

1:12 *For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in **the** grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.*

Now Paul begins to answer his critics. "Our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience." Paul's conscience was clear. He had lived among them "in simplicity and sincerity of God." Simplicity here means singleness of heart, no hidden motives. Sincerity means being pure, with nothing fake mixed in.

He did not live "in fleshly wisdom." Fleshly wisdom is the clever, self-serving way the world operates, always working an angle. Paul lived "in the grace of God." He was not perfect, but he was honest, and he was most careful of all in how he treated the Corinthians.

1:13-14 *For we write no other things to you than what you read or also understand; and I hope that you will understand even to **the** end, just as you also understood us in part, that we are your boast, just as you also **are** ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Some in Corinth were saying Paul's letters had hidden meanings, that he said one thing and meant another. Paul answers plainly: "we write no other things to you than what you read or also understand." There is nothing between the lines. He means what he writes.

He hopes they will understand him fully, "just as you also understood us in part." Some of them did trust him, but not all. Then he looks ahead to "the day of the Lord Jesus." That is the day Christ comes for His people and each believer's life is shown for what it was. On that day, Paul says, he will be their boast and they will be his. He wants them to be proud of each other before the Lord. That is a beautiful picture of a pastor and a church.

1:15-16 *And in this confidence I was intending to come to you before, so that you might have a second grace, and to pass through you into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be sent forward to Judea.*

Here Paul explains the change of plans. He had intended to visit Corinth twice: once on the way north to Macedonia, and again on the way back, before sailing to Judea with the gift for the poor in Jerusalem. He wanted them to have "a second grace," a double blessing from two visits.

That plan changed. In 1 Corinthians 16:5-7 Paul had told them he would come after passing through Macedonia. It seems he later planned the double visit, and then changed again. To some in Corinth, all of this looked like a man who could not make up his mind.

1:17 *Therefore, when purposing this, did I then use the fickleness? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to* ***the*** *flesh, so that with me there may be the "Yes, yes" and the "No, no"?*

Paul asks the question his critics were asking: "did I then use the fickleness?" Fickle means changing your mind easily, being unreliable. Then he asks, "what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh," so that he says yes, yes and no, no at the same time?

To plan "according to the flesh" means to plan selfishly, to say whatever is easy at the moment and change it when it suits you. That kind of person says yes and no in the same breath. Paul says that is not who he is. Sometimes plans must change. That does not make a man a liar. What matters is why the plan changed.

1:18-19 *But God* ***is*** *faithful, that our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you through us, through me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in Him it has been Yes.*

"But God is faithful." Paul calls on God's own faithfulness. His message to them "was not Yes and No." It was not unsure or double-minded.

Then he points to the message itself. "The Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you through us, through me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in Him it has been Yes." Silvanus is the same man called Silas in Acts (Acts 18:5). These three had preached Christ in Corinth. Paul's argument is simple: if the Jesus we preached is completely reliable, how could the men who preached Him be careless with their word? A faithful message calls for faithful messengers.

1:20 *For as many as* ***are the*** *promises of God, in Him* ***is*** *the Yes, and in Him the Amen, to God for glory through us.*

This is one of the great verses of the Bible. "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him is the Yes, and in Him the Amen." Every promise God ever made finds its yes in Jesus. The promises to Abraham, to David, to Israel, and to us all stand firm because of Him. God does not hedge or back out.

The word Amen means so be it, it is true. When we say Amen at the end of a prayer, we are agreeing with God's yes. "To God for glory through us." When believers trust God's promises and say Amen to them, God is glorified. Is there a promise of God you have been doubting? In Christ, the answer is yes.

1:21-22 *Now the* ***One*** *who establishes us with you into Christ and anointed us* ***is*** *God, who also sealed us and gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.*

Paul now lists four things God has done for every believer. First, God "establishes us with you into Christ." He makes us firm and steady in Christ. Notice "us with you." Paul and the Corinthians stand on the same ground. Second, God anointed us. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed with oil to set them apart. God has set apart every believer by giving His Spirit.

Third, God "also sealed us." A seal was a mark of ownership. It showed what belonged to whom. Fourth, God "gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts." A pledge is a down payment, the first part of a payment that promises the rest will come. The Holy Spirit living in us now is God's guarantee of everything He has promised. Our security rests on what God has done, not on how strong we feel.

1:23 *But I call on God as witness upon my soul, that to spare you I came no longer to Corinth.*

Now Paul gives the real reason he did not come. "I call on God as witness upon my soul." This is a solemn oath. Paul is saying, God knows my heart, and He knows I am telling the truth. "To spare you I came no longer to Corinth."

He was not avoiding them out of fear or careless planning. If he had come right then, he would have had to come with discipline and correction, and it would have been another painful visit (2:1). He waited to give them time to set things right. Sometimes love waits.

1:24 *Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are fellow workers of your joy; for by faith you have stood.*

Paul quickly adds, "Not that we lord it over your faith." To lord it over someone means to boss them, to rule over them harshly. Paul had authority as an apostle, but he did not use it to control their faith. Their faith was between them and God. "We are fellow workers of your joy." A true pastor works alongside his people for their joy.

"For by faith you have stood." They stood before God by their own faith in Christ, not by Paul's control. This is a good word for church leaders today. Our job is not to control people. It is to help them stand on their own two feet with Christ.

Chapter 1 Summary

Paul greets the church in Corinth and praises the God of all comfort, who comforts us in every affliction so that we can comfort others. The sufferings of Christ overflow to His people, and so does His comfort. Paul tells of an affliction in Asia so heavy that he despaired of life, and he explains that God allowed it so he would trust not in himself but in God who raises the dead. God delivered him, does deliver him, and will deliver him, and the prayers of the church had a part in it. Paul then defends his integrity. His conscience is clear, his letters mean what they say, and his change of travel plans was not fickleness. Every promise of God is Yes in Christ, and God has established, anointed and sealed believers, giving the Spirit as a pledge. Paul stayed away to spare the Corinthians, not to lord it over their faith, but to work with them for their joy.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What two names does Paul give God in 1:3, and what do they tell us about Him?

2. According to 1:4, why does God comfort us?

3. How does Paul describe what happened to him in Asia? (1:8)

4. What reason does Paul give for why God allowed him to come to the end of his own strength? (1:9)

5. What three tenses of deliverance does Paul name in 1:10?

6. What charge were some in Corinth making against Paul, and how does he answer it? (1:15-19)

7. What does it mean that every promise of God is Yes in Christ? (1:20)

8. What four things has God done for every believer according to 1:21-22?

9. Think of a time God comforted you in a hard season. Who could you pass that comfort on to this week?

10. Paul says he did not "lord it over" their faith (1:24). How can you encourage someone's faith without trying to control it?

Chapter 2: Forgiveness and the Fragrance of Christ

Scripture

2:1-17 But I judged this for myself, not to come to you again in grief. For if I grieve you, then who is the ***one*** who makes me glad, except the ***one*** who is grieved by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, so that when I come I may not have grief from those from whom I ought to rejoice, having confidence in you all that my joy is ***the joy*** of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears, not that you might be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly toward you. But if anyone has grieved, he has not grieved me, but in part, so that I may not burden you all. Sufficient for such a one ***is*** this punishment which ***is*** by the majority, so that on the contrary you ***should*** rather forgive and comfort ***him***, lest somehow such a one be swallowed up by more abundant grief. Therefore I exhort you to confirm love toward him. For to this end I also wrote, so that I might know your proof, whether you are obedient in all things. Now to whom you forgive anything, I also ***forgive***; for I also, if I have forgiven anything, to whom I have forgiven ***it***, ***have done so*** for your sake in ***the*** presence of Christ, so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes. Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of the Christ, and a door had been opened to me in ***the*** Lord, I have had no rest in my spirit, at my not finding Titus my brother; but taking leave of them, I went out to Macedonia. But thanks ***be*** to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and makes manifest through us the scent of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the one a scent of death to death, and to the other a scent of life to life. And who ***is*** sufficient for these things? For we are not like the many, peddling the word of God; but as from sincerity, but as from God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Chapter 2 Preview

Paul keeps explaining why he did not come to Corinth when he said he would. He did not want to make another painful visit. Instead he wrote them a letter with many tears, and it worked. The church had disciplined a man who had done wrong, and the man was sorry. Now Paul tells them it is time to forgive him, comfort him, and show him love, so that Satan does not gain an advantage over them.

Then Paul tells of his own restless heart. He went to Troas to preach and found an open door, but he could not rest because Titus had not come with news from Corinth. So he went on to Macedonia. Before he finishes that story (he picks it up again in 7:5), Paul breaks out in thanks. God leads His people in triumph in Christ, and through them He spreads the fragrance of knowing Christ everywhere. To some that fragrance smells like death, and to others like life.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *But I judged this for myself, not to come to you again in grief.*

"But I judged this for myself, not to come to you again in grief." The word again is important. It tells us Paul had already made one visit to Corinth that brought grief. Bible teachers call it the painful visit. Acts does not tell us about it, but this verse, along with 12:14 and 13:1-2, shows it happened sometime after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

Paul made a decision. He would not come back to them in the same way, with more sorrow. That is why he changed his plans (1:15-23). He was not avoiding hard things. He was choosing a better way to deal with them.

2:2 *For if I grieve you, then who is the **one** who makes me glad, except the **one** who is grieved by me?*

"For if I grieve you, then who is the one who makes me glad, except the one who is grieved by me?" Paul's joy was tied up with the Corinthians. If he came and made them sad, the very people who should make him glad would be the ones hurting.

This shows us Paul's heart. He did not enjoy correcting people. A good parent does not enjoy disciplining a child, and a good pastor does not enjoy confronting sin. Love sometimes has to wound, but it never takes pleasure in it.

2:3 *And I wrote this very thing to you, so that when I come I may not have grief from those from whom I ought to rejoice, having confidence in you all that my joy is **the joy** of you all.*

"And I wrote this very thing to you." Instead of a second painful visit, Paul wrote a letter. He wrote it "so that when I come I may not have grief from those from whom I ought to rejoice." He wanted them to deal with the problem before he arrived, so that his next visit could be a happy one.

Paul also had "confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all." He trusted that, deep down, what made him glad would make them glad too. He believed the best about them, even while they were giving him grief.

2:4 *For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears, not that you might be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly toward you.*

"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears." This letter cost Paul a great deal. Anguish means deep distress, like being squeezed from every side. He did not write it angry or cold. He wrote it weeping.

Why? "Not that you might be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly toward you." The hard letter was a love letter. Sometimes the most loving thing a person can do is tell us the truth when we do not want to hear it (Proverbs 27:6). As I explained in the Background, Bible teachers are not sure which letter this was, and Scripture does not tell us. What we do know is the heart behind it.

2:5 *But if anyone has grieved, he has not grieved me, but in part, so that I may not burden you all.*

"But if anyone has grieved, he has not grieved me, but in part, so that I may not burden you all." Paul now turns to one man who had caused the trouble. He does not name him. He is careful and gentle even here.

Paul says the man did not hurt only him. In a sense he hurt the whole church. Paul does not want to overstate it ("so that I may not burden you all"), but he wants them to see that sin in a church is never only a private matter between two people. It touches everyone.

Who was this man? Some Bible teachers think he was the man in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 who was living with his father's wife. Many others think he was someone who opposed or insulted Paul during the painful visit, since Paul speaks of "the one having suffered wrong" in 7:12, and that fits a personal offense better. Scripture does not say for sure.

2:6 *Sufficient for such a one **is** this punishment which **is** by the majority,*

"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which is by the majority." The church had acted. Most of the members had agreed to discipline the man. Church discipline is the loving correction of a member who keeps on in sin, as Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-17. It may end with the church no longer treating him as part of the fellowship until he repents.

Paul says it was sufficient, enough. The goal of discipline is not to crush someone or to keep punishing him forever. The goal is to bring him back. When that goal has been reached, the punishment should stop. Some churches never discipline anyone. Others never stop. Paul shows us a better way.

2:7 *so that on the contrary you **should** rather forgive and comfort **him**, lest somehow such a one be swallowed up by more abundant grief.*

"So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him." The man had repented. Now the church needed to change direction. They had to forgive him, which means letting go of the debt, no longer holding his sin against him. And they had to comfort him, to come alongside him and encourage him, the same word Paul used in chapter 1.

Why? "Lest somehow such a one be swallowed up by more abundant grief." There is a sorrow that heals and a sorrow that drowns. If the church kept the man at arm's length after he had repented, he could sink into despair and give up. A church that disciplines but will not forgive is cruel. Is there someone in your life who has said they are sorry, but you have kept at a distance? This verse speaks to that.

2:8 *Therefore I exhort you to confirm love toward him.*

"Therefore I exhort you to confirm love toward him." To exhort is to urge strongly. To confirm means to make it official, to show it openly. The church had acted together to discipline the man. Now Paul wants them to act together just as clearly to welcome him back.

Forgiveness that is only whispered is not enough. The man needed to know, without any doubt, that he was loved and restored. When someone repents, we should make our love plain to them, in words and in actions.

2:9 *For to this end I also wrote, so that I might know your proof, whether you are obedient in all things.*

"For to this end I also wrote, so that I might know your proof, whether you are obedient in all things." Paul's hard letter was a test. Would the church obey the Lord's teaching, even when it was painful to do?

They passed the first part of the test. They disciplined the man. Now there was a second part. Would they be just as obedient in forgiving him? Obedience "in all things" includes both. It is often easier to be strict than to be merciful. God asks us for both.

2:10 *Now to whom you forgive anything, I also **forgive**; for I also, if I have forgiven anything, to whom I have forgiven **it**, **have done so** for your sake in **the** presence of Christ,*

"Now to whom you forgive anything, I also forgive." Paul stands with the church. If they forgive, he forgives. He does not want his own hurt to stand in the way.

He says he has forgiven "for your sake in the presence of Christ." Paul forgave the man for the good of the church, and he did it as a man standing before Christ. That is the key to forgiving others. We forgive as people who have been forgiven so much ourselves (Ephesians 4:32). When we remember that we stand in the presence of Christ, our grudges start to look very small.

2:11 *so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*

"So that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes." Here is a sobering truth. Satan, the devil, is a real enemy, and he has schemes, plans, and tricks he uses against the church.

In this case, Satan could win two ways. He had already tried to destroy the church by letting sin go unchecked. Now he could try to destroy a repentant man by drowning him in grief, and to destroy the church by making it harsh and unforgiving. An unforgiving spirit is one of the devil's favorite tools. It splits families and churches, and it poisons hearts. We must not be ignorant of it.

2:12-13 *Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of the Christ, and a door had been opened to me in **the** Lord, I have had no rest in my spirit, at my not finding Titus my brother; but taking leave of them, I went out to Macedonia.*

Now Paul goes back to his travel story. "When I came to Troas for the gospel of the Christ, and a door had been opened to me in the Lord." Troas was a port city in Asia, across the sea from Macedonia. An open door means an opportunity to preach. People were ready to listen.

Yet Paul says, "I have had no rest in my spirit, at my not finding Titus my brother." Titus had most likely carried Paul's hard letter to Corinth, and Paul was waiting anxiously to hear how they

received it. He was so burdened that he left the open door and went on to Macedonia to find Titus. Paul was a man with real feelings. His love for the church in Corinth kept him up at night. Paul picks this story back up in 7:5-7, where Titus finally arrives with good news.

2:14 *But thanks **be** to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and makes manifest through us the scent of the knowledge of Him in every place.*

Then, in the middle of the story, Paul bursts out: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ." In Paul's day, when a Roman general won a great victory, the city of Rome would hold a parade called a triumph. The general rode in front, and behind him came his soldiers and the captives he had taken. Incense was burned all along the way, filling the streets with its smell.

Paul says God is the conquering general, and we are part of His victory parade. Some take Paul to be one of God's captives, conquered by grace. Others see him as one of the soldiers sharing the victory. Either way, the point is the same: in Christ, God is always winning, even when Paul is restless and confused. "And makes manifest through us the scent of the knowledge of Him in every place." Like incense in that parade, the knowledge of Christ spreads through God's people wherever they go.

2:15 *For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,*

"For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God." This is a beautiful thought. When we live for Christ and speak of Him, our lives give off a fragrance that pleases God. In the Old Testament, offerings burned on the altar were called a pleasing aroma to the Lord (Leviticus 1:9). Our lives of faith are like that offering.

That aroma spreads "among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." The fragrance is the same in both groups. The message does not change. But not everyone receives it the same way.

2:16 *to the one a scent of death to death, and to the other a scent of life to life. And who **is** sufficient for these things?*

"To the one a scent of death to death, and to the other a scent of life to life." In the Roman triumph, the smell of incense meant victory for the soldiers, but for the captives at the end of the line, it meant they were headed to death. The same smell meant two very different things.

The gospel works like that. To those who refuse it, it is a smell of death. It reminds them of judgment, and they want nothing to do with it. To those who receive it, it is the sweet smell of life. Then Paul asks, "And who is sufficient for these things?" Who is good enough to carry a message with eternal life and death in it? No one, on his own. Paul answers that question in 3:5: our sufficiency is from God.

2:17 *For we are not like the many, peddling the word of God; but as from sincerity, but as from God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

"For we are not like the many, peddling the word of God." A peddler was a street seller, often one who watered down his wine to make more money. Paul says many teachers in his day were like that. They treated God's Word as a product to sell. They changed it, watered it down, and used it to fill their own pockets.

Paul was different. He spoke "as from sincerity, but as from God, in the sight of God." He spoke what God gave him, as a man who knew God was watching. This is a warning for every teacher and every listener today. Anyone who uses God's Word mainly to make money or build his own name is a peddler. Look for teachers who speak as men standing before God.

Chapter 2 Summary

Paul explains that he did not return to Corinth because he did not want another painful visit. Instead he wrote them a letter out of much affliction and many tears, to show his love for them. The church had disciplined the man who caused the trouble, and Paul says the punishment was enough. Now they must forgive him, comfort him, and confirm their love for him, so he is not swallowed up by grief and so Satan does not take advantage of them. Paul tells how he could not rest at Troas because Titus had not come. Then he thanks God, who leads His people in triumph in Christ and spreads the fragrance of Christ through them. To those perishing it is the smell of death, and to those being saved it is the smell of life. Paul speaks with sincerity, as from God and before God, unlike those who peddle God's Word.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Why did Paul decide not to come to Corinth again in grief? (2:1-3)

2. How did Paul feel when he wrote his hard letter, and why did he write it? (2:4)

3. What had the church done about the man who caused grief, and what does Paul now tell them to do? (2:6-8)

4. What danger did Paul see if the church did not forgive the man? (2:7, 11)

5. Why was Paul restless in Troas even though a door was open for the gospel? (2:12-13)

6. What picture does Paul use in 2:14, and what does it teach about God?

7. How can the same message be a smell of death to some and a smell of life to others? (2:15-16)

8. What does it mean to peddle the word of God, and how was Paul different? (2:17)

9. Is there someone who has repented of hurting you that you still keep at a distance? What would it look like to confirm love toward them?

10. Where in your life could you spread the fragrance of Christ this week?

Chapter 3: Ministers of a New Covenant

Scripture

3:1-18 Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, like some, commendatory letters to you or commendatory ***ones*** from you? You are our letter, inscribed in our hearts, known and read by all men, being made manifest that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with ***the*** Spirit of ***the*** living God, not on tablets of stone but on fleshy tablets of heart. And such confidence we have through the Christ toward God; not that we are sufficient from ourselves to reckon anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency ***is*** from God, who also made us sufficient ***as*** ministers of a new covenant, not of ***the*** letter but of ***the*** Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive. Now if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stones, came about in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to look intently into the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which was being brought to nothing, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory? For if the ministry of condemnation ***was*** glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For even what has been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, because of the surpassing glory. For if what is being brought to nothing ***was*** through glory, much more what remains ***is*** in glory. Therefore, having such hope, we use much boldness, and not as Moses was putting a veil over his own face, so that the sons of Israel would not look intently into the end of what was being brought to nothing. But their minds were hardened. For until today the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant, not being lifted, which is being brought to nothing in Christ. But until today, when Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart. But whenever ***it*** turns to ***the*** Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of ***the*** Lord ***is***, there ***is*** freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of ***the*** Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from ***the*** Lord, ***the*** Spirit.

Chapter 3 Preview

The false teachers in Corinth carried letters of recommendation, and they seem to have asked where Paul's letters were. Paul answers that he does not need any. The Corinthians themselves are his letter, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God on human hearts. Paul does not claim to be good enough for this work in himself. God made him sufficient as a minister of a new covenant.

Then Paul compares the two covenants. The old covenant, written on stone at Mount Sinai, came with glory, so much that Israel could not look at Moses' face. But that glory was fading. The new covenant, the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, has a glory that far surpasses it and lasts. Paul explains that a veil still lies over the hearts of many in Israel when the old covenant is read, but whenever the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. All of us who belong to Christ now behold His glory and are being changed into His image, from glory to glory.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, like some, commendatory letters to you or commendatory **ones** from you?*

"Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?" To commend means to recommend or speak well of. Paul had just said he speaks as from God and in the sight of God (2:17). He knew his critics would twist that and say, there he goes again, praising himself.

"Or do we need, like some, commendatory letters to you or commendatory ones from you?" In the early church, believers who traveled often carried letters from their home church to introduce them (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2). That was a good practice. But the false teachers in Corinth had come waving their letters, and they seemed to say that Paul had none. Paul's question is almost a smile. He had started the church. Did he really need a letter to introduce himself to his own spiritual children?

3:2 *You are our letter, inscribed in our hearts, known and read by all men,*

"You are our letter, inscribed in our hearts, known and read by all men." Paul says, if you want my letter of recommendation, look in the mirror. The church in Corinth was living proof that God had worked through Paul. Before he came, they were idol worshipers. Now they were believers in Jesus.

This letter was "inscribed in our hearts." Paul carried them in his heart wherever he went. And it was "known and read by all men." People all over could see what God had done in Corinth. Here is a question for each of us. If people read your life like a letter, what would it tell them about Christ?

3:3 *being made manifest that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with **the** Spirit of **the** living God, not on tablets of stone but on fleshy tablets of heart.*

"You are a letter of Christ ministered by us." Christ is the true author of this letter. Paul was only the one who delivered it. It was written "not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God." Ink fades and paper wears out. What the Spirit writes lasts.

And it was written "not on tablets of stone but on fleshy tablets of heart." Paul is thinking of Mount Sinai, where God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). He is also thinking of the prophets. God promised through Jeremiah that in the new covenant He would write His law on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), and through Ezekiel that He would take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh and put His Spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul says that promise is being fulfilled in the lives of believers.

Jeremiah says God will make this covenant "with the house of Israel," and Ezekiel's promise of a new heart comes with God's promise to bring Israel back to its own land (Ezekiel 36:24). Some teachers say the church has taken Israel's place in these promises. I believe the church shares now in their forgiveness and new heart through the Spirit, and God will still keep every one of them to the nation of Israel when Christ returns (Romans 11:26-27).

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 31:33 (alluded to); Proverbs 3:3 (alluded to); Ezekiel 36:26 (alluded to); Ezekiel 11:19 (alluded to); Exodus 31:18 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 9:10 (alluded to)

3:4-5 *And such confidence we have through the Christ toward God; not that we are sufficient from ourselves to reckon anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency* ***is*** *from God,*

"And such confidence we have through the Christ toward God." Paul is confident, but not in himself. His confidence comes through Christ and is directed toward God.

Then he answers the question he asked in 2:16, "who is sufficient for these things?" Here is his answer: "not that we are sufficient from ourselves to reckon anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God." Paul does not take credit for anything. He does not even claim he can think up anything worthwhile on his own. Everything that came from his ministry came from God. That is a freeing truth for anyone who serves the Lord. You do not have to be enough. God is enough.

3:6 *who also made us sufficient* ***as*** *ministers of a new covenant, not of* ***the*** *letter but of* ***the*** *Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive.*

God "also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant." A covenant is a binding agreement. The old covenant was the agreement God made with Israel at Mount Sinai through Moses, the Law. The new covenant is the one God promised through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and Jesus made it with His own blood (Luke 22:20). In it God forgives sins and writes His law on the heart by His Spirit.

"Not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive." Some people take this to mean we should not read the Bible plainly and should look for hidden spiritual meanings. That is not what Paul means at all. The letter here is the Law written on stone. The Law is holy and good (Romans 7:12), but it can only tell us what is right and condemn us when we fail. It cannot give us life or power to obey. The Spirit does what the Law could never do. He gives new life.

In Jeremiah 31:31 God says He will make this covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." As I said at verse 3, Paul serves the new covenant now, and its promises to the nation of Israel still stand and will be kept when Christ returns.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 31:31 (alluded to)

3:7 *Now if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stones, came about in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to look intently into the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which was being brought to nothing,*

"Now if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stones, came about in glory." Paul calls the old covenant "the ministry of death." That sounds harsh, but think of what the Law does. It shows us God's holy standard, and because we have all broken it, it shows that we deserve death (Romans 6:23).

Still, it "came about in glory." When Moses came down from the mountain with the Law, his face shone so brightly (Exodus 34:29-35) "that the sons of Israel were not able to look intently into the face of Moses because of the glory of his face." The Law was from God, and it came with real glory. But Paul adds that this glory "was being brought to nothing." It was fading away.

Old Testament links: Exodus 34:29-30 (alluded to)

3:8 *how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory?*

"How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory?" Here is Paul's argument from the lesser to the greater. If the covenant that brought death came with such glory, how much greater must be the glory of the covenant that brings the Spirit and life?

The ministry of the Spirit is the new covenant. Through it the Holy Spirit lives in every believer (Romans 8:9). Under the old covenant the Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks. Under the new covenant He makes His home in all of God's people. That is a far greater glory than a shining face.

3:9 *For if the ministry of condemnation **was** glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.*

"For if the ministry of condemnation was glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory." Condemnation is the sentence of guilt. The Law points its finger at the sinner and says, guilty. That was all it could do.

The new covenant is "the ministry of righteousness." Here God does not just declare us guilty. Through faith in Christ He declares us righteous. That is called justification, God declaring a sinner right with Him because of what Christ has done (Romans 3:21-26). Which would you rather receive: a sentence of guilt, or a declaration that you are right with God? The new covenant offers the second, and that is why its glory is greater.

3:10-11 *For even what has been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, because of the surpassing glory. For if what is being brought to nothing **was** through glory, much more what remains **is** in glory.*

"For even what has been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, because of the surpassing glory." Think of a flashlight on a dark night. It shines brightly. But turn it on at noon in the desert

sun and you can barely see it. The light is still there, but it is outshined. The old covenant had real glory, but next to the new covenant it hardly seems to shine.

"For if what is being brought to nothing was through glory, much more what remains is in glory." The old covenant was temporary, a stage in God's plan. The new covenant remains. It will never be replaced. It is God's final and lasting way of dealing with His people.

3:12 *Therefore, having such hope, we use much boldness,*

"Therefore, having such hope, we use much boldness." Hope in the Bible is not a maybe. It is a sure confidence about what God has promised but not yet finished. Because Paul knew the new covenant would never fade, he could speak with boldness.

Boldness here means plain, open, frank speech. Paul had nothing to hide. He did not need to dress up his message or soften it. Believers today can speak about Christ with the same boldness, not because we are clever, but because the message is sure.

3:13 *and not as Moses was putting a veil over his own face, so that the sons of Israel would not look intently into the end of what was being brought to nothing.*

"And not as Moses was putting a veil over his own face." After Moses spoke to the people, he covered his face with a veil (Exodus 34:33-35). Paul gives us the reason: "so that the sons of Israel would not look intently into the end of what was being brought to nothing."

In other words, the glory on Moses' face was fading, and the veil kept the people from watching it fade away. This was a picture of the old covenant itself. Its glory was real, but it was not meant to last forever. Paul, by contrast, keeps nothing veiled. He preaches the new covenant openly.

Old Testament links: Exodus 34:33-35 (alluded to)

3:14 *But their minds were hardened. For until today the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant, not being lifted, which is being brought to nothing in Christ.*

"But their minds were hardened." Paul now speaks about his own people, Israel. Even with the Law in their hands, many did not understand where it pointed. "For until today the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant, not being lifted." This is the first place in the Bible where the books of Moses are called "the old covenant."

The veil that once covered Moses' face now, in a sense, covers the understanding of many Jewish people when the Scriptures are read. They read the Law but do not see Christ in it. That veil "is being brought to nothing in Christ." Only in Christ is it removed. Paul says this with sorrow, not contempt. He loved his people deeply (Romans 9:1-5).

3:15 *But until today, when Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.*

"But until today, when Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart." The name Moses here means the books Moses wrote, the Law, which was read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogue, the Jewish meeting place for worship and teaching (Acts 15:21).

Notice the change. In verse 13 the veil was over Moses' face. Here it is over their heart. The problem is not with the Scriptures. The Law clearly points to Christ (Luke 24:27, 44). The problem is a heart that is not yet open to see Him. That is true of every person, Jew or Gentile, until God opens the eyes (4:4-6).

3:16 *But whenever **it** turns to **the** Lord, the veil is taken away.*

"But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." What a promise. The word it points back to the heart in verse 15. Whenever a heart turns to the Lord, the veil comes off. Paul is again thinking of Moses, who took off the veil whenever he went in to speak with the Lord (Exodus 34:34).

This is true for any Jewish person today who turns to Jesus the Messiah. It is also a promise for the nation of Israel. The veil over Israel is not permanent. Paul tells us in Romans 11:25-27 that a partial hardening has come on Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel will be saved, as the prophets foretold. God has not cast away His people (Romans 11:1-2). The church has not replaced Israel. A day is coming when the nation will turn to the Lord and look on Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), and the veil will be taken away.

Old Testament links: Exodus 34:34 (alluded to)

3:17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of **the** Lord **is**, there **is** freedom.*

"Now the Lord is the Spirit." This is a hard phrase. Paul is not mixing up the Persons of the Godhead, as if Jesus and the Holy Spirit were the same Person. He has just spoken of turning "to the Lord," as Moses did. Paul is saying that the Lord we turn to in the new covenant meets us by His Spirit. Many Bible teachers also see here that the Spirit is fully God, the Lord Himself. Either way, Paul keeps the Lord and the Spirit together, because the Spirit is how the Lord lives in and works in His people.

"And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Freedom from what? From the veil, from the condemnation of the Law, from slavery to sin. This is not freedom to sin, but freedom to know God and obey Him from the heart (Galatians 5:1, 13).

3:18 *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of **the** Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from **the** Lord, **the** Spirit.*

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Under the old covenant only Moses went in to see God's glory. Now we all do. Every believer, not just a leader, sees the glory of the Lord. We see it "as in a mirror," which may mean we see it reflected, not yet face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). We see it in the face of Jesus (4:6) and through His Word.

And as we behold, we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." The word transformed is the one used of Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). Little by little, as we look at Jesus, we become like Him. Bible teachers call this sanctification, the lifelong work of the Spirit making us holy. It comes "from the Lord, the Spirit." We do not change ourselves by trying harder. We change by looking at Jesus, and the Spirit does the work. Moses' glory faded. Ours grows.

Chapter 3 Summary

Paul does not need letters of recommendation, because the Corinthian believers are his letter, written by the Spirit of the living God on human hearts. His sufficiency is not from himself but from God, who made him a minister of a new covenant, where the Spirit gives life. The old covenant, written on stone, came with glory, but it was a ministry of death and condemnation, and its glory was fading. The new covenant is the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, with a glory that surpasses the old and remains. A veil lies over the hearts of many in Israel when Moses is read, but whenever the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away, and God has promised a day when Israel as a nation will turn to Him. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, and all believers, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His image from glory to glory.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say he does not need letters of recommendation? (3:1-3)

2. Where does Paul say our sufficiency comes from? (3:5)

3. What does Paul mean by "the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive"? (3:6)

4. What two names does Paul give the old covenant, and what two names does he give the new? (3:7-9)

5. Why did Moses put a veil over his face? (3:13)

6. What does the veil over the heart stand for, and when is it taken away? (3:14-16)

7. What do 3:16 and Romans 11:25-27 teach about God's future for Israel?

8. According to 3:18, how are believers changed, and who does the changing?

9. If others read your life like a letter (3:2), what would they learn about Christ?

10. What is one way you can spend more time beholding the glory of the Lord this week?

Chapter 4: Treasure in Clay Jars

Scripture

4:1-18 Because of this, having this ministry, just as we were shown mercy, we do not lose heart; but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor falsifying the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, so that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of the Christ, who is ***the*** image of God, would not shine forth on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus ***as*** Lord, and ourselves your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For ***it is*** God who said ***for*** light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in ***the*** face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from us: being afflicted in every ***way*** but not hemmed in, being perplexed but not despairing, being persecuted but not forsaken, being struck down but not perishing, always carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our body. For we who live are always being delivered to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death is at work in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that the ***One*** who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us through Jesus and will present ***us*** with you. For all things ***are*** for your sake, so that the grace, having increased through the more ***people***, may make the thanksgiving abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart; but even if our outer man is being brought to decay, yet the inner ***man*** is being renewed day by day. For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us, excessively to excess, an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things being seen but at the things not being seen; for the things being seen ***are*** temporary, but the things not being seen ***are*** eternal.

Chapter 4 Preview

Because God gave Paul the glorious ministry of the new covenant, he does not lose heart. He refuses to use tricks or twist God's Word. He simply speaks the truth openly. If some still do not see, it is because the god of this age has blinded their minds. Paul does not preach himself. He preaches Christ Jesus as Lord, because the same God who spoke light into being at creation has shone in our hearts to show us His glory in the face of Jesus.

Then Paul gives one of the best known pictures in the Bible. We carry this treasure in clay jars, plain earthen pots, so that everyone can see the power belongs to God and not to us. Paul is pressed on every side, but not crushed. He is struck down, but not destroyed. His outer man is wearing out, but his inner man is renewed day by day. His troubles feel heavy, but next to the eternal weight of glory they are light and brief. So he keeps his eyes on what is unseen and eternal.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *Because of this, having this ministry, just as we were shown mercy, we do not lose heart;*

"Because of this, having this ministry, just as we were shown mercy, we do not lose heart." This ministry is the ministry of the new covenant that Paul described in chapter 3. Paul did not earn it. He received it "just as we were shown mercy." Paul never forgot that he had once persecuted the church (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Everything he had was mercy.

And so "we do not lose heart." To lose heart means to give up, to grow weary and quit. Paul had every reason to quit. He had been attacked, mocked, and hurt by the very church he started. But when you know your calling came from God's mercy, you keep going. The work is His, and so is the strength.

4:2 *but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor falsifying the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God.*

"But we have renounced the hidden things of shame." To renounce is to turn away from something for good. Paul refused to use the sneaky methods some teachers used. He was "not walking in craftiness," which means clever tricks and scheming, "nor falsifying the word of God." To falsify is to twist or water it down, mixing in error to make it more pleasing.

Instead Paul was "by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God." He just laid the truth out in the open and let people's consciences judge. That is still the right way to share the gospel. We do not need gimmicks or pressure. We need to tell the truth plainly and live it honestly, knowing God is watching.

4:3 *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing,*

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled among those who are perishing." Paul's critics may have said, if your message is so clear, why doesn't everyone believe it? Paul admits that to some people the gospel seems hidden, as if a veil lay over it.

But the problem is not with the gospel. The veil is on those "who are perishing," people who are on the road to eternal ruin because they have refused the truth. The gospel is not unclear. Hearts that refuse it cannot see it. Paul is going back to the veil of chapter 3, and he is about to tell us who put it there.

4:4 *in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, so that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of the Christ, who is* ***the*** *image of God, would not shine forth on them.*

"In whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving." The "god of this age" is Satan. Jesus called him the ruler of this world (John 12:31), and John tells us the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). He is not truly a god, and he is not equal to God. But in this present age, many people serve him as if he were.

His goal is to keep people blind, "so that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God, would not shine forth on them." Satan does not mind if people are religious, busy, or even curious about spiritual things. What he wants is to keep them from seeing Jesus clearly. Jesus is "the image of God." If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15). That is why it matters so much that we pray for those who do not believe. Only God can open blind eyes.

4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus **as** Lord, and ourselves your slaves for the sake of Jesus.*

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord." The false teachers in Corinth were always talking about themselves: their gifts, their letters, their experiences. Paul refused to make himself the message. He preached Christ Jesus as Lord, the One with all authority.

And what did Paul call himself? "Ourselves your slaves for the sake of Jesus." A slave in Paul's day had no rights of his own and lived to serve his master. Paul says he is the Corinthians' servant, not their boss, and he serves them for the sake of Jesus. That is what Christian leadership looks like. The best preachers point away from themselves to Christ, and they serve the people rather than using them.

4:6 *For **it is** God who said **for** light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in **the** face of Jesus Christ.*

"For it is God who said for light to shine out of darkness." Paul is pointing back to the very first day of creation. God spoke, and light came into being (Genesis 1:3). The darkness had no say in it.

That same God "has shone in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Every conversion is a new creation. Before we believed, our hearts were dark. Then God spoke, and light broke in. Paul knew this firsthand. A light from heaven flashed around him on the road to Damascus, and he saw the risen Jesus (Acts 9:3-5). If God can bring light out of darkness at creation, He can bring light into the darkest heart. Never give up praying for someone you love.

Old Testament links: Genesis 1:3 (alluded to)

4:7 *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from us:*

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The treasure is the gospel, the light of the knowledge of God's glory in Jesus (4:6). The earthen vessels are clay jars, the cheap, plain pottery people used every day for storing things and carrying water. They cracked and chipped easily. No one took notice of them.

That is what Paul says we are. Our bodies are weak. Our abilities are limited. We get sick, tired, and discouraged. Why would God put His greatest treasure in such fragile containers? Paul tells us: "so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from us." If the jar were made of gold, people would admire the jar. When the jar is plain clay, everyone can see that the

power comes from God. Your weakness is not a problem for God. It is the very place His power shows best.

4:8 *being afflicted in every **way** but not hemmed in, being perplexed but not despairing,*

Now Paul gives four pairs that show how this works. "Being afflicted in every way but not hemmed in." Afflicted means pressed, squeezed from every side. Hemmed in means trapped with no way out. Paul felt the pressure, but God always kept a way open.

"Being perplexed but not despairing." Perplexed means not knowing what to do, being at a loss. Despairing means being completely without hope. Paul often did not know what to do next. But he never ran out of hope, because his hope was in God, not in his own answers. Is that where you are? You may be perplexed, but in Christ you do not have to despair.

4:9 *being persecuted but not forsaken, being struck down but not perishing,*

"Being persecuted but not forsaken." To be persecuted is to be hunted down and attacked because of your faith. To be forsaken is to be abandoned, left alone. People chased Paul from city to city, but God never left him. Jesus promised that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

"Being struck down but not perishing." Paul was knocked down many times, once with real stones (Acts 14:19). But he was never knocked out. He got up and went on. The Christian life is not about never falling. It is about the God who keeps raising us up.

4:10 *always carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our body.*

"Always carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." Paul's body bore the marks of his suffering for Christ. Everywhere he went, he was facing the same hatred and danger that led Jesus to the cross. He was dying a little every day for the sake of the gospel.

But there was a purpose in it: "so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our body." When people saw Paul suffer and keep going with joy, they saw something that could not be explained by Paul's own strength. They saw the life of the risen Jesus at work in him. Our trials can be a window through which others see Christ.

4:11 *For we who live are always being delivered to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

"For we who live are always being delivered to death for the sake of Jesus." Paul repeats the thought to make it plain. He lived every day under the threat of death because he served Jesus. That was not bad luck. It was the cost of his calling, and he paid it gladly.

And again the purpose: "so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our mortal flesh." Mortal means subject to death. Our flesh is weak and will one day die. But in that weak, dying body, the life of Jesus shines. God does not wait until we are strong to show His life through us. He does it in our weakness, right now.

4:12 *So then death is at work in us, but life in you.*

"So then death is at work in us, but life in you." Paul's suffering brought life to others. Because he was willing to face danger, beatings, and prison to preach the gospel, the Corinthians heard it and received eternal life.

This is the pattern of the cross. Jesus died so that we might live. In a smaller way, His servants give up their comfort and safety so that others might hear and live. Every missionary who leaves home, every believer who serves at a cost, is following this pattern. What are you willing to give up so that someone else might come to life in Christ?

4:13 *But having the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak,*

"But having the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written." Then he quotes, "I believed, therefore I spoke." Paul is quoting Psalm 116:10. The psalmist was in deep trouble, near death, yet he trusted God and spoke of it.

Paul says he has the same faith. "We also believe, therefore we also speak." Real faith cannot keep quiet. Paul kept preaching even when it cost him, because he believed what he preached. If we truly believe the gospel is true and that people are perishing without it, we will speak.

Old Testament links: Psalm 116:10 (quoted)

4:14 *knowing that the **One** who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us through Jesus and will present **us** with you.*

"Knowing that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us through Jesus and will present us with you." Here is why Paul could face death without fear. God raised Jesus from the dead. That is a fact of history. And the same God will raise all who belong to Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

"And will present us with you." Paul looks forward to the day when he and the Corinthians will stand together before the Lord. That is the end of the story for every believer. Death is not the last word. Resurrection is. When the Lord comes for His church, the dead in Christ will be raised first, and we will all be together with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

4:15 *For all things **are** for your sake, so that the grace, having increased through the more **people**, may make the thanksgiving abound to the glory of God.*

"For all things are for your sake." Everything Paul suffered, he suffered for the good of the believers. He was not seeking his own glory or comfort.

And the goal was bigger than the Corinthians: "so that the grace, having increased through the more people, may make the thanksgiving abound to the glory of God." As God's grace reaches more and more people, more and more people give thanks to Him, and God is glorified. The final aim of everything is the glory of God. Our suffering, our service, and our salvation all point there.

4:16 *Therefore we do not lose heart; but even if our outer man is being brought to decay, yet the inner* ***man*** *is being renewed day by day.*

"Therefore we do not lose heart." Paul says it again (4:1). Here is why: "even if our outer man is being brought to decay, yet the inner man is being renewed day by day." The outer man is our body, our physical life. It is wearing out. Every gray hair, every ache, every trip to the doctor is a reminder.

But there is another part of us, "the inner man," our spirit, our life with God. And that part is "being renewed day by day." While the body grows weaker, the believer's inner life can grow stronger. Some of the most spiritually alive people you will ever meet are old saints in failing bodies. If you are watching your body wear out, take heart. God is renewing you on the inside every day.

4:17 *For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us, excessively to excess, an eternal weight of glory,*

"For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us, excessively to excess, an eternal weight of glory." When you read the list of what Paul suffered in 11:23-28, it is hard to call it light. Yet Paul says it is momentary and light, not because it did not hurt, but because of what he compares it to.

Put it on a scale. On one side is our affliction: brief, and in the end, light. On the other side is "an eternal weight of glory," heavy beyond measure and lasting forever. Paul even piles up words to show how much greater it is: "excessively to excess." And notice the word producing. Our suffering is not wasted. God uses it to prepare us for glory. That does not make pain easy, but it does make it meaningful.

4:18 *while we look not at the things being seen but at the things not being seen; for the things being seen* ***are*** *temporary, but the things not being seen* ***are*** *eternal.*

"While we look not at the things being seen but at the things not being seen." This is how Paul kept going. He did not keep his eyes on his problems, his pain, or his critics. He looked at what cannot be seen with our eyes: God, Christ, heaven, and the glory to come.

"For the things being seen are temporary, but the things not being seen are eternal." Everything you can see, your house, your car, your bank account, even your body, is temporary. It will pass away. What you cannot see, God, His Word, His kingdom, and the souls of people, will last forever. Where are your eyes today? A believer who keeps looking at the eternal can make it through almost anything that is temporary.

Chapter 4 Summary

Because Paul received the ministry of the new covenant by God's mercy, he does not lose heart. He refuses to use tricks or twist God's Word, and he speaks the truth openly before God. If the gospel is veiled to some, it is because the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers. Paul preaches Christ Jesus as Lord, not himself, because God, who made light shine out of darkness, has

shone in our hearts to give us the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus. We carry this treasure in clay jars so that the power will be seen as God's. Paul is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, but never crushed, despairing, forsaken or destroyed. He carries the dying of Jesus in his body so that the life of Jesus may be seen. He speaks because he believes, knowing that God will raise him with Jesus. Though the outer man is wasting away, the inner man is renewed day by day, and our light and momentary affliction is producing an eternal weight of glory, so we look at the things that are unseen and eternal.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say he does not lose heart? (4:1, 16)

2. What methods did Paul refuse to use in his ministry, and what did he do instead? (4:2)

3. Who is "the god of this age," and what does he do to unbelievers? (4:4)

4. How does Paul connect creation and conversion in 4:6?

5. What is the treasure, what are the clay jars, and why did God put the treasure in such plain containers? (4:7)

6. Name the four pairs of contrasts in 4:8-9.

7. What does Paul mean when he says "death is at work in us, but life in you"? (4:12)

8. How can Paul call his suffering momentary and light? (4:17; compare 11:23-28)

9. Where in your life do you feel most like a cracked clay jar? How might God show His power there?

10. What "things being seen" tend to take your eyes off the eternal? What would help you look at the unseen?

Chapter 5: A New Creation and the Ministry of Reconciliation

Scripture

5:1-10 For we know that if our earthly house of the tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling which ***is*** from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we will not be found naked. For indeed we who are in the tent groan, being burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the One having prepared us for this very thing ***is*** God, who also has given to us the pledge of the Spirit. Therefore, being always confident and knowing that, while being at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we walk through faith, not through sight, we are confident, and we are pleased rather to be absent out of the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also are ambitious, whether being at home or being absent, to be well-pleasing to Him. For it is necessary for all of us to be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive back the things ***done*** through the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil.

5:11-21 Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we have been made manifest to God; and I hope also to have been made manifest in your consciences. For we are not again commending ourselves to you, but giving you an occasion of boasting on our behalf, so that you may have ***an answer*** toward those boasting in appearance and not in heart. For if we were beside ourselves, ***it was*** for God; or if we are of sound mind, ***it is*** for you. For the love of Christ compels us, having concluded this: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, so that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to the One who died for them and was raised. Therefore from now ***on*** we know no one according to ***the*** flesh; and even if we have known Christ according to ***the*** flesh, yet now we no longer know ***Him so***. Therefore if anyone ***is*** in Christ, ***he is*** a new creation; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new. And all things ***are*** from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling ***the*** world to Himself, not reckoning their trespasses to them, and having placed in us the word of reconciliation. Therefore on behalf of Christ we are ambassadors, as though God were urging through us; we implore ***you*** on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For He made the One who did not know sin ***to be*** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Chapter 5 Preview

Paul has just said that our outer man is wearing out (4:16). Now he tells us what happens when it wears out completely. Our body is like a tent, and one day it will be taken down. But God has prepared a building for us, an eternal house in the heavens. While we live in this tent we groan, longing for that new body. God has given us His Spirit as a pledge that it is coming. So Paul is confident. To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. Either way, his goal is to please Christ, because every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

In the second half of the chapter Paul tells us what drives his ministry. The fear of the Lord moves him to persuade people, and the love of Christ compels him. Christ died for all, so those who live should live for Him. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ, pleading with people to be reconciled to God. The chapter ends with one of the clearest statements of the gospel in the Bible: God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *For we know that if our earthly house of the tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

"For we know." Paul is not guessing. He speaks with certainty. "If our earthly house of the tent is destroyed." Our body is a tent. A tent is a temporary home. It is easy to put up and easy to take down, and it does not last. Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3), so he knew tents well. When we die, this tent is taken down.

"We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." A building is permanent, unlike a tent. God Himself makes it. Many Bible teachers believe this building is the resurrection body God will give every believer, a body like Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:21). Others think it refers to our heavenly dwelling more broadly. Either way, notice that Paul says we already have it. It is so certain that he speaks of it as already ours.

5:2 *For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling which* ***is*** *from heaven,*

"For indeed in this we groan." To groan is to sigh deeply under a burden. In this tent, we feel the weight of sickness, pain, aging, and sin. Paul says in Romans 8:23 that we groan inwardly as we wait for the redemption of our body.

But this is not hopeless groaning. It is "longing to be clothed with our dwelling which is from heaven." Paul mixes his pictures here: a house and a set of clothes. He pictures putting the new body on over the old, like putting a coat on. The groaning of a believer is the groaning of someone who is homesick for a better home.

5:3 *if indeed, having been clothed, we will not be found naked.*

"If indeed, having been clothed, we will not be found naked." This verse is hard. Paul is using the word naked to mean being without a body. The Greeks often thought the body was a prison and that the best thing was to escape it and be a free spirit. Paul does not think that way. God made us body and soul, and He means to give us new bodies, not leave us as bodiless spirits forever.

Bible teachers read this verse in a few ways. Many believe Paul is speaking of the time between death and the resurrection, when the believer is with the Lord but without his resurrection body, and that Paul would rather be alive when Christ comes and be changed without dying at all. Others think naked means being found without Christ, unprepared, at the judgment. What all

agree on is that the believer's hope is not to float as a spirit forever, but to be clothed with a new body.

5:4 *For indeed we who are in the tent groan, being burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

"For indeed we who are in the tent groan, being burdened." Paul repeats the thought from verse 2. Life in this body is heavy. But he makes clear what he is longing for: "we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed."

Paul is not wishing he could die and be rid of his body. He wants something better: "so that the mortal may be swallowed up by life." Mortal means able to die. One day, everything in us that can die will be swallowed up by life, the way a wave swallows a footprint in the sand. Paul uses the same picture in 1 Corinthians 15:54: death is swallowed up in victory. That is our hope. Life wins.

5:5 *Now the One having prepared us for this very thing **is** God, who also has given to us the pledge of the Spirit.*

"Now the One having prepared us for this very thing is God." God made us for this. He shaped us, saved us, and prepared us for resurrection life. Our future body is not an afterthought. It has been His plan all along.

And how do we know it will happen? God "also has given to us the pledge of the Spirit." Paul used the same word in 1:22. A pledge is a down payment, the first part of the price paid in advance, which promises the rest is coming. The Holy Spirit living in us now is God's guarantee. If you have the Spirit, God has already started paying on His promise, and He always finishes what He starts.

5:6-7 *Therefore, being always confident and knowing that, while being at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we walk through faith, not through sight,*

"Therefore, being always confident." Notice the word always. Paul's confidence did not come and go with how he felt. He was "knowing that, while being at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." As long as we live in this body, we are not yet with the Lord face to face. We are, in a sense, away from home.

Verse 7 is a short sentence that explains it: "for we walk through faith, not through sight." We cannot see the Lord yet. We cannot see heaven. But we trust what God has said. Faith is not believing without reason. It is trusting the word of the One who has proven Himself faithful. That is how every believer lives until the day faith becomes sight.

5:8 *we are confident, and we are pleased rather to be absent out of the body and to be at home with the Lord.*

"We are confident, and we are pleased rather to be absent out of the body and to be at home with the Lord." This is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible for believers facing death, and for those who have lost a believing loved one.

Paul tells us plainly what happens when a believer dies. He is absent from the body and at home with the Lord. There is no long sleep in the grave for the soul, and no waiting room in between. The believer goes straight into the presence of Christ. Paul says the same thing in Philippians 1:23: to depart and be with Christ is far better. The body rests in the grave until the resurrection, but the person is with the Lord. If you have buried a loved one who knew Jesus, they are home.

5:9 *Therefore we also are ambitious, whether being at home or being absent, to be well-pleasing to Him.*

"Therefore we also are ambitious, whether being at home or being absent, to be well-pleasing to Him." Ambition is not always bad. It depends on what you are reaching for. Paul had one great ambition: to please the Lord.

"Whether being at home or being absent." Whether he lived in the body or went to be with the Lord, Paul wanted to please Christ. That is a good question for each of us. What is your great ambition? Money, comfort, success, being liked? Or pleasing the Lord Jesus? The rest of our ambitions should be measured against that one.

5:10 *For it is necessary for all of us to be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive back the things **done** through the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil.*

"For it is necessary for all of us to be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." Here is why Paul wanted to please the Lord. The judgment seat is the bema in Greek. In a Greek or Roman city it was the raised platform where a judge sat to hear cases, or where an official sat to hand out prizes to the winners of the games. Paul himself had stood before the bema of Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18:12).

"All of us" here means all believers. Paul is writing to Christians and including himself. This is not a judgment to decide whether we go to heaven. That was settled at the cross. Paul tells us in Romans 8:1 that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and Jesus said the one who believes will not come into judgment but has passed from death into life (John 5:24). The judgment seat of Christ is where believers' lives are made manifest, shown for what they really were, and where Christ gives rewards.

"So that each one may receive back the things done through the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil." What we do in this body matters. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 that each believer's work will be tested by fire. Work built on Christ that lasts will receive a reward. Work that was worthless will be burned up, and the believer will suffer loss of reward, but he himself will be saved. I believe the Lord will come for His church before the seven-year Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:9), and many Bible teachers place this judgment in heaven after that event, before believers return with Him at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:11-14). We are not saved by our works, but we will give an account for how we lived as saved people. That should make us take every day seriously.

Old Testament links: Ecclesiastes 12:14 (alluded to)

5:11 *Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we have been made manifest to God; and I hope also to have been made manifest in your consciences.*

"Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." The fear of the Lord is a deep reverence and awe for God, knowing that He is holy and that we will give an account to Him. This is not the terror of a slave. It is the respect of a servant who wants to please his Master. That fear moved Paul to persuade people, to reason with them and urge them to believe the gospel.

"But we have been made manifest to God." God already knew Paul's heart completely. Paul had nothing to hide from God. "And I hope also to have been made manifest in your consciences." He hoped the Corinthians would see his heart as clearly as God did, and know that he was sincere.

5:12 *For we are not again commending ourselves to you, but giving you an occasion of boasting on our behalf, so that you may have* ***an answer*** *toward those boasting in appearance and not in heart.*

"For we are not again commending ourselves to you." Paul knew some would say he was bragging again (3:1). That was not his goal. He was "giving you an occasion of boasting on our behalf." He wanted to give the loyal believers in Corinth something to say when others attacked him.

They needed an answer "toward those boasting in appearance and not in heart." The false teachers cared about how things looked: polished speech, impressive letters, outward show. Paul cared about the heart. God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). We should too. It is easy to be impressed by how someone looks or speaks. It is better to ask what is in their heart and how they live.

5:13 *For if we were beside ourselves,* ***it was*** *for God; or if we are of sound mind,* ***it is*** *for you.*

"For if we were beside ourselves, it was for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you." To be beside yourself is to be out of your mind. Some critics seem to have said Paul was crazy, maybe because of his intense zeal or his spiritual experiences. People said the same thing about Jesus (Mark 3:21). Festus told Paul his great learning was driving him mad (Acts 26:24).

Paul's answer is simple. If he seems out of his mind, that is between him and God. If he is calm and sensible, that is for their benefit. Either way, everything he does is for God and for others, not for himself.

5:14 *For the love of Christ compels us, having concluded this: that if One died for all, then all died;*

"For the love of Christ compels us." The love of Christ here most likely means Christ's love for us, though it also stirs our love for Him. To compel is to press hard, to hold in and drive forward, like the banks of a river that push the water along. Paul's whole life was driven by the love Jesus showed him at the cross.

"Having concluded this: that if One died for all, then all died." Paul had thought it through. Jesus died for all, and so in Him, all died. When Christ died, those who are in Him died with Him. His death counts as ours. Good Bible teachers discuss what the words for all mean. Some believe

Christ died for every person, making salvation available to all who believe. Others believe Paul means all who are in Christ, all of God's people. Both agree that only those who believe receive the benefit, and that the gospel must be offered to everyone.

5:15 *and He died for all, so that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to the One who died for them and was raised.*

"And He died for all, so that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to the One who died for them and was raised." Here is the purpose of the cross for our everyday lives. Christ did not die only so we could go to heaven. He died so that we would stop living for ourselves.

Before we knew Christ, we lived to please ourselves. We were the center of our own world. But when we see that Jesus died for us and rose again, the center moves. We live for Him now. That changes how we spend our money, our time, and our words. Who are you living for today?

5:16 *Therefore from now **on** we know no one according to **the** flesh; and even if we have known Christ according to **the** flesh, yet now we no longer know **Him so**.*

"Therefore from now on we know no one according to the flesh." To know someone according to the flesh is to judge them by outward, worldly standards: their looks, their money, their background, their status. Paul says he no longer looks at people that way.

"And even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we no longer know Him so." Before his conversion, Paul had judged Jesus by worldly standards. He saw a carpenter from Nazareth who was crucified, and he concluded Jesus could not be the Messiah. Now he knows Jesus as the risen Lord. And if Paul changed the way he saw Jesus, he had to change the way he saw everyone. Every person is someone Christ died for.

5:17 *Therefore if anyone **is** in Christ, **he is** a new creation; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new.*

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." This is one of the best-loved verses in the Bible. To be in Christ is to be joined to Him by faith. When that happens, a person is not just improved or cleaned up. He is a new creation. God does in our hearts what He did at the beginning of the world. He makes something new.

"The old things have passed away; look, all things have become new." The old life, the old guilt, the old slavery to sin, the old standing before God, has passed away. That does not mean a believer never struggles with sin again. We still do (Galatians 5:17). But the believer has a new heart, a new nature, a new Master, and a new future. If you are in Christ, you are not who you used to be. Your past does not define you. Christ does.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 43:19 (alluded to); Isaiah 65:17 (alluded to)

5:18 *And all things **are** from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation,*

"And all things are from God." Paul wants us to be clear about who did this. We did not make ourselves new. God did. He is the One "who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

To reconcile means to bring two parties back together who were enemies. Because of sin, we were God's enemies (Romans 5:10). The problem was on our side. We had rebelled against Him. But God took the first step. Through Jesus, He removed what stood between us and made peace. And then He "gave to us the ministry of reconciliation." God's reconciled people become His messengers, inviting others to come back to Him.

5:19 *that is, that God was in Christ reconciling **the** world to Himself, not reckoning their trespasses to them, and having placed in us the word of reconciliation.*

"That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." God was at work in Christ, especially at the cross, to bring the world back to Himself. The word world shows how wide the offer is. No one is outside the reach of God's offer of peace.

How did God do it? "Not reckoning their trespasses to them." To reckon is to count, to put on someone's account. A trespass is a step across the line God drew. God did not count our sins against us. Why not? Because, as verse 21 will say, He counted them against Christ. "And having placed in us the word of reconciliation." God has trusted believers with this message. That is a great honor and a great responsibility.

5:20 *Therefore on behalf of Christ we are ambassadors, as though God were urging through us; we implore **you** on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.*

"Therefore on behalf of Christ we are ambassadors." An ambassador is an official sent by a king or a nation to speak for it in a foreign land. He does not speak his own message. He speaks for the one who sent him. Every believer is an ambassador for Christ in this world. Our home is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and we are here representing our King.

"As though God were urging through us." When we share the gospel, God Himself is making His appeal through us. Think about that. The God of the universe is pleading with people through your voice. And here is the message: "we implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God." To implore is to beg. God does not force people. He pleads with them. Have you been reconciled to God? If not, this is His invitation to you.

5:21 *For He made the One who did not know sin **to be** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

"For He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf." Here is how God made reconciliation possible. Jesus "did not know sin." He never sinned once, in thought, word, or deed (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). He was the perfect, spotless Lamb.

Yet God made Him "to be sin on our behalf." On the cross, God laid on Jesus all our sin and treated Him as if He were the sinner. Jesus did not become a sinner. He took the punishment that our sins deserved. Bible teachers call this substitution: Christ took our place. The prophet Isaiah said the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

"So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Here is the other side of the exchange. Jesus took our sin, and we receive His righteousness. God credits the perfect record of Christ to everyone who believes. This is called imputation, God putting Christ's righteousness on our account. Many Bible teachers call it the great exchange. Our sin went to Him. His righteousness comes to us. That is the heart of the gospel, and it is all of grace.

Chapter 5 Summary

Paul teaches that our body is a tent that will be taken down, but God has prepared for us a building from God, eternal in the heavens. While we live in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life, and God has given us the Spirit as a pledge. We walk by faith, not by sight, and to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. Our ambition is to please Him, because all believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for what we have done in the body. The fear of the Lord moves Paul to persuade people, and the love of Christ compels him, since Christ died for all so that those who live would live for Him. Anyone in Christ is a new creation. God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, not counting our trespasses against us, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ, pleading with people to be reconciled to God. God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What picture does Paul use for our earthly body, and what does God have waiting for us? (5:1)

2. Why do believers groan in this body, and what are they longing for? (5:2-4)

3. What does God give us as a pledge of our future body? (5:5)

4. According to 5:8, what happens to a believer at death?

5. What is the judgment seat of Christ, who will stand before it, and what is it for? (5:10; compare 1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

6. What two things motivated Paul to keep preaching? (5:11, 14)

7. What does it mean to be a new creation? (5:17)

8. What is an ambassador, and what message do Christ's ambassadors carry? (5:20)

9. Explain in your own words what happened on the cross according to 5:21.

10. If you are an ambassador for Christ, who is one person you could share the message of reconciliation with this week?

Chapter 6: Now Is the Day of Salvation

Scripture

6:1-18 And working together, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, "In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you." Look, now ***is*** a well-accepted time; look, now ***is*** a day of salvation. ***We are*** giving no cause of stumbling in anything, so that the ministry may not be blamed, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God: in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in ***the*** Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in ***the*** word of truth, in ***the*** power of God, through the weapons of righteousness of the right ***hand*** and left, through glory and dishonor, through bad report and good report; as deceivers and ***yet*** true; as being unknown and ***yet*** being well known; as dying, and look, we live; as being disciplined and ***yet*** not being put to death; as being sorrowful, but always rejoicing; as poor, but making many rich; as having nothing, and ***yet*** possessing all things. Our mouth has been opened to you, Corinthians; our heart has been widened. You are not restricted in us, but you are restricted in your affections. Now ***in*** the same recompense (I speak as to children), you also be widened. Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership ***have*** righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship ***has*** light with darkness? And what harmony ***has*** Christ with Belial? Or what part ***has*** a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement ***has the*** temple of God with idols? For you are a temple of ***the*** living God, just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among ***them***, and I will be their God, and they will be a people to Me." "Therefore come out from ***the*** midst of them and be separate," says ***the*** Lord, "and do not touch an unclean ***thing***, and I will receive you, and I will be to you for a Father, and you will be to Me for sons and daughters," says ***the*** Lord Almighty.

Chapter 6 Preview

Paul has just called the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. Now he urges them not to receive God's grace in vain. Quoting Isaiah, he tells them that now is the acceptable time and now is the day of salvation. Then he describes his own ministry. He has tried to give no one a reason to stumble. He has commended himself as a servant of God, not by fine words, but by endurance in beatings, prisons, riots, hard work and hunger, and by purity, kindness, the Holy Spirit, and genuine love. He lives in a world of contrasts: called a deceiver yet true, dying yet alive, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich.

Paul then opens his heart. He has held nothing back from them, and he asks them to open their hearts to him in return. Finally he gives a strong warning: do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, the temple of God and idols have nothing in common. God's people are His temple, and He calls them to come out and be separate, with the promise that He will be a Father to them.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *And working together, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.*

"And working together, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Paul works together with God. He is God's fellow worker in the ministry of reconciliation (5:18-20). He does not just preach a message. He pleads with people.

What does it mean to receive God's grace in vain? In vain means empty, for nothing, without result. Paul is warning the Corinthians not to let the grace they received come to nothing in their lives. Some of them were listening to false teachers who preached another gospel (11:4). Others were living as if grace made no difference. God's grace is meant to save us and to change us (Titus 2:11-12). Grace that is heard but not lived out has been received in vain.

6:2 *For He says, "In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you." Look, now **is** a well-accepted time; look, now **is** a day of salvation.*

Paul writes, "For He says," and then he quotes, "In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you." Paul is quoting Isaiah 49:8. In Isaiah, God speaks these words to His Servant, the Messiah, promising to help Him and through Him to bring salvation to Israel and the nations.

Then Paul applies it: "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation." The day Isaiah looked forward to has come. Christ has come, died and risen. God's offer of salvation is open now. But this open door will not stay open forever. No one is promised tomorrow. If you have never trusted Christ, today is the day. If you have been putting off obeying Him in some area, today is the day for that too.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 49:8 (quoted)

6:3 ***We are*** *giving no cause of stumbling in anything, so that the ministry may not be blamed,*

"We are giving no cause of stumbling in anything, so that the ministry may not be blamed." A stumbling block is anything that trips someone up and keeps them from coming to Christ. Paul took great care that nothing in his life would give people an excuse to reject the gospel.

This is a heavy truth for every believer, and especially for anyone who leads or teaches. People will judge the message by the messenger. When a Christian leader falls into scandal, many people blame the gospel itself. That is not fair, but it happens. Paul guarded his life so that no one could point at him and say the ministry was a fraud.

6:4-5 *but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God: in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings,*

"But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God." The false teachers commended themselves with letters and boasting. Paul commends himself as a servant, and his proof is how he has endured.

He starts with much endurance, the ability to keep going under pressure. Then he lists nine hardships in three groups. First, troubles in general: "in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses." Distresses are tight places with no way out. Second, troubles men brought on him: "in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots." Acts tells of Paul being beaten and jailed in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24) and of riots against him in many cities (Acts 14:19; 19:29). Third, troubles he accepted for the work: "in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings." He worked hard, often lost sleep, and went without food. These are not the marks of a man seeking comfort or fame. They are the marks of a servant.

6:6-7 *in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in* ***the*** *Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in* ***the*** *word of truth, in* ***the*** *power of God, through the weapons of righteousness of the right* ***hand*** *and left,*

Now Paul turns from what he endured to the character God built in him. "In purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness." Purity is moral cleanness and right motives. Knowledge is understanding of God's truth. Patience is being slow to anger with difficult people. Kindness is goodness shown to others. "In the Holy Spirit, in genuine love." All these came from the Spirit, and Paul's love was genuine, not an act.

"In the word of truth, in the power of God." Paul preached God's true Word, and he depended on God's power, not his own. "Through the weapons of righteousness of the right hand and left." A soldier held his sword in the right hand and his shield in the left. Paul's weapons were righteous ones, used both to attack error and to defend the truth. He did not fight with lies, flattery, or manipulation (10:4).

6:8 *through glory and dishonor, through bad report and good report; as deceivers and* ***yet*** *true;*

Now Paul gives a series of contrasts. "Through glory and dishonor, through bad report and good report." Sometimes people praised Paul, and sometimes they insulted him. Some spoke well of him, others spread lies. He kept on serving the same either way.

"As deceivers and yet true." His enemies called him a liar and a fraud. In fact, he spoke the truth. A servant of God does not live for the praise of men, and he is not stopped by their insults. If we only serve when we are praised, we are serving ourselves.

6:9 *as being unknown and* ***yet*** *being well known; as dying, and look, we live; as being disciplined and* ***yet*** *not being put to death;*

"As being unknown and yet being well known." To the world, Paul was a nobody. The important people of his day did not know his name. But he was well known to God, and well known among the churches.

"As dying, and look, we live." Again and again Paul faced death, and again and again God kept him alive (1:8-10; 11:23). "As being disciplined and yet not being put to death." Paul accepted hard times as part of God's training in his life, but God never let those trials destroy him. Every trial was measured by God's hand.

Old Testament links: Psalm 118:18 (alluded to)

6:10 *as being sorrowful, but always rejoicing; as poor, but making many rich; as having nothing, and **yet** possessing all things.*

"As being sorrowful, but always rejoicing." Paul felt real sorrow. He wept over the churches, over sin, and over his own people Israel (Romans 9:2). But under the sorrow was a joy that never left. Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends on what is happening. Joy depends on who God is.

"As poor, but making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Paul had very little money, but he gave people the riches of the gospel. He owned almost nothing, yet in Christ he had everything (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). Is your joy tied to what you have, or to who you have? A believer with nothing but Christ is richer than a man with everything but Christ.

6:11 *Our mouth has been opened to you, Corinthians; our heart has been widened.*

"Our mouth has been opened to you, Corinthians." Paul rarely calls his readers by name like this. It shows how deeply he feels. He has spoken freely and openly to them. He has held nothing back.

"Our heart has been widened." His heart is wide open to them. There is room in it for all of them, even those who have hurt him. Paul has just poured out his life story in the verses above. He is not hiding anything. He loves them, and he wants them to know it.

6:12 *You are not restricted in us, but you are restricted in your affections.*

"You are not restricted in us, but you are restricted in your affections." To be restricted is to be squeezed into a narrow space. Paul says the problem is not on his side. His heart has plenty of room for them. But their hearts had grown narrow toward him.

The word affections here is a word for the inner parts, the deep feelings of the heart. Some of the Corinthians had pulled back their love from Paul, probably because they listened to his critics. When we let others turn us against someone who loves us, our own hearts shrink.

6:13 *Now **in** the same recompense (I speak as to children), you also be widened.*

"Now in the same recompense (I speak as to children), you also be widened." A recompense is a fair return, a response in kind. Paul is asking for a fair exchange. I have opened my heart to you. Now open your hearts to me.

"I speak as to children." Paul was their spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15). He speaks to them as a loving father speaks to his children, asking them to love him back. Is there someone in your life who has opened their heart to you, while you have kept yours closed? Love grows when it is returned.

6:14 *Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership **have** righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship **has** light with darkness?*

"Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers." A yoke is the wooden bar that joins two animals so they can pull a plow or a cart together. The Law of Moses said not to plow with an ox

and a donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10). They are different in size, strength, and stride. Yoked together, they would pull against each other.

Paul says believers should not be bound together with unbelievers in ways that pull them away from Christ. Look at the context. Just before this, Paul begged the Corinthians to open their hearts to him. Just after, he speaks of the temple of God and idols. Corinth was full of idol worship, and the false teachers were pulling the believers away from Paul and from the truth. Paul is calling the church to stop joining hands with people and practices that oppose Christ.

How does this apply today? Most Bible teachers apply it first to marriage. A believer should not marry an unbeliever. Paul says the same thing plainly in 1 Corinthians 7:39, that a widow may marry whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Marriage is the closest yoke there is, and two people who serve different masters will pull in different directions. Many also apply this verse to close business partnerships and other binding commitments that would force a believer to compromise. Bible teachers differ on how far that goes. Some read it broadly of any close binding tie. Others keep it to marriage and to taking part in idolatry and false religion, which is the closest context.

Two things this verse does not mean. It does not mean we should cut off all contact with unbelievers. Paul says plainly that we would have to leave the world to do that (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Jesus ate with sinners. We are to be friends with unbelievers and love them toward Christ. And it does not mean a believer who is already married to an unbeliever should leave. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 that if the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay, the believer should not leave. If that is your situation, this verse is not a call to divorce. It is a call to stay faithful to Christ in your marriage, and to pray.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 22:10 (alluded to)

6:15 *And what harmony **has** Christ with Belial? Or what part **has** a believer with an unbeliever?*

In verses 14 to 16 Paul asks five questions, and the answer to each is the same: none. "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness?" Righteousness is living by God's standard. Lawlessness is living with no regard for His law. Light and darkness cannot share the same space. When light comes in, darkness leaves.

"And what harmony has Christ with Belial?" Belial is a Hebrew word that means worthlessness. In Jewish writings of that time it became a name for Satan. Christ and Satan are not partners. They are enemies. "Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" At the deepest level, in what they love and serve, a believer and an unbeliever stand on opposite sides. They may share many things in this life, but they do not share the same Lord.

6:16 *And what agreement **has the** temple of God with idols? For you are a temple of **the** living God, just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among **them**, and I will be their God, and they will be a people to Me."*

"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" In the Old Testament, putting an idol in God's temple was one of the worst sins Israel could commit (2 Kings 21:4-7). The temple belonged to God alone.

"For you are a temple of the living God." Now Paul applies it. The church, God's people together, is His temple. God does not live in a building made of stone. He lives in His people by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Then Paul quotes God's promise from Leviticus 26:12 and Ezekiel 37:27: "I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be a people to Me." God's great desire from the beginning has been to live with His people. That is why we must not bring idols into His temple. An idol is anything we love, trust, or serve more than God.

In Ezekiel these words are God's promise to Israel, when He gathers the nation back to its land and sets His sanctuary among them forever (Ezekiel 37:21-28). Paul does not move that promise to the church. He uses God's words to show that God already lives among His people now.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 26:12 (quoted); Ezekiel 37:27 (quoted)

6:17 *"Therefore come out from **the** midst of them and be separate," says **the** Lord, "and do not touch an unclean **thing**, and I will receive you,*

"Therefore come out from the midst of them and be separate," says the Lord. Paul is quoting from Isaiah 52:11, where God called His people to leave Babylon and the uncleanness of its idols behind. "And do not touch an unclean thing, and I will receive you."

To be separate does not mean to live in a bubble. It means to be set apart for God in what we believe, love, and do. It means saying no to the sinful practices and false worship of the world around us. And look at the promise: "and I will receive you." When we come out from what is unclean, God welcomes us. Separation is not only leaving something behind. It is coming home to Someone.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 52:11 (quoted)

6:18 *and I will be to you for a Father, and you will be to Me for sons and daughters," says **the** Lord Almighty.*

"And I will be to you for a Father, and you will be to Me for sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. This echoes God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14, recorded again in 1 Chronicles 17:13, and the prophets' promises about His people (Isaiah 43:6). Notice that Paul includes "sons and daughters." Every believer, man or woman, is a child of God.

"The Lord Almighty" is a name that shows God's complete power. The God who rules over all things promises to be a Father to us. That is the reason to be separate from what is unclean. We do

not separate from the world to earn God's love. We separate because we already belong to a Father who loves us, and we want to live like His children.

Old Testament links: 2 Samuel 7:14 (quoted); 1 Chronicles 17:13 (quoted); Isaiah 43:6 (alluded to)

Chapter 6 Summary

Paul urges the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain, because now is the acceptable time and now is the day of salvation. He has tried to give no one a cause to stumble, and he commends himself as a servant of God by his endurance in afflictions, beatings, imprisonments and labors, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit and genuine love, and by the word of truth and the power of God. His life is full of contrasts: dishonored yet honored, called a deceiver yet true, unknown yet well known, dying yet alive, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing yet possessing all things. Paul has opened his heart to them and asks them to open their hearts to him. He warns them not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, because righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, and the temple of God and idols have nothing in common. Believers are the temple of the living God, and He calls them to come out and be separate, promising to receive them and be a Father to them.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain? (6:1)

2. When is the day of salvation, according to 6:2?

3. Why was Paul so careful not to give anyone a cause of stumbling? (6:3)

4. List some of the hardships Paul endured as a servant of God. (6:4-5)

5. Which of the contrasts in 6:8-10 stands out to you most, and why?

6. What does Paul ask of the Corinthians in 6:11-13?

7. What is a yoke, and what does it mean to be "unequally yoked with unbelievers"? (6:14; compare Deuteronomy 22:10)

8. What does 6:14 not mean, according to 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 and 7:12-14?

9. Paul says the church is "a temple of the living God" (6:16). Is there anything in your life that acts like an idol in God's temple?

10. Is there a decision in front of you (a relationship, a partnership, a commitment) that this passage speaks to?

Chapter 7: Godly Sorrow and Real Repentance

Scripture

7:1-16 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in ***the*** fear of God. Make room for us; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we exploited no one. I do not speak for condemnation; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. Great ***is*** my boldness toward you; great ***is*** my boasting on your behalf; I have been filled with comfort; I overabound with joy in all our affliction. For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but in every ***way*** we were being afflicted: outside ***were*** conflicts, within ***were*** fears. But the One comforting the lowly, God, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted over you, reporting to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more. For even if I grieved you with the letter, I do not regret ***it***; even if I was regretting ***it*** (for I see that that letter grieved you, even if for an hour), now I rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved to repentance; for you were grieved according to God, so that you might suffer loss in nothing from us. For the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret, but the grief of the world produces death. For look, this very thing, your having been grieved according to God, how much earnestness it has produced in you, yes, ***what*** defense, yes, ***what*** indignation, yes, ***what*** fear, yes, ***what*** longing, yes, ***what*** zeal, yes, ***what*** vindication! In everything you have proved yourselves to be pure in the matter. So even if I wrote to you, ***it was*** not for the sake of the one having done wrong, nor for the sake of the one having suffered wrong, but for the sake of our earnestness on your behalf being made manifest to you before God. Because of this we have been comforted in your comfort; and we rejoiced still more abundantly at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. For if I have boasted anything to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting to Titus became truth. And his affections are more abundantly toward you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, how you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice therefore that in everything I am confident in you.

Chapter 7 Preview

Paul finishes his call to holiness. Because God has promised to live among His people and be their Father, we should cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit. Then Paul goes back to the plea he made in 6:11-13. Make room for us in your hearts, he says. He has wronged no one. He loves them so much that he is ready to live with them or die with them.

Now Paul picks up the story he left in 2:13. When he came to Macedonia, he had no rest. There were fights on the outside and fears on the inside. But God, who comforts the lowly, comforted him by the arrival of Titus and the good news he brought. The church in Corinth had received Paul's hard letter, and it had led them to repentance. Paul explains the difference between godly sorrow, which leads to repentance and salvation, and worldly sorrow, which leads to death. He rejoices at their earnestness and zeal, at the joy of Titus, and at his own confidence in them.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in **the** fear of God.*

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved." The promises are the ones Paul just quoted in 6:16-18. God will live among us, receive us, and be a Father to us. Beloved means dearly loved. Paul is not scolding. He is pleading as one who loves them.

"Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit." Defilement is anything that makes us dirty in God's sight. Sins of the flesh are the outward sins of the body, like sexual immorality and drunkenness. Sins of the spirit are inward sins, like pride, bitterness, and envy. Both kinds stain us, and Paul includes himself when he says let us. We cannot cleanse ourselves from the guilt of sin. Only the blood of Christ does that (1 John 1:7). But we can and must turn away from what defiles, and walk in the holiness God has given us.

"Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." To perfect means to bring to completion, to finish. Holiness is being set apart for God and made like Him. This is a lifelong process, and it is done "in the fear of God," with deep respect for the God who is holy and who lives among us.

7:2 *Make room for us; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we exploited no one.*

"Make room for us." This is Paul's heart cry. He had asked them in 6:13 to widen their hearts. Now he says it again. Open your hearts to us.

Then Paul answers the charges his critics made: "we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we exploited no one." To wrong someone is to treat them unjustly. To corrupt is to lead them into error or ruin their faith. To exploit is to take advantage of someone, often for money. The false teachers were guilty of all three (11:20). Paul was guilty of none. He had lived among them with a clean record, and he could say so honestly. Can we say the same about how we have treated others?

7:3 *I do not speak for condemnation; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.*

"I do not speak for condemnation." Paul is not trying to make them feel guilty. He is not saying they are the ones who wronged and exploited. He wants them to know where his heart is.

"For I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together." This is the language of deep commitment, the kind of words spoken between best friends or a husband and wife. Paul is saying, I am bound to you for life and for death. Nothing could separate his love from them. That is how a true pastor loves his people, and it is how believers should love one another.

7:4 *Great **is** my boldness toward you; great **is** my boasting on your behalf; I have been filled with comfort; I overabound with joy in all our affliction.*

"Great is my boldness toward you; great is my boasting on your behalf." Paul speaks freely and frankly to them, and he also brags about them to others. Both come from love.

"I have been filled with comfort; I overabound with joy in all our affliction." Paul is so full of comfort and joy that it spills over. And notice, this joy comes "in all our affliction." His troubles had not gone away. But God had given him joy in the middle of them. Paul is about to tell them why.

7:5 *For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but in every **way** we were being afflicted: outside **were** conflicts, within **were** fears.*

"For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest." Paul now goes back to the story he started in 2:12-13. He had left Troas because he could not find Titus, and crossed over to Macedonia. But things did not get better there.

"In every way we were being afflicted: outside were conflicts, within were fears." Outside, there were fights and opposition, perhaps from those who hated the gospel. Inside, there were fears, worry about the church in Corinth and how they had received his letter. Paul was honest about his fears. Being a strong believer does not mean you never feel afraid. It means you bring those fears to God.

7:6 *But the One comforting the lowly, God, comforted us by the coming of Titus;*

"But the One comforting the lowly, God, comforted us by the coming of Titus." What a beautiful name for God: "the One comforting the lowly." The lowly are those who are brought down, discouraged, humbled by trouble. God has a special care for them (Isaiah 49:13).

And how did God comfort Paul? "By the coming of Titus." God often comforts us through people. Paul did not get a vision or hear a voice from heaven. A friend walked through the door. Who might God be wanting to send you to this week, to bring comfort to someone who is down?

Old Testament links: Isaiah 49:13 (alluded to)

7:7 *and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted over you, reporting to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more.*

"And not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted over you." Titus himself had been comforted by what he found in Corinth. He came back encouraged, and that encouraged Paul.

Titus reported three things. First, your longing. They missed Paul and wanted to see him again. Second, your mourning. They were sorry for what had happened and for the pain they caused. Third, "your zeal for me." They now stood up for Paul with eagerness. "So that I rejoiced the more." All of Paul's fears were turned to joy.

7:8 *For even if I grieved you with the letter, I do not regret **it**; even if I was regretting **it** (for I see that that letter grieved you, even if for an hour),*

"For even if I grieved you with the letter, I do not regret it." This is the hard letter Paul spoke of in 2:3-4, the one he wrote with many tears. As I explained in the Background, Bible teachers are not certain which letter it was. Paul knew it would hurt, and it did.

"Even if I was regretting it (for I see that that letter grieved you, even if for an hour)." Paul admits that for a time after he sent it, he wished he had not. He worried that he had been too harsh. Have you ever had to say something hard to someone you love, and then lain awake wondering if you said it right? Paul knew that feeling. But the grief the letter caused was only "for an hour," only for a short time. And it led somewhere good.

7:9 *now I rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved to repentance; for you were grieved according to God, so that you might suffer loss in nothing from us.*

"Now I rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved to repentance." Paul did not enjoy their pain. He rejoiced in what the pain produced. Repentance means a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. It is turning from sin and turning to God.

"For you were grieved according to God." Their sorrow was the kind God wanted. It was sorrow before God, about how their sin offended Him, not just about the trouble it caused them. "So that you might suffer loss in nothing from us." The letter did them no harm. It did them good. Sometimes a wound from a friend is the best thing that can happen to us (Proverbs 27:6).

7:10 *For the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret, but the grief of the world produces death.*

"For the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret, but the grief of the world produces death." This is one of the most important verses in the Bible about repentance.

There are two kinds of sorrow over sin. Godly sorrow is sorrow that sees sin the way God sees it. It grieves because sin offends God and hurts others. That kind of sorrow leads to repentance, a real turning from sin, and it leads to salvation and life. No one ever regrets that kind of sorrow. Worldly sorrow is different. It is sorrow over being caught, over losing something, or over the consequences of sin, but not over sin itself. It may bring tears, but it does not bring change. It leads to bitterness, despair, and death.

Think of Peter and Judas. Both failed Jesus on the same night. Peter wept bitterly, turned back, and was restored (Luke 22:62; John 21:15-19). Judas was filled with remorse, but he did not turn to the Lord, and he went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). The difference was not how bad they felt. It was where their sorrow led them. When you feel sorry for sin, ask yourself which kind of sorrow it is. Is it leading you to God?

7:11 *For look, this very thing, your having been grieved according to God, how much earnestness it has produced in you, yes,* ***what*** *defense, yes,* ***what*** *indignation, yes,* ***what*** *fear, yes,* ***what*** *longing, yes,* ***what*** *zeal, yes,* ***what*** *vindication! In everything you have proved yourselves to be pure in the matter.*

"For look, this very thing, your having been grieved according to God, how much earnestness it has produced in you." Paul now shows what godly sorrow looks like. It produces fruit you can see. He lists seven things.

Earnestness means they took the matter seriously at last. Defense means they were eager to clear themselves and set things right. Indignation means they were angry at the sin. Fear means a holy reverence before God, and perhaps fear of Paul's coming discipline. Longing means they wanted to be restored to Paul. Zeal means they acted with eagerness. Vindication means they made sure justice was done. "In everything you have proved yourselves to be pure in the matter." They had dealt with the problem fully. Real repentance does not just feel sorry. It acts.

7:12 *So even if I wrote to you,* ***it was*** *not for the sake of the one having done wrong, nor for the sake of the one having suffered wrong, but for the sake of our earnestness on your behalf being made manifest to you before God.*

"So even if I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one having done wrong, nor for the sake of the one having suffered wrong." Paul is speaking of the man who caused the trouble (2:5-8) and the person he wronged, which may have been Paul himself. Paul's main goal in writing was not to punish the one or to defend the other.

His goal was "for the sake of our earnestness on your behalf being made manifest to you before God." Paul wanted the Corinthians to see his own heart. He wanted them to know, before God, how deeply he and his coworkers cared about them and about their doing what was right. The hard letter was not written to wound them. It was written out of love. A true friend will sometimes wound us for our good (Proverbs 27:6).

7:13 *Because of this we have been comforted in your comfort; and we rejoiced still more abundantly at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.*

"Because of this we have been comforted in your comfort." Their repentance comforted Paul. Paul's comfort and the church's comfort were bound together, as he said in chapter 1.

"And we rejoiced still more abundantly at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you." Titus may have gone to Corinth worried about how he would be received. Instead the church welcomed him and refreshed his spirit. To refresh someone is to give them rest, to put new strength into them. When a church treats God's servants well, it brings joy to everyone.

7:14 *For if I have boasted anything to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting to Titus became truth.*

"For if I have boasted anything to him about you, I was not put to shame." Before Titus went to Corinth, Paul had told him good things about the church. He had said, in effect, they will come through. Paul may have been nervous that he would be proven wrong.

But he was not: "as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting to Titus became truth." Paul had always told the Corinthians the truth, and now what he told Titus about them was proven true as well. It is a good thing to believe the best about people and to speak well of them. Paul's hope for them turned out to be right.

7:15 *And his affections are more abundantly toward you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, how you received him with fear and trembling.*

"And his affections are more abundantly toward you." Titus came back loving the Corinthians even more. His heart was drawn to them. Why? "As he remembers the obedience of all of you, how you received him with fear and trembling."

Fear and trembling here does not mean they were terrified of Titus. It means they received him with humble seriousness, knowing he came with the authority of an apostle and that they had done wrong. They did not argue or make excuses. They listened and obeyed. That kind of humble response draws love from the heart of anyone who serves God.

7:16 *I rejoice therefore that in everything I am confident in you.*

"I rejoice therefore that in everything I am confident in you." Paul ends this section with joy and confidence. The crisis is over. The church has repented. Paul's trust in them has been restored.

This verse also prepares the way for what comes next. In chapters 8 and 9 Paul will ask them to finish their gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Because he is confident in them, he can ask. When trust has been rebuilt, the work can go forward. That is a good lesson for any church or family. Repentance and forgiveness clear the way for working together again.

Chapter 7 Summary

Because God has promised to live among His people and be their Father, Paul urges the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. He asks them to make room for him in their hearts, since he has wronged, corrupted and exploited no one, and he loves them enough to live and die with them. Paul then returns to his story. In Macedonia he had no rest, with conflicts outside and fears within, but God, who comforts the lowly, comforted him by the coming of Titus and the news that the Corinthians longed for him, mourned, and were zealous for him. Paul does not regret his hard letter, because it grieved them to repentance. Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret, while worldly sorrow produces death. Their godly sorrow produced earnestness, defense, indignation, fear, longing, zeal and vindication. Paul rejoices in their comfort, in the joy of Titus, who was refreshed by them, and in his own confidence in them.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What promises does Paul point to in 7:1, and what does he say we should do because of them?

2. What three things does Paul say he never did to the Corinthians? (7:2)

3. How does Paul describe his time in Macedonia before Titus came? (7:5)

4. How did God comfort Paul, and what does that teach us about how God often comforts His people? (7:6-7)

5. Why does Paul say he no longer regrets the hard letter? (7:8-9)

6. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? (7:10)

7. How do Peter and Judas show the two kinds of sorrow?

8. What seven things did godly sorrow produce in the Corinthians? (7:11)

9. Think of a time you felt sorry for sin. Which kind of sorrow was it, and where did it lead you?

10. Is there someone who is lowly right now that God might want you to comfort, as Titus comforted Paul?

Chapter 8: The Grace of Giving

Scripture

8:1-15 Now we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given among the churches of Macedonia, that in much testing of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their generosity. For according to ***their*** ability, I testify, and beyond ***their*** ability, ***they gave*** of their own accord, with much appeal begging us to receive the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints. And not as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us through ***the*** will of God, so that we urged Titus that, just as he had begun before, so he would also complete this grace also among you. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge and all earnestness and in the love from you in us, ***see*** that you abound in this grace also. I do not speak as a command, but through the earnestness of others also proving the genuineness of your love. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich. And I give an opinion in this, for this is profitable for you, who began before, a year ago, not only to do but also to will. But now also complete the doing, so that, just as ***there was*** the readiness of the willing, so also ***there may be*** the completing out of what ***you*** have. For if the readiness is present, ***it is*** well-accepted according to what anyone may have, not according to what he does not have. For ***it is*** not that ***there should be*** rest for others and affliction for you, but by equality: at the present time your surplus ***is*** for their need, so that their surplus also may be for your need, so that there may be equality; just as it has been written, "He who ***gathered*** much did not have excess, and he who ***gathered*** little did not lack."

8:16-24 But thanks ***be*** to God, who gives the same earnestness for you into the heart of Titus; for he indeed accepted the appeal, but being more earnest, he went out to you of his own accord. And we sent with him the brother whose praise in the gospel ***is*** through all the churches; and not only ***this***, but he was also chosen by the churches ***as*** our fellow traveler with this grace which is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself and ***for*** your readiness, avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this bounty which is being ministered by us, providing good ***things*** not only before ***the*** Lord but also before men. And we sent with them our brother, whom we have often proved in many things to be earnest, but now much more earnest by ***his*** great confidence which ***is*** toward you. Whether about Titus, ***he is*** my partner and fellow worker for you; or our brothers, ***they are*** apostles of ***the*** churches, ***the*** glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, even before the face of the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting about you.

Chapter 8 Preview

With the trust between Paul and the church restored, Paul now turns to a practical matter. The believers in Jerusalem were poor, and Paul was gathering a gift for them from the Gentile churches. The Corinthians had been eager to give a year earlier, but they had not finished. Paul points them to the churches of Macedonia. Those believers were very poor and going through hard trials, yet they begged to be allowed to give, and they gave beyond their means. Why? Because they first gave themselves to the Lord.

Paul does not command the Corinthians to give. He calls giving a grace, and he points to the greatest Giver of all. The Lord Jesus was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that through His poverty we might become rich. Paul asks them to finish what they began, giving according to what they have. In the second half of the chapter Paul explains who will carry the money: Titus and two trusted brothers. Paul takes great care that no one can accuse him of mishandling the gift, because he wants to do what is right not only before the Lord but also before men.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *Now we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given among the churches of Macedonia,*

"Now we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given among the churches of Macedonia." Macedonia was the Roman province in northern Greece. Its churches included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:12; 17:1, 10).

Notice what Paul calls their giving. He calls it "the grace of God." The word grace shows up again and again in these two chapters. Giving is not first something we do for God. It is something God does in us. When believers give generously, it is evidence that God's grace is at work in their hearts. A generous heart is a gift from God.

8:2 *that in much testing of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their generosity.*

"That in much testing of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their generosity." Look at the strange mix in this verse. The Macedonians were in "much testing of affliction." They were suffering for their faith (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14). They were in deep poverty, which means extreme, rock-bottom poverty.

Yet they also had "the abundance of their joy." And when joy and poverty came together, the result was "the riches of their generosity." That is the kind of math only God can do. You would think poor people would give little. But joy in Christ made them rich in giving. Generosity does not depend on how much you have. It depends on what has hold of your heart.

8:3 *For according to **their** ability, I testify, and beyond **their** ability, **they gave** of their own accord,*

"For according to their ability, I testify, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord." Paul was an eyewitness. He saw it himself. They gave as much as they could, and then they gave more than seemed possible.

And they did it "of their own accord." No one forced them. No one pressured them. No one had to beg. They gave freely, from willing hearts. This is the heart of grace giving. It is not a tax or a fee. It is a free gift that comes from a heart God has touched.

8:4 *with much appeal begging us to receive the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints.*

"With much appeal begging us to receive the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." Here is something amazing. Paul did not have to beg them to give. They begged Paul to let them give. Perhaps Paul hesitated because they were so poor. But they would not take no for an answer.

They saw giving as a grace, a privilege, and as fellowship. The Greek word is koinonia, which means sharing, partnership. By giving to the poor believers in Jerusalem, the Gentile believers in Macedonia were sharing in the life of the whole church. The saints here are the believers in Jerusalem, who were poor and in need (Romans 15:26). Do you see giving as a burden or as a privilege?

8:5 *And not as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us through* ***the*** *will of God,*

"And not as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us through the will of God." The Macedonians did more than Paul hoped for. And here is the secret of their giving: "they first gave themselves to the Lord."

This is the key to all real giving. Before they gave their money, they gave themselves. When a person has given his whole life to the Lord, giving money is no longer a hard question. It all belongs to Him anyway. The question is not how much of my money I should give to God. The question is whether I have given myself to God. If I have, my money will follow. They also gave themselves to us, to Paul and his team, to help in the work as God led them.

8:6 *so that we urged Titus that, just as he had begun before, so he would also complete this grace also among you.*

"So that we urged Titus that, just as he had begun before, so he would also complete this grace also among you." Titus had already started gathering the gift in Corinth on an earlier visit. Now Paul asks him to go back and finish it.

Again Paul calls the gift this grace. He does not call it a collection, an offering, or a duty. He calls it grace. The Corinthians had started well. Now they needed to finish. Good intentions are not enough. God wants us to follow through on what we said we would do.

8:7 *But just as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge and all earnestness and in the love from you in us,* ***see*** *that you abound in this grace also.*

"But just as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge and all earnestness and in the love from you in us." Paul praises what the Corinthians did well. They had strong faith. They had gifts of speech and knowledge (1 Corinthians 1:5). They were earnest. They loved Paul and his team.

"See that you abound in this grace also." A church can be gifted in many ways and still be weak in giving. Paul wants them to grow in this area too. Giving is as much a part of spiritual maturity as faith and knowledge. If we are growing in Christ, our generosity should be growing too.

8:8 *I do not speak as a command, but through the earnestness of others also proving the genuineness of your love.*

"I do not speak as a command." This is very important. Paul is an apostle. He could have ordered them to give a certain amount. He chose not to. Giving under command is not grace giving.

"But through the earnestness of others also proving the genuineness of your love." Paul points to the Macedonians' eagerness, not to shame the Corinthians, but to give them a chance to show that their love was real. Love that is real will show up in action (1 John 3:17-18). Giving is one way we prove our love is genuine, not just talk.

Some readers ask whether the Old Testament tithe, a tenth, is required of Christians. Paul does not mention the tithe anywhere in these two chapters. He does not set a percentage. He speaks of grace, willingness, giving according to what we have, and following the example of Christ. Some Bible teachers see the tithe as a good starting guide for believers, since Abraham gave a tenth before the Law (Genesis 14:20). Others see the tithe as part of the Law of Moses and teach that believers are free to give as each one purposes, as Paul says in 9:7. What this passage plainly teaches is that our giving should be willing, generous, in proportion to what we have, and done with honesty and care.

8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich.*

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich." Here is the greatest reason to give. Paul points to Jesus.

Think first about Jesus being rich. Before He came to earth, the Son of God shared the glory of the Father (John 17:5). All of heaven belonged to Him. Yet "for your sake He became poor." At His birth He was laid in a feeding trough (Luke 2:7). He was raised in a working family in a small town, and had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He died on a cross with nothing, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Why? "So that you by His poverty might become rich." Not rich in money, but rich in forgiveness, in eternal life, in every spiritual blessing.

Some teachers use this verse to say that God wants every believer to be rich in money. That is not what Paul is saying. Paul himself was often poor (6:10; 11:27). The riches here are spiritual riches in Christ. When we remember how much Jesus gave up for us, giving to others is the most natural response in the world.

8:10 *And I give an opinion in this, for this is profitable for you, who began before, a year ago, not only to do but also to will.*

"And I give an opinion in this, for this is profitable for you." Again, Paul gives advice, not a command. He is telling them what would be good for them.

"Who began before, a year ago, not only to do but also to will." The Corinthians had been the first to start. A year earlier they had wanted to give, and they had started to give (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). They had the desire, and they had made a start. But then the trouble in the church had happened, and the giving seems to have stalled.

8:11 *But now also complete the doing, so that, just as* ***there was*** *the readiness of the willing, so also* ***there may be*** *the completing out of what* ***you*** *have.*

"But now also complete the doing." Finish what you started. "So that, just as there was the readiness of the willing, so also there may be the completing out of what you have."

Many of us are quick to say yes and slow to follow through. We pledge, we promise, we intend, but we never finish. Paul says, you were ready and willing a year ago. Now make your willingness real by completing it. And notice the measure: "out of what you have." Paul is not asking them to give what they do not have.

8:12 *For if the readiness is present,* ***it is*** *well-accepted according to what anyone may have, not according to what he does not have.*

"For if the readiness is present, it is well-accepted according to what anyone may have, not according to what he does not have." This is a freeing verse. God looks first at the readiness, the willing heart. When the heart is willing, God accepts the gift according to what a person has.

God does not measure a gift by its size, but by the heart behind it and what it costs the giver. Jesus said the poor widow who put two small coins into the temple treasury gave more than all the rich, because she gave out of her poverty (Mark 12:41-44). A poor believer's small gift given with joy may be worth more in God's eyes than a rich man's large gift given for show. God does not expect you to give what you do not have.

8:13 *For* ***it is*** *not that* ***there should be*** *rest for others and affliction for you,*

"For it is not that there should be rest for others and affliction for you." Paul is not asking the Corinthians to make themselves poor so that others can live in ease. That would just move the problem from one group to another.

Paul is wise and balanced here. Grace giving does not mean giving so much that your own family goes hungry or that you cannot pay your bills. Paul teaches elsewhere that a believer must provide for his own household (1 Timothy 5:8). God calls us to be generous, but not reckless.

8:14 *but by equality: at the present time your surplus **is** for their need, so that their surplus also may be for your need, so that there may be equality;*

"But by equality: at the present time your surplus is for their need, so that their surplus also may be for your need, so that there may be equality." Right now, the Corinthians had more than they needed, and the Jerusalem believers had less. The time might come when it would be the other way around.

Equality here does not mean that everyone must have exactly the same amount, or that the government should force people to share. Paul is talking about believers freely helping each other in the body of Christ. When one part of the body has more, it helps the part that has less. The church is a family. Families take care of each other.

8:15 *just as it has been written, "He who **gathered** much did not have excess, and he who **gathered** little did not lack."*

Paul writes, "just as it has been written," and then he quotes, "He who gathered much did not have excess, and he who gathered little did not lack." Paul is quoting Exodus 16:18. When God fed Israel with manna in the wilderness, some gathered more and some gathered less. But when they measured it, everyone had just what they needed. No one had too much, and no one had too little.

God provided for His people then, and He provides now. Often He does it through His people sharing with one another. When we give to believers in need, we are part of God's way of making sure His children have what they need.

Old Testament links: Exodus 16:18 (quoted)

8:16-17 *But thanks **be** to God, who gives the same earnestness for you into the heart of Titus; for he indeed accepted the appeal, but being more earnest, he went out to you of his own accord.*

"But thanks be to God, who gives the same earnestness for you into the heart of Titus." Titus cared about the Corinthians as much as Paul did. Paul thanks God for that, because God put that care in Titus's heart.

"For he indeed accepted the appeal, but being more earnest, he went out to you of his own accord." Paul asked Titus to go, and Titus said yes. But he would have gone anyway. He wanted to. That is the best kind of servant, one who does not need to be pushed.

8:18 *And we sent with him the brother whose praise in the gospel **is** through all the churches;*

"And we sent with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is through all the churches." Paul does not name this brother. He was well known and highly respected in all the churches for his work in the gospel.

Who was he? Scripture does not say. Some early church writers suggested Luke, the writer of the Gospel, because his name was praised everywhere for it. Others have suggested Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, or one of the men named in Acts 20:4 who traveled with Paul. We do not know, and it does not matter much. What matters is that he was a man of good reputation.

8:19 *and not only **this**, but he was also chosen by the churches **as** our fellow traveler with this grace which is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself and **for** your readiness,*

"And not only this, but he was also chosen by the churches as our fellow traveler with this grace." The churches themselves picked this man to travel with Paul and help carry the gift. Paul did not choose him. That was on purpose.

"Which is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself and for your readiness." The purpose of the gift was the glory of the Lord. When Gentile believers sent money to help Jewish believers, it showed the world that Christ had made them one family (Ephesians 2:14). It also gave the Corinthians a chance to show their readiness to help.

8:20-21 *avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this bounty which is being ministered by us, providing good **things** not only before **the** Lord but also before men.*

"Avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this bounty which is being ministered by us." The gift was large, a bounty, a generous amount. Paul knew that whenever money is involved, people may ask questions. His critics in Corinth were already saying he could not be trusted (12:16-18). So he made sure no one could accuse him of stealing or misusing it.

"Providing good things not only before the Lord but also before men." Paul wanted to be honest before God, but he also wanted to be seen as honest by people. That is why more than one person handled the money, and why the churches chose who would carry it. This is wise for every church today. Never let one person handle the money alone. Keep good records. Be open about how gifts are used. Doing right before God is the first step. Being seen to do right before men protects the testimony of the gospel.

8:22 *And we sent with them our brother, whom we have often proved in many things to be earnest, but now much more earnest by **his** great confidence which **is** toward you.*

"And we sent with them our brother, whom we have often proved in many things to be earnest." A third man went with Titus and the first brother. Paul does not name him either. He had been tested many times and had always proven faithful.

"But now much more earnest by his great confidence which is toward you." This brother was even more eager to go because he was confident in the Corinthians. Paul was surrounding the gift with trustworthy people. Faithfulness in many small things had prepared this man for this larger task (Luke 16:10).

8:23 *Whether about Titus, **he is** my partner and fellow worker for you; or our brothers, **they are** apostles of **the** churches, **the** glory of Christ.*

"Whether about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for you." Paul vouches for Titus. He is not just a helper. He is a partner in the work.

"Or our brothers, they are apostles of the churches, the glory of Christ." The word apostle here is used in its general sense of a messenger or one sent. These men were not apostles like the Twelve

or like Paul, chosen by Christ Himself. They were sent by the churches as their official messengers. And Paul calls them "the glory of Christ." Their faithful lives brought honor to Jesus. What a thing to be said of anyone.

8:24 *Therefore show to them, even before the face of the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting about you.*

"Therefore show to them, even before the face of the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting about you." Paul had bragged about the Corinthians to others (9:2). Now these messengers were coming, and other churches would hear how the Corinthians received them.

Paul asks the Corinthians to give "the proof of your love." Love is proven by what we do. Their warm welcome and their finished gift would show that Paul's confidence in them was well placed. Our giving says something to the world about our love for Christ and for His people. What does yours say?

Chapter 8 Summary

Paul tells the Corinthians about the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia. In great affliction and deep poverty, their joy overflowed into rich generosity. They gave beyond their means, of their own accord, and begged for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem, because they first gave themselves to the Lord. Paul asks Titus to finish gathering the gift in Corinth and urges the church to abound in this grace too. He does not command them, but points to the Lord Jesus, who was rich and became poor for our sake, so that through His poverty we might become rich. Paul asks them to finish what they began a year earlier, giving out of what they have, since God accepts a willing gift according to what a person has. The goal is not to burden them but to share, so that there may be equality, as with the manna in the wilderness. Paul sends Titus and two trusted brothers chosen by the churches to carry the gift, taking care to do what is right both before the Lord and before men. He asks the Corinthians to show the proof of their love.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What does Paul call the Macedonians' giving, and why is that important? (8:1)

2. Describe the situation of the Macedonian churches. How did they give? (8:2-4)

3. What did the Macedonians do first, before they gave their money? (8:5)

4. Why does Paul say he is not speaking as a command? (8:8)

5. How did Jesus become poor, and how do we become rich through Him? (8:9)

6. According to 8:12, how does God measure a gift?

7. What lesson does Paul draw from the manna in the wilderness? (8:14-15; compare Exodus 16:18)

8. What steps did Paul take to make sure no one could blame him in handling the gift? (8:18-21)

9. Have you given yourself to the Lord first (8:5)? How does that change the way you think about your money?

10. Is there something you said you would do for the Lord or for others that you need to finish (8:10-11)?

Chapter 9: God Loves a Cheerful Giver

Scripture

9:1-15 For concerning the ministry to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your readiness, about which I boast of you to ***the*** Macedonians, that Achaia has been prepared since a year ago; and the zeal from you has stirred up the majority. But I have sent the brothers, so that our boasting about you might not be made empty in this matter, so that, just as I was saying, you may be prepared; lest perhaps, if Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (that we may not say you) be put to shame in this confidence of boasting. Therefore I considered ***it*** necessary to urge the brothers that they go ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously announced blessing, that this be ready thus, as a blessing and not as covetousness. Now this ***I say***: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings. Each ***one should give*** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God ***is*** able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work; just as it has been written, "He scattered, he gave to the poor; his righteousness remains to the age." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the produce of your righteousness, ***you*** being enriched in everything for all generosity, which produces through us thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service not only is fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also abounding through many thanksgivings to God, ***while*** through the proof of this ministry ***they are*** glorifying God for the submission of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and ***for*** the generosity of the fellowship toward them and toward all, and by their supplication for you, longing for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Now thanks ***be*** to God for His indescribable free gift!

Chapter 9 Preview

Paul continues his teaching on the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. He knows the Corinthians are willing. In fact, he has been bragging about them to the Macedonians, and their zeal has stirred others to give. But he is sending the brothers ahead to make sure the gift is ready when he arrives, so that neither he nor they will be put to shame. He wants it to be a real blessing, not something squeezed out of them.

Then Paul gives some of the clearest teaching on giving in the Bible. Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously. Each one should give as he has decided in his heart, not with grief or under pressure, because God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to make all grace abound to us, so that we have what we need and can abound in every good work. Our giving meets the needs of the saints, and it overflows in thanksgiving to God. The chapter ends with a burst of praise for God's greatest gift of all.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1 *For concerning the ministry to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;*

"For concerning the ministry to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you." Superfluous means more than is needed, unnecessary. Paul has just written a whole chapter on giving, and now he says he does not really need to write about it.

Paul is being gracious and tactful. He knows the Corinthians already understand why the gift matters. He is not lecturing them. He is reminding friends of something they already care about. "The ministry to the saints" is the gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem (8:4). Giving to help other believers in need is called a ministry, a service to God.

9:2 *for I know your readiness, about which I boast of you to* ***the*** *Macedonians, that Achaia has been prepared since a year ago; and the zeal from you has stirred up the majority.*

"For I know your readiness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians." Paul had told the Macedonian churches how eager the Corinthians were. He had said, "Achaia has been prepared since a year ago." Achaia was the province where Corinth was.

"And the zeal from you has stirred up the majority." The Corinthians' early eagerness had inspired the Macedonians to give. Now, in chapter 8, Paul has used the Macedonians to inspire the Corinthians. Each church encouraged the other. That is how the body of Christ should work. Our faithfulness can stir others to faithfulness, and theirs can stir us (Hebrews 10:24).

9:3 *But I have sent the brothers, so that our boasting about you might not be made empty in this matter, so that, just as I was saying, you may be prepared;*

"But I have sent the brothers, so that our boasting about you might not be made empty in this matter." Paul is sending Titus and the two brothers from chapter 8 ahead of him. He wants to be sure his bragging about the Corinthians does not turn out to be hollow.

"So that, just as I was saying, you may be prepared." Paul believed in them, but he also knew that good intentions can fade. The trouble in the church had slowed things down. So he sent help to get the gift ready. Wise leaders do not just hope things get done. They make plans to help people follow through.

9:4 *lest perhaps, if Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (that we may not say you) be put to shame in this confidence of boasting.*

"Lest perhaps, if Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared." Some believers from Macedonia would travel with Paul to Corinth. If they arrived and found that the Corinthians had not collected anything, it would be embarrassing.

"We (that we may not say you) be put to shame in this confidence of boasting." Paul is gentle and even a little playful. He says we would be put to shame, and then adds, not to mention you. Both

Paul and the Corinthians would look foolish. Paul is honest that he cares about this. Our words about others should match reality, and our follow-through should match our promises.

9:5 *Therefore I considered **it** necessary to urge the brothers that they go ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously announced blessing, that this be ready thus, as a blessing and not as covetousness.*

"Therefore I considered it necessary to urge the brothers that they go ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously announced blessing." Paul calls the gift a blessing. That is a beautiful way to think about it. When we give, we bless others. The gift had been announced and promised. Now it needed to be gathered.

"That this be ready thus, as a blessing and not as covetousness." Covetousness is greed, wanting to hold on to more for yourself. Paul wanted the gift to be gathered early so that it would come from generous hearts, not be squeezed out at the last minute from people who felt pressured. A gift squeezed out of someone under pressure feels more like a tax than a blessing.

9:6 *Now this **I say**: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings.*

"Now this I say: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings." Paul uses a farming picture. A farmer who plants only a few seeds will get only a small harvest. A farmer who plants generously will get a large harvest.

Giving is like sowing seed. When we give, it may feel like we are losing something, just as a farmer throws good seed on the ground. But the seed is not lost. It grows into a harvest. What is the harvest? Paul tells us in the verses that follow: God's grace and provision (9:8), a growing harvest of righteousness (9:10), and thanksgiving to God from many people (9:12). Some teachers say this verse promises that if you give money to God, He will make you rich in money. That is not what Paul says. The harvest God gives is often spiritual, and when He does provide material things, it is so that we can keep on giving (9:8, 11). Jesus also promised that treasure given for His sake is stored in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

9:7 *Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

"Each one should give just as he purposes in the heart." Notice three things. First, each one. Every believer has a part, not just the rich. Second, giving is something we purpose, decide ahead of time. It should be planned and thought through, not just a reaction to an emotional appeal. Third, it is decided "in the heart," between the believer and God. Paul does not set a rule or an amount.

"Not out of grief or out of necessity." Out of grief means giving with regret, wishing you had not. Out of necessity means giving because you feel forced. Neither is how God wants us to give. "For God loves a cheerful giver." The word for cheerful is hilaros, glad or joyful. God delights in people who give gladly. Why? Because that is how He gives. He gave His Son freely and joyfully for us. When we give with joy, we look like our Father.

9:8 *And God **is** able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work;*

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you." Here is the promise for the giver. God is able. Look at how often the word all shows up in this verse: all grace, always, all sufficiency, everything, every good work. Paul is piling up words to show how complete God's supply is.

"So that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work." Sufficiency means having enough. God promises that the generous giver will always have enough, not necessarily more than enough to spend on himself, but enough for his needs and enough to keep doing good. The goal of God's supply is not our comfort. It is "every good work." God gives to us so that we can give through us.

9:9 *just as it has been written, "He scattered, he gave to the poor; his righteousness remains to the age."*

"Just as it has been written." Then Paul quotes Psalm 112:9: "He scattered, he gave to the poor; his righteousness remains to the age." Psalm 112 describes the righteous man who fears the Lord. One mark of that man is that he gives freely to the poor.

To scatter is like a farmer sowing seed, throwing it out widely. The righteous man does not hoard. "His righteousness remains to the age." His good deeds are not forgotten. They last. What we give to help others for God's sake is never wasted. It counts forever.

Old Testament links: Psalm 112:9 (quoted)

9:10 *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the produce of your righteousness,*

"Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food." Paul is echoing Isaiah 55:10, which speaks of God sending rain so the earth gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. God is the One who gives the farmer both the seed to plant and the bread to eat.

"Supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the produce of your righteousness." Paul prays that God would do the same for the Corinthians. He will provide what they need to live, and He will keep giving them more seed to sow. And as they keep giving, the "produce of your righteousness," the fruit of their godly lives, will keep growing.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 55:10 (alluded to)

9:11 ***you*** *being enriched in everything for all generosity, which produces through us thanksgiving to God.*

"You being enriched in everything for all generosity." Why does God enrich us? "For all generosity." God makes us rich so that we can be generous. That is the purpose of whatever wealth God gives us.

This is the opposite of what the world teaches. The world says, get rich so you can enjoy it. God says, I will give you enough so you can share it. "Which produces through us thanksgiving to God." When we give, people give thanks to God. The gift passes from God to us, from us to others, and back to God as praise. We are a channel, not a reservoir.

9:12 *For the ministry of this service not only is fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also abounding through many thanksgivings to God,*

"For the ministry of this service not only is fully supplying the needs of the saints." Paul uses a special word for service. It is the word leitourgia, often used for priestly service in the temple. Our giving is an act of worship.

And it does two things. First, it meets real needs. The believers in Jerusalem were poor, and the gift would help feed and care for them. Second, "is also abounding through many thanksgivings to God." It does more than meet needs. It causes many people to thank God. The poor saints would praise God for His care, shown through the Gentile churches.

9:13 ***while*** *through the proof of this ministry* ***they are*** *glorifying God for the submission of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and* ***for*** *the generosity of the fellowship toward them and toward all,*

"While through the proof of this ministry they are glorifying God." The gift would prove something. When the believers in Jerusalem saw it, they would glorify God "for the submission of your confession to the gospel of Christ." Your confession is what you say you believe. Your submission is your obedience to it. The gift would show that the Corinthians' faith was real.

"And for the generosity of the fellowship toward them and toward all." Remember that many Jewish believers in Jerusalem were unsure about Gentile believers. Could these people really be part of God's family? A generous gift from Gentile churches to Jewish saints would show the love of Christ crossing that old dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14). Giving builds unity in the church.

9:14 *and by their supplication for you, longing for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.*

"And by their supplication for you." Supplication is earnest prayer. The believers in Jerusalem would respond to the gift by praying for the Corinthians. The Corinthians would give money, and the Jerusalem believers would give prayer. Both would be enriched.

"Longing for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you." The Jewish believers would come to love and long for these Gentile believers they had never met, because they would see God's grace at work in them. The gift would knit hearts together across distance and background. That is what generous giving does in the body of Christ.

9:15 *Now thanks **be** to God for His indescribable free gift!*

"Now thanks be to God for His indescribable free gift!" After two chapters about giving, Paul cannot help himself. He bursts into praise. "His indescribable free gift" is God's gift of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16), and with Him everything else God gives us (Romans 8:32).

Indescribable means too great for words. We cannot fully explain how great it is that God gave His Son for us. Every gift we give is only a small echo of this one. That is where Paul wants us to end: not looking at our generosity, but at God's. When we see how much He has given us, giving to others becomes a joy. Have you thanked God today for His indescribable gift?

Chapter 9 Summary

Paul knows the Corinthians are ready to give, and he has boasted to the Macedonians about their zeal, which stirred others. He sends the brothers ahead so the gift will be ready and his boasting will not prove empty, and so it will be a willing blessing rather than something squeezed out of them. Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously. Each one should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under pressure, because God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to make all grace abound, so that we always have enough and can abound in every good work, as the righteous man in Psalm 112 scatters gifts to the poor. God supplies seed to the sower and will increase the harvest of their righteousness, enriching them for all generosity. The gift meets the needs of the saints, overflows in thanksgiving to God, proves the reality of their confession, and moves the Jerusalem believers to pray for them and love them. Paul ends with thanks to God for His indescribable gift.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say it is unnecessary to write to the Corinthians about the gift? (9:1-2)

2. Why did Paul send the brothers ahead of him to Corinth? (9:3-5)

3. What is the difference between a gift given as a blessing and one given out of covetousness? (9:5)

4. What farming picture does Paul use in 9:6, and what is the harvest Paul describes in 9:8-12?

5. What three things does 9:7 teach about how we should give?

6. According to 9:8 and 9:11, why does God give us what we have?

7. What two results come from the gift to the saints in Jerusalem? (9:12)

8. How would the gift help bring Jewish and Gentile believers together? (9:13-14)

9. When you give, do you give cheerfully, or out of grief or pressure? What would help you give more gladly?

10. What is God's "indescribable free gift" (9:15), and how does thinking about it change the way you give?

Chapter 10: Weapons That Are Not of the Flesh

Scripture

10:1-18 Now I myself, Paul, urge you through the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who in appearance ***am*** humble among you, but being absent am confident toward you; and I implore ***you*** that, being present, I may not be confident with the confidence with which I reckon to be daring against some who reckon us as walking according to ***the*** flesh. For walking in flesh, we do not wage war according to ***the*** flesh; for the weapons of our warfare ***are*** not fleshly, but powerful to God for ***the*** demolition of strongholds, demolishing reasonings and every high thing lifting itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive into the obedience of Christ, and having ***it*** in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience has been fulfilled. You are looking at the things according to appearance. If anyone is persuaded in himself ***that he*** is Christ's, let him reckon this again from himself, that just as he ***is*** Christ's, so also we ***are*** Christ's. For even if I boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority, which the Lord gave to us for building ***you*** up and not for your demolition, I will not be ashamed, so that I may not seem as if to terrify you through the letters. For "the letters," he says, "***are*** weighty and strong, but the presence of the body ***is*** weak, and the speech ***is*** despised." Let such a one reckon this, that such as we are in word through letters when absent, such ***we are*** also in deed when present. For we do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those commending themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, do not understand. But we will not boast to the things beyond measure, but according to the measure of the sphere which God assigned to us, a measure to reach even as far as you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as ***though*** not reaching to you; for we came even as far as you in the gospel of Christ, not boasting to the things beyond measure in others' labors, but having hope, as your faith increases, to be enlarged among you according to our sphere, to abundance, so as to preach the gospel in the ***regions*** beyond you, not to boast in another's sphere in the things ***made*** ready. But "he who boasts, let him boast in ***the*** Lord." For not he who commends himself, that one is approved, but ***he*** whom the Lord commends.

Chapter 10 Preview

With chapter 10 the tone of the letter changes. Paul has been warm and thankful toward the church that repented. Now he turns to the false teachers in Corinth and to those still under their influence. They mocked Paul, saying he was bold in his letters but weak and unimpressive in person. Paul answers by appealing to the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and he warns that when he comes he is ready to be bold if he must.

Paul explains how he fights. He lives in a body like everyone else, but he does not wage war by worldly methods. His weapons are not fleshly. They are powerful through God to tear down strongholds, to demolish arguments and proud ideas raised against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive to obey Christ. Then Paul refuses to play the comparison game his opponents loved. They measure themselves by themselves. Paul stays within the field God assigned him, which included Corinth, and he hopes to go beyond them to preach where Christ is

not known. In the end, the only boasting that counts is boasting in the Lord, and the only approval that matters is the Lord's.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *Now I myself, Paul, urge you through the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who in appearance **am** humble among you, but being absent am confident toward you;*

"Now I myself, Paul, urge you through the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Paul puts his own name here with weight, "I myself, Paul." This is personal. He has been attacked personally, and he answers personally.

But notice how he begins: "through the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under control. Jesus called Himself gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29), yet He drove the money changers out of the temple. Paul wants to deal with them the way Jesus would.

"I who in appearance am humble among you, but being absent am confident toward you." Paul is quoting what his critics said about him. They said he was timid and humble when present, but bold and brave in his letters from far away. In other words, they called him a coward.

10:2 *and I implore **you** that, being present, I may not be confident with the confidence with which I reckon to be daring against some who reckon us as walking according to **the** flesh.*

"And I implore you that, being present, I may not be confident with the confidence with which I reckon to be daring against some." Paul begs them to set things right before he comes, so he will not have to be bold and severe in person. He would rather come gently.

Who are these people? They are those "who reckon us as walking according to the flesh." The false teachers accused Paul of living by worldly motives, being driven by selfishness, fear, or a love of money. Paul is warning them. If they force him to, he will be just as bold in person as he is in his letters.

10:3 *For walking in flesh, we do not wage war according to **the** flesh;*

"For walking in flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh;" This is a play on words. Paul admits he walks in flesh. He is a human being, living in a weak human body like everyone else.

But he does not fight "according to the flesh;" He does not use the world's methods to win people or to defend himself. The world fights with power, money, pressure, manipulation, smear campaigns, and clever speech. Paul refuses all of those. Every believer lives in the flesh, but we should not fight our battles by its rules.

10:4 *for the weapons of our warfare **are** not fleshly, but powerful to God for **the** demolition of strongholds,*

"For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful to God for the demolition of strongholds." Paul says the Christian life is warfare, a real spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12). But the weapons are not human weapons.

What are they? Paul does not list them here, but elsewhere he names truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer (Ephesians 6:13-18). These weapons are "powerful to God." They are mighty because God works through them.

And they can bring about "the demolition of strongholds." A stronghold was a fortress, a high-walled castle built to hold off attack. Paul is thinking of mental and spiritual fortresses, ways of thinking that people build up against God. Some people are walled in by pride, others by false religion, others by lies they have believed for years. No human argument can break those walls. But God's truth, carried in prayer and by the power of His Spirit, can tear them down.

10:5 *demolishing reasonings and every high thing lifting itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive into the obedience of Christ,*

"Demolishing reasonings and every high thing lifting itself up against the knowledge of God." Now Paul tells us what the strongholds are. They are reasonings, arguments, ideas, and philosophies that set themselves against God. And they are every high thing, every proud idea that lifts itself up like a tower against the truth of who God is.

"And taking every thought captive into the obedience of Christ." In war, the winning army takes prisoners. Paul says our thoughts must be taken prisoner and brought under the rule of Christ. This applies first to the false ideas in Corinth. But it applies to each of us too. What thoughts are running loose in your mind? Fear, lust, bitterness, worry, pride? We are not helpless against them. We can capture each thought, hold it up to God's Word, and make it obey Christ.

10:6 *and having **it** in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience has been fulfilled.*

"And having it in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience has been fulfilled." Paul is ready to deal with the rebels who will not repent. To avenge here means to punish wrongdoing, to bring discipline.

But notice the timing: "when your obedience has been fulfilled." Paul wanted the church as a whole to come fully back to obedience first. Then he could deal with the false teachers and the few who still followed them. Paul did not want to punish the whole church for the sins of a few. He wanted the faithful to be on his side when he came.

10:7 *You are looking at the things according to appearance. If anyone is persuaded in himself **that he** is Christ's, let him reckon this again from himself, that just as he **is** Christ's, so also we **are** Christ's.*

"You are looking at the things according to appearance." The Corinthians were judging by the surface. They were impressed by the false teachers' polish and confidence, and they judged Paul by his plain looks and simple speech.

"If anyone is persuaded in himself that he is Christ's, let him reckon this again from himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also we are Christ's." The false teachers claimed to belong to Christ in some special way. Paul answers, fine, but whatever you claim for yourself, I can claim too. I belong to Christ as much as anyone. Do not judge by outward appearance (John 7:24).

10:8 *For even if I boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority, which the Lord gave to us for building **you** up and not for your demolition, I will not be ashamed,*

"For even if I boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority." Paul knew he had real authority as an apostle. He had been called by the risen Lord Himself. If he chose to boast about it, it would be true.

But notice the purpose of that authority: "which the Lord gave to us for building you up and not for your demolition." Paul's authority was given to build people up, not to tear them down. The false teachers used their authority to enslave and exploit (11:20). Paul used his to strengthen. That is the test of true spiritual leadership. Does a leader's authority build people up in Christ, or tear them down for his own gain? "I will not be ashamed," Paul says. His claim to authority would hold up.

10:9-10 *so that I may not seem as if to terrify you through the letters. For "the letters," he says, "**are** weighty and strong, but the presence of the body **is** weak, and the speech **is** despised."*

"So that I may not seem as if to terrify you through the letters." Paul does not want them to think he is just trying to scare them with harsh letters. And here is why he says this. He quotes what his critics were saying: the letters, he says, "are weighty and strong, but the presence of the body is weak, and the speech is despised."

The word he in that quote is likely a leader of the false teachers. He said Paul's letters were powerful and impressive, but in person Paul was weak and his speaking was worthless. Corinth loved great public speakers. Paul did not try to impress them with fancy words (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Some early writings describe Paul as short and plain looking, though we cannot be sure. Whatever Paul looked like, the gospel he preached did not depend on his looks or his voice.

10:11 *Let such a one reckon this, that such as we are in word through letters when absent, such **we are** also in deed when present.*

"Let such a one reckon this, that such as we are in word through letters when absent, such we are also in deed when present." Paul is warning his critic. Do not think I am one man on paper and another in person. When I come, my actions will match my letters.

This is a mark of integrity. A person of integrity is the same whether he is near or far, seen or unseen. His words and his deeds match. Paul was not two-faced. Are we the same person in private as in public, the same online as in person, the same at church as at home?

10:12 *For we do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those commending themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, do not understand.*

"For we do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those commending themselves." Paul is using a touch of irony here. He says he would not dare to put himself in the same class as these impressive men who keep praising themselves.

"But they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, do not understand." The false teachers made up their own measuring stick, and of course they measured up to it. They compared themselves with each other and decided they were great. Paul says that is foolish. When you measure yourself by yourself, you will always come out looking good. The only true measure is God's. Comparing ourselves with others leads to either pride or despair, and neither is from God.

10:13 *But we will not boast to the things beyond measure, but according to the measure of the sphere which God assigned to us, a measure to reach even as far as you.*

"But we will not boast to the things beyond measure." Paul will not claim more than God has given him. "But according to the measure of the sphere which God assigned to us." A sphere is a field or territory, an area of work. God had given Paul a specific field of ministry, the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-9).

"A measure to reach even as far as you." Corinth was inside that field. God had sent Paul there, and Paul had founded the church. So Paul had every right to speak to them. The false teachers had come into a church someone else had planted and were acting as if it were theirs.

10:14 *For we are not overextending ourselves, as **though** not reaching to you; for we came even as far as you in the gospel of Christ,*

"For we are not overextending ourselves, as though not reaching to you." Paul is not stretching his authority beyond its limits. Corinth really was part of his assignment.

"For we came even as far as you in the gospel of Christ." Paul was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Corinthians 3:6, 10). He laid the foundation. That gave him a right to speak to them that no newcomer could claim. Paul is not bragging. He is stating a fact.

10:15 *not boasting to the things beyond measure in others' labors, but having hope, as your faith increases, to be enlarged among you according to our sphere, to abundance,*

"Not boasting to the things beyond measure in others' labors." The false teachers were doing just that. They came into a church Paul had founded and took credit for what God had done through him. Paul would never do that.

"But having hope, as your faith increases, to be enlarged among you according to our sphere, to abundance." Paul hoped that as the Corinthians grew in faith and settled their problems, his work could expand. Their maturity would free him to move on. A healthy church becomes a launching point for reaching others.

10:16 *so as to preach the gospel in the **regions** beyond you, not to boast in another's sphere in the things **made** ready.*

"So as to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you." Paul's heart was always for those who had never heard. He wanted to go farther west, to Rome and even to Spain (Romans 15:20-24). He wrote that his ambition was to preach Christ where He had not been named.

"Not to boast in another's sphere in the things made ready." Paul did not want to move into someone else's field and take credit for their work. The false teachers did exactly that. Paul wanted to break new ground. Every church today should have a heart for the regions beyond, for the people who have never heard of Jesus.

10:17 *But "he who boasts, let him boast in **the** Lord."*

"But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." Paul is quoting Jeremiah 9:24, which he also quoted in 1 Corinthians 1:31. God says through Jeremiah that the wise man should not boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the rich man in his riches. If anyone boasts, let him boast that he understands and knows the Lord.

This is the answer to all the bragging in Corinth. The false teachers boasted in their letters, their speech, and their experiences. Paul says the only boasting that is right is boasting in what the Lord has done. If God has done anything good through us, the credit is His.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 9:24 (quoted)

10:18 *For not he who commends himself, that one is approved, but **he** whom the Lord commends.*

"For not he who commends himself, that one is approved, but he whom the Lord commends." Here is the bottom line. You can recommend yourself all day long, but that does not make you approved. The word approved means tested and found genuine.

The only approval that matters is the Lord's. One day every believer will stand before Him (5:10). On that day, it will not matter what we said about ourselves, how many followers we had, or how impressive we looked. What will matter is whether the Lord says well done (Matthew 25:21). Are you living for the approval of people, or for the approval of the Lord?

Chapter 10 Summary

Paul turns to his critics with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. They said he was humble in person but bold in his letters, and that he lived by worldly standards. Paul answers that though he lives in the flesh, he does not wage war according to the flesh. His weapons are not fleshly but powerful through God to tear down strongholds, demolishing arguments and every proud thing raised against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to obey Christ. He is ready to deal with disobedience once the church's obedience is complete. Paul belongs to Christ as much as anyone, and his authority is for building them up, not tearing them down. His critics said his letters were weighty but his presence weak and his speech despised, but Paul warns that his actions in person will match his letters. He refuses to compare himself with those who measure themselves by themselves. He stays within the field God assigned him, which reached to Corinth, and hopes to preach the gospel in the regions beyond. Whoever boasts should boast in the Lord, because only the one the Lord commends is approved.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. How does Paul begin his appeal in 10:1, and what does it tell us about how he wanted to deal with his critics?

2. What did Paul's critics say about him? (10:1, 10)

3. What does it mean that Paul walks in the flesh but does not wage war according to the flesh? (10:3)

4. What are strongholds, and what weapons tear them down? (10:4-5; compare Ephesians 6:13-18)

5. What was the purpose of the authority the Lord gave Paul? (10:8)

6. Why is it foolish to measure ourselves by ourselves? (10:12)

7. What field of ministry had God assigned to Paul, and why did Corinth belong in it? (10:13-14)

8. Whose approval matters most, according to 10:17-18?

9. What thought do you need to take captive and bring into obedience to Christ (10:5)? How will you do it?

10. In what area of life are you most tempted to compare yourself with others? How does this chapter speak to that?

Chapter 11: Paul and the False Apostles

Scripture

11:1-15 I wish you were bearing with me a little in the foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with ***the*** jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid lest perhaps, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your thoughts may be corrupted from the simplicity that ***is*** toward Christ. For if indeed the one coming preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit which you did not receive, or a different gospel which you did not accept, you would bear ***with it*** well. For I reckon ***that I*** have fallen short in nothing of the most eminent apostles. But even if ***I am*** unskilled in speech, yet not in knowledge; but in every ***way we have*** been made manifest to you in all things. Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you freely? I robbed other churches, having received support for the ministry to you; and being present with you and having been in need, I did not burden anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia fully supplied my need; and in everything I kept myself unburdensome to you, and I will keep ***myself so***. ***The*** truth of Christ is in me, that this boasting will not be stopped as to me in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! But what I do, I will also do, so that I may cut off the occasion of those desiring an occasion, so that in what they boast they may be found just as we also ***are***. For such ***are*** false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And ***it is*** no marvel, for Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore ***it is*** no great ***thing*** if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

11:16-33 Again I say, let no one think me to be a fool; but if otherwise, receive me even as a fool, so that I also may boast a little. What I am speaking, I am not speaking according to ***the*** Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you gladly bear with fools, being wise ***yourselves***! For you bear ***it*** if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours ***you***, if anyone takes ***from you***, if anyone lifts himself up, if anyone strikes you in the face. I speak as concerning dishonor, as though we were weak. But in whatever anyone is daring (I speak in foolishness), I also am daring. Are they Hebrews? I also. Are they Israelites? I also. Are they ***the*** seed of Abraham? I also. Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as being out of my mind) I ***am*** more: in labors more abundantly, in beatings exceedingly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in deaths often. From ***the*** Jews five times I received forty ***lashes*** minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have spent in the deep; in journeys often, in dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from ***my own*** race, in dangers from ***the*** Gentiles, in dangers in ***the*** city, in dangers in ***the*** wilderness, in dangers in ***the*** sea, in dangers among false brothers; in labor and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the things outside, ***there is*** the pressure on me daily, the care for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn? If it is necessary to boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He who is blessed to the ages, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor of Aretas the king was guarding

the city of the Damascenes, wishing to seize me; and through a window in a basket I was let down through the wall, and I escaped his hands.

Chapter 11 Preview

Paul hates to talk about himself, but the Corinthians have left him no choice. False teachers have come in, preaching another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel, and the church has put up with them. Paul is jealous for the church with God's own jealousy, like a father who has promised his daughter in marriage and wants to present her pure to her husband. He fears that just as the serpent deceived Eve, their minds will be led astray from simple devotion to Christ. He answers the charge that he must be a lesser apostle because he preached for free, and then he says plainly who these men are: false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

In the second half of the chapter Paul plays the fool. Since his opponents boast, he will boast too, but he boasts in strange things. He is a Hebrew like them, and more a servant of Christ, but his proof is not his successes. It is his sufferings: beatings, lashes, stonings, shipwrecks, dangers on every side, hunger, cold, sleepless nights, and the daily weight of caring for the churches. He ends his boasting with an embarrassing story: being let down in a basket over the wall of Damascus to escape. If he must boast, he will boast in his weakness.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *I wish you were bearing with me a little in the foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.*

"I wish you were bearing with me a little in the foolishness." Paul is about to do something he finds foolish: talk about himself and his credentials. He asks the Corinthians to put up with it for a little while.

"But indeed you are bearing with me." Or, as the words can also be read, please do bear with me. Paul knows that boasting is not the way of Christ. But the Corinthians were being led astray by men who boasted constantly. To win them back, Paul will use their own method for a moment, while showing how empty it is.

11:2 *For I am jealous for you with **the** jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ.*

"For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God." Not all jealousy is sin. There is a selfish jealousy that wants what belongs to others. But there is also a godly jealousy that rightly guards what belongs to someone we love. God is jealous for His people in this way (Exodus 34:14). He will not share us with idols.

"For I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." In Jewish custom, betrothal was a binding promise of marriage. The couple was legally committed, but the wedding came later. A father would guard his betrothed daughter until the wedding day. Paul pictures himself as that father. Through his preaching he had promised the Corinthians to Christ, and he

wanted to present them on the wedding day as a pure bride, faithful to her one husband. The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-8), and Paul would not stand by while someone tried to seduce her away.

11:3 *But I am afraid lest perhaps, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your thoughts may be corrupted from the simplicity that **is** toward Christ.*

"But I am afraid lest perhaps, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness." Paul goes back to the garden (Genesis 3:1-6). The serpent did not attack Eve head-on. He came with craftiness, with clever questions and half-truths. He asked whether God had really said it. He twisted God's Word just enough to make it sound reasonable.

"So your thoughts may be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ." Simplicity here means single-hearted devotion, pure and undivided loyalty to Jesus. False teaching rarely comes as an open attack on Christ. It usually comes as something added, something more complicated or more impressive, that slowly pulls the heart away from Christ alone. Satan still uses the same old trick. Beware of any teaching that leaves you with less of Jesus.

Old Testament links: Genesis 3:1 (alluded to); Genesis 3:13 (alluded to)

11:4 *For if indeed the one coming preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit which you did not receive, or a different gospel which you did not accept, you would bear **with it** well.*

"For if indeed the one coming preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach." The false teachers used the name Jesus, but the Jesus they preached was not the real one. "Or you receive a different spirit which you did not receive." Their teaching came with a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit. "Or a different gospel which you did not accept." Their good news was not the gospel of grace.

"You would bear with it well." Paul's words are sharp. The Corinthians put up with these men very easily. Paul warns the Galatians the same way: even if an angel from heaven preaches another gospel, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8). Many groups today use the name of Jesus, but they mean someone different from the Jesus of the Bible, the eternal Son of God who died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead. The name alone is not enough. We must ask, which Jesus?

11:5 *For I reckon **that I** have fallen short in nothing of the most eminent apostles.*

"For I reckon that I have fallen short in nothing of the most eminent apostles." The phrase "most eminent apostles" can also be read as super-apostles. Who were they? Many Bible teachers believe Paul is speaking with irony about the false teachers themselves, who presented themselves as super-apostles, far above Paul. Others think Paul means the Twelve in Jerusalem, whom the false teachers may have claimed to represent.

Either way, Paul's point is clear. He was not a second-rate apostle. He had been called by the risen Christ, just as surely as anyone.

11:6 *But even if **I am** unskilled in speech, yet not in knowledge; but in every **way we have** been made manifest to you in all things.*

"But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet not in knowledge." Paul admits that he was not a trained public speaker in the style the Greeks admired. He did not use polished words or clever tricks of speech (1 Corinthians 2:1-4). The word for unskilled means an amateur, a non-professional.

But in knowledge, in understanding God's truth, Paul was no amateur. God had revealed the gospel to him directly (Galatians 1:11-12). "But in every way we have been made manifest to you in all things." The Corinthians had seen Paul up close. They knew him. They should not have needed persuading. Content matters more than style. A plain speaker with the truth is far better than a gifted speaker with error.

11:7 *Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you freely?*

"Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you freely?" Here is one of the strange charges against Paul. When he was in Corinth, he refused to take money from the church. He worked with his own hands as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

In Greek culture, a teacher who did not charge was often thought to be worth little. The false teachers took pay and probably said that proved they were real professionals, while Paul was not. Paul asks with irony, was it a sin to serve you for free? He humbled himself, doing manual labor, so that they could be lifted up by the gospel.

11:8 *I robbed other churches, having received support for the ministry to you;*

"I robbed other churches, having received support for the ministry to you." Paul is using strong language for effect. He did not really rob anyone. He means that other churches, poorer than Corinth, gave him support while he served in Corinth. It was as if he had taken from them in order to serve the Corinthians.

Paul taught that those who preach the gospel have a right to be supported by it (1 Corinthians 9:14). But he gave up that right in Corinth so that no one could accuse him of preaching for money. He let the Macedonians support him instead.

11:9 *and being present with you and having been in need, I did not burden anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia fully supplied my need; and in everything I kept myself unburdensome to you, and I will keep **myself so**.*

"And being present with you and having been in need, I did not burden anyone." Even when Paul ran short, he did not ask the Corinthians for help. "For the brothers who came from Macedonia fully supplied my need." When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, they brought gifts that allowed Paul to devote himself to preaching (Acts 18:5; Philippians 4:15-16).

"And in everything I kept myself unburdensome to you, and I will keep myself so." Paul did not plan to change his policy. He would keep serving Corinth without pay. He knew his critics would twist anything he did, so he gave them nothing to grab on to.

11:10 ***The*** *truth of Christ is in me, that this boasting will not be stopped as to me in the regions of Achaia.*

"The truth of Christ is in me, that this boasting will not be stopped as to me in the regions of Achaia." Paul makes a solemn statement. As surely as the truth of Christ is in him, no one will stop him from boasting that he preached in Achaia for free.

This was one thing the false teachers could never claim. They took money. Paul did not. His free service was a clear mark of the difference between them, and he would not give it up.

11:11 *Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!*

"Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!" Someone might think Paul refused their money because he did not care about them, or wanted to keep his distance. Paul says, God knows that is not true.

Sometimes love is shown by giving, and sometimes by refusing to take. Paul refused their money because he loved them, not because he did not. He did not want anything to come between them and the gospel. Our motives can be misunderstood, but God knows our hearts.

11:12 *But what I do, I will also do, so that I may cut off the occasion of those desiring an occasion, so that in what they boast they may be found just as we also* ***are****.*

"But what I do, I will also do, so that I may cut off the occasion of those desiring an occasion." The false teachers wanted an opportunity to say that Paul was just like them, in it for the money. Paul would keep refusing pay to take that opportunity away.

"So that in what they boast they may be found just as we also are." The false teachers boasted that they were apostles on the same level as Paul. Paul's free service made a clear test. If they were really like him, let them serve without pay too. They would never do it.

11:13 *For such* ***are*** *false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." Now Paul says it plainly. These men are not true apostles. They are frauds. They are deceitful workers, men who work by lies and tricks. And they are disguising themselves. The word means to change the outward form, to put on a costume. They looked like apostles of Christ on the outside, but they were not.

This is a serious warning for the church in every age. Not everyone who claims to speak for Christ really does. Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but are ravenous wolves inside (Matthew 7:15). We must test every teacher by the Word of God (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11).

How do we tell? Look at what they teach about Jesus and the gospel (11:4). Look at whether they serve the people or use them (11:20). Look at whether they point to Christ or to themselves (4:5).

11:14 *And **it is** no marvel, for Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light.*

"And it is no marvel, for Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light." We should not be surprised that false teachers look good on the outside. Their master does the same. Satan does not usually show up looking evil. He comes looking like light, beauty, and truth.

Think about that. The most dangerous lies do not sound like lies. They sound spiritual, reasonable, and attractive. Satan offered Eve wisdom (Genesis 3:5). He quoted Scripture to Jesus (Matthew 4:6). Many false religions began with someone who claimed to receive a message from an angel. Paul says even if an angel from heaven preaches another gospel, do not believe it (Galatians 1:8). Do not judge by how bright the messenger looks. Judge by the Word of God.

11:15 *Therefore **it is** no great **thing** if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

"Therefore it is no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." If Satan can disguise himself, his servants can too. They talk about righteousness, holiness, and truth, but they serve the father of lies (John 8:44).

"Whose end will be according to their works." Here is a sober promise. These men will not get away with it. God will judge them according to what they have done. Their disguise may fool people, but it will not fool God. The end of every false teacher is judgment (2 Peter 2:1-3). This should make us careful whom we follow, and it should make every teacher tremble to handle God's Word rightly.

11:16 *Again I say, let no one think me to be a fool; but if otherwise, receive me even as a fool, so that I also may boast a little.*

"Again I say, let no one think me to be a fool." Paul returns to the idea of foolish boasting from verse 1. He does not want them to think he is really a fool. "But if otherwise, receive me even as a fool, so that I also may boast a little."

Since the Corinthians had listened to the false teachers' boasting, Paul asks them to listen to his for a moment. He is playing a part, the part of a boastful fool, to show them how foolish all this boasting really is.

11:17 *What I am speaking, I am not speaking according to **the** Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting.*

"What I am speaking, I am not speaking according to the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting." Paul is careful here. He is not saying these verses are not inspired by God. He is saying that boasting about yourself is not the way the Lord Jesus acted. Jesus did not go around listing His credentials.

Paul is stepping into the role of a fool for a moment, on purpose, to win the Corinthians back. He wants them to know that he knows this is not the normal way a servant of Christ should talk.

11:18 *Since many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.*

"Since many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast." To boast according to the flesh means to brag about worldly things: background, family, education, achievements, and spiritual experiences.

The false teachers did that all the time. So Paul will meet them on their own ground for a moment. But as we will see, Paul's boasting turns out very differently from theirs. He ends up boasting in his weaknesses.

11:19 *For you gladly bear with fools, being wise* ***yourselves****!*

"For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!" Paul's words drip with irony. The Corinthians thought of themselves as wise (1 Corinthians 4:10). And yet they gladly put up with the foolish boasting of the false teachers.

Paul is saying, since you are so wise and so patient with fools, you can surely put up with me for a few minutes. It is a gentle jab, meant to wake them up to how foolish they had been.

11:20 *For you bear* ***it*** *if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours* ***you****, if anyone takes* ***from you****, if anyone lifts himself up, if anyone strikes you in the face.*

"For you bear it if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes from you, if anyone lifts himself up, if anyone strikes you in the face." Here we see what the false teachers were really like. They enslaved the believers, bringing them under their control and perhaps under the Law. They devoured them, eating up their money and resources. They took from them, taking advantage of them. They lifted themselves up, acting proud and superior. They even struck them in the face, treating them with contempt and maybe real violence.

And the Corinthians put up with it. It is a sad truth that people sometimes follow leaders who abuse them, and even defend those leaders. Real shepherds feed and protect the flock. False shepherds feed on it (Ezekiel 34:2-4). If you have been hurt by a leader like that, know that this is not what Christ intends for His church. He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

11:21 *I speak as concerning dishonor, as though we were weak. But in whatever anyone is daring (I speak in foolishness), I also am daring.*

"I speak as concerning dishonor, as though we were weak." Paul uses irony again. He says, I am ashamed to admit it, but I was too weak to treat you that way. He was weak in the sense that he refused to abuse them.

"But in whatever anyone is daring (I speak in foolishness), I also am daring." Now Paul begins his foolish boast. Whatever the false teachers dare to boast about, Paul can match it. And he reminds them again that he is speaking as a fool.

11:22 *Are they Hebrews? I also. Are they Israelites? I also. Are they **the** seed of Abraham? I also.*

"Are they Hebrews? I also. Are they Israelites? I also. Are they the seed of Abraham? I also." The false teachers were Jewish, and they made much of it. Paul answers with three questions, each one a little stronger.

A Hebrew was a Jewish person, likely one who kept the Hebrew or Aramaic language and customs. An Israelite was a member of God's covenant people, the nation descended from Jacob, whom God named Israel. The seed of Abraham were the heirs of God's promises to Abraham. Paul could claim all three (Philippians 3:5). He was every bit as Jewish as they were. Paul never stopped loving his people or valuing his heritage. He simply refused to trust in it for salvation.

11:23 *Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as being out of my mind) I **am** more: in labors more abundantly, in beatings exceedingly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in deaths often.*

"Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as being out of my mind) I am more." Paul has granted that they share his Jewish background. But when they claim to be servants of Christ, Paul says he is more. He knows this sounds crazy, so he adds that he is speaking like a madman.

And now he gives his proof, and it is not what anyone would expect. "In labors more abundantly, in beatings exceedingly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in deaths often." Paul does not list his successes, his churches, or his visions. He lists his sufferings. Acts records only one imprisonment before this letter, at Philippi (Acts 16:23), so there were others we do not know about. "In deaths often" means he had faced death many times.

11:24-25 *From **the** Jews five times I received forty **lashes** minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have spent in the deep;*

"From the Jews five times I received forty lashes minus one." The Law of Moses allowed up to forty lashes as a punishment (Deuteronomy 25:3). The Jewish leaders gave thirty-nine so they would not go over the limit by mistake. This was a brutal whipping. Paul received it five times from synagogue leaders, none of which Acts records.

"Three times I was beaten with rods." This was a Roman punishment. Acts tells of one time, at Philippi (Acts 16:22-23). "Once I was stoned." This was at Lystra, where the crowd left him for dead (Acts 14:19). "Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have spent in the deep." All of these shipwrecks happened before the one recorded in Acts 27, which came later. Once Paul spent a whole day and night in the open sea. These men who mocked Paul as weak had never suffered anything like this.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 25:3 (alluded to)

11:26 *in journeys often, in dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from **my own** race, in dangers from **the** Gentiles, in dangers in **the** city, in dangers in **the** wilderness, in dangers in **the** sea, in dangers among false brothers;*

"In journeys often." Paul traveled thousands of miles, mostly on foot, at a time when travel was hard and dangerous. Then he lists eight dangers. "In dangers of rivers," because rivers flooded and bridges were few. "In dangers of robbers," because roads through lonely country were full of bandits. "In dangers from my own race," the Jewish people who opposed him (Acts 9:23; 14:19). "In dangers from the Gentiles," those who were not Jewish (Acts 16:19-24; 19:23-41).

"In dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers in the sea." There was no safe place for Paul. Cities had mobs. The wilderness had wild animals and hunger. The sea had storms. And finally, "in dangers among false brothers." Perhaps the worst danger of all came from people who claimed to be believers but were not. Betrayal from within hurts the most.

11:27 *in labor and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness;*

"In labor and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Paul now turns from dangers to daily hardships. He worked hard, often with his hands, to support himself. He went many nights without sleep. He was often hungry and thirsty. Fastings here may mean going without food because there was none, not only fasting by choice.

"In cold and nakedness." He sometimes did not have enough clothing to keep warm. This is the great apostle Paul. He did not live in comfort. He lived like this so that people could hear about Jesus. Next time we complain about a hard day, it may help to read this verse.

11:28 *besides the things outside, **there is** the pressure on me daily, the care for all the churches.*

"Besides the things outside, there is the pressure on me daily, the care for all the churches." After all the outward sufferings, Paul names an inward one. Every day he carried the weight of worry and concern for the churches he had started.

Think of all the churches Paul cared for: in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Every report of false teaching, division, sin, or persecution weighed on his heart. Anyone who has served as a pastor, elder, or leader in a church knows something of this pressure. It is often heavier than any outward hardship. Pray for your pastor and leaders. They carry more than you see.

11:29 *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn?*

"Who is weak, and I am not weak?" Paul felt with his people. When a believer was weak, struggling in faith or conscience, Paul felt that weakness as if it were his own. He did not stand far off and judge.

"Who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn?" When someone was led into sin, Paul burned inside, with grief for the one who fell and with anger at whoever caused it. That is the heart of a true shepherd. He does not shrug when a sheep stumbles. He feels it deeply.

11:30 *If it is necessary to boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness.*

"If it is necessary to boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness." Here is the turning point of Paul's foolish boast. He has listed his sufferings, and now he says plainly what he is doing. He will not boast in his strength. He will boast in his weakness.

This turns the world's values upside down. The false teachers boasted in their strength. Paul boasts in what showed how weak he was, because in his weakness God's power was seen (4:7; 12:9). This is not the way the world thinks, but it is the way of the cross.

11:31 *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He who is blessed to the ages, knows that I am not lying.*

"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He who is blessed to the ages, knows that I am not lying." Paul calls God as his witness. Everything he has said is true. He is not exaggerating.

Why such a strong oath? Because his list of sufferings was so extreme that some might have thought he was making it up. And because his enemies called him a liar (6:8). Paul knew God saw everything that had happened to him. He did not need anyone else's approval when God knew the truth.

11:32-33 *In Damascus the governor of Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes, wishing to seize me; and through a window in a basket I was let down through the wall, and I escaped his hands.*

"In Damascus the governor of Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes, wishing to seize me." Aretas was the king of the Nabateans, an Arab kingdom east and south of Israel. Most historians identify him as Aretas IV, who ruled until about A.D. 40. His governor in Damascus tried to arrest Paul soon after Paul's conversion. Acts 9:23-25 tells the same story and adds that the Jews in Damascus were plotting to kill him.

"And through a window in a basket I was let down through the wall, and I escaped his hands." Why does Paul end his boasting with this story? Because it was humiliating. In the Roman army, the first soldier over the wall of an enemy city won a high honor. Paul was the first one down the wall, running away in a basket. The great apostle's first big moment was an escape in the dark. Paul tells it on purpose. He is boasting in his weakness. His life was not a story of his strength, but of God's power to protect a weak man.

Chapter 11 Summary

Paul asks the Corinthians to bear with his foolish boasting. He is jealous for them with God's jealousy, having betrothed them as a pure virgin to Christ, and he fears that, as the serpent deceived Eve, their minds will be led astray from simple devotion to Christ by those who preach another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. Paul is not inferior to the most eminent apostles. He may be unskilled in speech, but not in knowledge. He preached to them free of charge, supported by other churches, and he will keep doing so to cut off the claims of his opponents. These men are false apostles and deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles

of Christ, just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and their end will match their works. Then Paul boasts as a fool. He is a Hebrew, an Israelite, and Abraham's seed like them, and more a servant of Christ, proven by labors, imprisonments, beatings, lashes, a stoning, shipwrecks, constant dangers, hunger, cold, sleeplessness, and the daily care of all the churches. If he must boast, he will boast in his weakness, and he ends with the story of escaping Damascus in a basket.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What kind of jealousy did Paul have for the Corinthians, and what picture does he use to describe it? (11:2)

2. How did the serpent deceive Eve, and what was Paul afraid would happen to the Corinthians? (11:3)

3. What three things did the false teachers bring that were different from what Paul preached? (11:4)

4. Why did Paul refuse to take money from the Corinthians? (11:7-12)

5. How does Paul describe the false apostles, and whom does he compare them to? (11:13-15)

6. How did the false teachers treat the Corinthians? (11:20)

7. What does Paul boast about to prove he is a servant of Christ, and why is that surprising? (11:23-30)

8. Why do you think Paul ends his list with the story of the basket in Damascus? (11:32-33)

9. How can you test whether a teacher or leader is truly from Christ? What questions from this chapter would help?

10. Paul felt the weight of caring for the churches (11:28). How could you encourage your pastor or a church leader this week?

Chapter 12: Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

Scripture

12:1-10 Indeed it is not profitable for me to boast; for I will come to visions and revelations of ***the*** Lord. I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago (whether in ***the*** body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know; God knows), such a one caught up to ***the*** third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in ***the*** body or outside the body I do not know; God knows), that he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not permitted for a man to speak. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses. For if I desire to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will speak ***the*** truth; but I refrain, lest anyone reckon to me beyond what he sees me ***to be*** or hears from me. And so that I might not be exalted above measure by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, so that he might buffet me, so that I might not be exalted above measure. Concerning this I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in distresses, on behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

12:11-21 I have become a fool in boasting; you compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing did I fall short of the most eminent apostles, even if I am nothing. Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all endurance, in signs and wonders and miracles. For what is it in which you were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! Look, a third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not burden you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you. For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, even if, loving you more abundantly, I am loved less. But be it so, I did not burden you; but being crafty, I caught you by deceit. Did I exploit you through any of those whom I have sent to you? I urged Titus, and I sent the brother with ***him***. Did Titus exploit you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Not in the same steps? Again, do you think that we are defending ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ; but all things, beloved, ***are*** for your building up. For I fear lest perhaps, having come, I may find you not such as I wish, and I may be found by you such as you do not wish; lest perhaps ***there be*** strifes, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, slanders, whisperings, arrogances, disorders; lest, when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and I may mourn ***over*** many of those who have sinned before and have not repented of the impurity and sexual immorality and sensuality which they practiced.

Chapter 12 Preview

Paul's opponents boasted of visions and spiritual experiences, so Paul tells of one of his own, though he can hardly bring himself to do it. He speaks of "a man in Christ" who was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, fourteen years earlier, and heard words no man is allowed to speak. That man was Paul himself. But Paul will not build his ministry on that experience. To

keep him from becoming proud, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. Three times he begged the Lord to take it away. The Lord's answer has comforted believers ever since: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." So Paul gladly boasts in his weaknesses, because when he is weak, then he is strong.

In the second half of the chapter Paul ends his foolish boasting. The Corinthians should have defended him. The signs of a true apostle had been done among them. His only wrong, he says with irony, was refusing to be a burden to them. He is coming a third time, and he still wants nothing from them but them. Like a parent, he will gladly spend and be spent for them. He fears, though, that when he comes he will find quarrels, jealousy, anger, and gossip, and that some have not repented of sexual sin. Everything he has said, he says for their building up.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *Indeed it is not profitable for me to boast; for I will come to visions and revelations of **the** Lord.*

"Indeed it is not profitable for me to boast." Paul does not see any real benefit in boasting. It does nothing for the kingdom of God. But the false teachers had forced the issue by bragging about their spiritual experiences.

"For I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." Paul has boasted of his sufferings in chapter 11. Now he turns to something the Corinthians would find more impressive: visions and revelations. A vision is something seen by God's power. A revelation is something God makes known that could not be known otherwise. These came "of the Lord," from the Lord Jesus. Paul had many such experiences (Acts 16:9; 18:9; 22:17-18; 27:23).

12:2 *I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago (whether in **the** body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know; God knows), such a one caught up to **the** third heaven.*

"I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago." Paul speaks of himself as if he were someone else. Why? Because he was uncomfortable boasting about it. He did not want to put himself in the spotlight. But verse 7 makes it clear that he is the man.

"Fourteen years ago" puts this about A.D. 42, if the letter was written about A.D. 56. That was during the quiet years in Paul's life after his conversion, when he was in Tarsus and the region of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21), before his missionary journeys began. Paul had kept quiet about this for fourteen years. That alone shows how different he was from the false teachers.

"Whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know; God knows." Paul honestly did not know whether his body was taken up to heaven or only his spirit. He does not pretend to know more than he does. "Such a one caught up to the third heaven." The Jewish people often spoke of the sky where the birds fly as the first heaven, the heavens where the sun, moon and stars are as the second, and the place where God dwells as the third. Paul was taken into the very presence of God.

12:3-4 *And I know such a man (whether in **the** body or outside the body I do not know; God knows), that he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not permitted for a man to speak.*

"And I know such a man (whether in the body or outside the body I do not know; God knows)." Paul repeats himself to stress how uncertain he is about the details, and how certain he is that it happened.

"That he was caught up into Paradise." Paradise is a Persian word that means a garden or park. In the Bible it came to mean the dwelling of God where the righteous are with Him. Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in Paradise that same day (Luke 23:43), and the tree of life is in the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). Paradise and the third heaven here are the same place.

"And heard inexpressible words, which it is not permitted for a man to speak." Paul heard things that cannot be put into human words, and things God did not allow him to repeat. Notice that Paul does not describe what he saw or give us a tour of heaven. Many people today write books about trips to heaven, full of details. Paul, who really was taken there, said almost nothing. That should make us careful about claims that go beyond what Scripture tells us.

12:5 *On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses.*

"On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses." Paul keeps a distance between himself and the experience. He will speak of the man who was caught up, but when it comes to Paul himself, the only thing he will boast about is his weakness.

Why? Because the experience was God's gift, not Paul's achievement. He did not earn it. And he does not want anyone to think more highly of him because of it. Spiritual experiences can be real gifts from God, but they are never a reason for pride.

12:6 *For if I desire to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will speak **the** truth; but I refrain, lest anyone reckon to me beyond what he sees me **to be** or hears from me.*

"For if I desire to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will speak the truth." If Paul wanted to boast, he would not be lying. Everything he could say would be true. He had real visions, real revelations, and real power from God.

"But I refrain, lest anyone reckon to me beyond what he sees me to be or hears from me." Paul holds back on purpose. He does not want people to think of him based on his visions. He wants them to judge him by what they see in his life and hear in his teaching. That is a wise rule for judging any teacher. Do not be impressed by stories of what someone says happened to them. Look at their life and listen to their teaching. Does it match God's Word?

12:7 *And so that I might not be exalted above measure by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, so that he might buffet me, so that I might not be exalted above measure.*

"And so that I might not be exalted above measure by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh." God knew the danger. A man who had seen what Paul saw could easily become proud. So something was given to keep him humble. The word for thorn can mean a sharp stake or a splinter. It was something painful that kept jabbing him.

"A messenger of Satan, so that he might buffet me." To buffet is to strike with the fist, to beat again and again. Here we see something deep. Satan meant the thorn for harm. God meant it for good. God used even a messenger of Satan to keep His servant humble, much as He allowed Satan to test Job (Job 1:12; 2:6). Satan is never outside God's control.

What was the thorn? Paul does not tell us, and Bible teachers have offered many answers. Many think it was a physical illness or weakness. Some point to trouble with his eyes, since Paul mentions an illness when he first preached in Galatia (Galatians 4:13-15) and writes of the large letters he wrote with his own hand (Galatians 6:11). Others suggest malaria, chronic headaches, or the lasting effects of his beatings. Others believe it was the constant opposition and persecution he faced, since in the Old Testament Israel's enemies are called thorns in their sides (Numbers 33:55), and since Paul calls it a messenger, a word often used of a person. Still others think of a spiritual struggle or temptation. Perhaps God left it unnamed for a reason. Because it is not named, every suffering believer can find himself in Paul's story.

12:8 *Concerning this I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*

"Concerning this I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me." Paul prayed, and he prayed hard. He begged. He did it three times, perhaps on three separate occasions.

This is a comfort. Paul, a great man of God, prayed for healing or relief, and God said no. That did not mean Paul lacked faith. It did not mean Paul had sin in his life. It meant God had a better plan. Jesus Himself prayed three times in the garden for the cup to pass from Him, and yet submitted to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39-44). It is right to ask God to take away our pain. It is also right to trust Him when He does not.

12:9 *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

"And He has said to me," Paul writes, and then he gives the Lord's words: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Here is the Lord's answer. He did not take the thorn away. He gave Paul something better: His grace. Sufficient means enough. God's grace would be enough for Paul to carry the thorn every day.

"For My power is perfected in weakness." The word perfected means brought to its full purpose. God's power shows best when we are weak, because then it is obvious that the strength is His and

not ours. When we feel strong, we tend to lean on ourselves. When we are weak, we lean on Him, and His power flows.

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul's attitude changed. He stopped begging for the thorn to go and started boasting in his weakness. The phrase "rest upon me" pictures the power of Christ coming to dwell on him like a tent spread over him. Is there a weakness in your life that God has not removed? His grace is enough for you too, and His power can rest on you right in the middle of it.

12:10 *Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in distresses, on behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

"Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in distresses, on behalf of Christ." Paul does not enjoy pain for its own sake. He takes pleasure in these things "on behalf of Christ," because he knows they open the door for Christ's power to work in him.

"For when I am weak, then I am strong." This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life. A paradox is something that sounds impossible but is true. The world says strength is strength and weakness is weakness. God says that when we come to the end of ourselves, His strength takes over. This is the whole message of 2 Corinthians in one sentence. It is what the false teachers could never understand. They boasted in their strength. Paul boasted in his weakness, because there he found the power of Christ.

12:11 *I have become a fool in boasting; you compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing did I fall short of the most eminent apostles, even if I am nothing.*

"I have become a fool in boasting; you compelled me." Paul ends his foolish boasting here. He did not want to do it, but the Corinthians forced him to by listening to the false teachers.

"For I ought to have been commended by you." The Corinthians should have stood up for Paul. They knew him. They had seen his life and received the gospel from him. They should have defended him. "For in nothing did I fall short of the most eminent apostles, even if I am nothing." Paul repeats what he said in 11:5. In himself, he says, he is nothing. But by God's grace he was not behind any apostle.

12:12 *Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all endurance, in signs and wonders and miracles.*

"Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all endurance, in signs and wonders and miracles." There were marks that showed Paul was a true apostle. Among them were the miracles God did through him in Corinth. Signs point to something beyond themselves. Wonders cause amazement. Miracles are works of power. Acts tells of many such works through Paul (Acts 14:3; 19:11-12).

Paul did these "in all endurance." His miracles came with patience and suffering, not with show. Bible teachers differ on what this verse means for today. Some believe these sign gifts belonged especially to the apostles and the founding of the church, and so are not given in the same way

now. Others believe God still works such miracles through His people today. Both agree that God can do whatever He wills, and that the marks of a true servant include sound teaching and a godly life, not only signs.

12:13 *For what is it in which you were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!*

"For what is it in which you were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you?" Paul asks a pointed question. In what way did he treat the Corinthians worse than other churches? Only one: he did not take their money.

"Forgive me this wrong!" Paul is using irony again. If refusing their money was a sin, then he asks them to forgive him. Of course it was no sin at all. It was a gift. But the false teachers had twisted it into a reason to look down on Paul.

12:14 *Look, a third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not burden you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you. For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*

"Look, a third time I am ready to come to you." This verse tells us Paul had already been to Corinth twice: once when he founded the church (Acts 18), and once on the painful visit (2:1). Now he was ready to come a third time.

"And I will not burden you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you." Paul's policy would not change. He did not want their money. He wanted them, their hearts and their faith. "For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children." Paul thinks of himself as their spiritual father. Normally parents save up for their children, not the other way around. He would provide for them, not take from them. A true minister is not after what people have. He is after their souls.

12:15 *And I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, even if, loving you more abundantly, I am loved less.*

"And I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls." Paul would gladly spend his money, his time, and his strength for them. And more than that, he would be spent himself, poured out completely, used up for their good.

"Even if, loving you more abundantly, I am loved less." This is one of the saddest lines in the letter. The more Paul loved them, the less they seemed to love him back. Yet he would keep on loving. Have you ever loved someone who did not return it? Paul knew that pain. And so did Jesus, who loved His own to the end, even when they ran away (John 13:1).

12:16 *But be it so, I did not burden you; but being crafty, I caught you by deceit.*

"But be it so, I did not burden you." The Corinthians could not deny that Paul had not taken their money.

"But being crafty, I caught you by deceit." Now Paul quotes another twisted charge from his critics. They seem to have said, yes, Paul did not take your money himself, but he is crafty. He set up this collection for Jerusalem, and he is going to take the money through his helpers. They accused him of being a con man. Paul answers in the next verses.

12:17-18 *Did I exploit you through any of those whom I have sent to you? I urged Titus, and I sent the brother with* ***him****. Did Titus exploit you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Not in the same steps?*

"Did I exploit you through any of those whom I have sent to you?" Paul asks them to look at the record. Had any of his messengers ever taken advantage of them?

"I urged Titus, and I sent the brother with him. Did Titus exploit you?" The Corinthians knew Titus. He had been with them, and they knew he had not cheated them. "Did we not walk in the same spirit? Not in the same steps?" Paul and Titus lived the same way, with the same honesty and the same motives. Paul's helpers reflected his character. That is a test of any ministry. Look at the people a leader sends out. Do they show the same integrity?

12:19 *Again, do you think that we are defending ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ; but all things, beloved,* ***are*** *for your building up.*

"Again, do you think that we are defending ourselves to you?" Paul knows how all of this might sound. It might seem like he has spent three chapters just trying to protect his own reputation.

"We speak before God in Christ." Paul is not finally answering to the Corinthians. He speaks as a man standing before God. "But all things, beloved, are for your building up." Here is the real reason for all he has written. It was not about Paul. It was for their good, to build them up in faith. Even his self-defense was really an act of love, because if they rejected Paul, they would be rejecting the true gospel he preached.

12:20 *For I fear lest perhaps, having come, I may find you not such as I wish, and I may be found by you such as you do not wish; lest perhaps* ***there be*** *strifes, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, slanders, whisperings, arrogances, disorders;*

"For I fear lest perhaps, having come, I may find you not such as I wish, and I may be found by you such as you do not wish." Paul is worried that his third visit will be another painful one. He might find them not living as they should, and they might find him having to come with discipline.

Then he lists the sins he fears he will find: "strifes, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, slanders, whisperings, arrogances, disorders." These are sins of the tongue and the heart, the kind that tear a church apart. Strife is quarreling. Rivalries are selfish ambitions. Slanders are open attacks on others, and whisperings are gossip behind their backs. Arrogances are puffed-up pride. Disorders are confusion and chaos. These sins are just as deadly to a church as any outward scandal. Are any of them in your heart, or in your church?

12:21 *lest, when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and I may mourn **over** many of those who have sinned before and have not repented of the impurity and sexual immorality and sensuality which they practiced.*

"Lest, when I come again, my God may humble me before you." Paul feared that seeing their sin would humble him, that he would be brought low with grief and shame over his spiritual children.

"And I may mourn over many of those who have sinned before and have not repented of the impurity and sexual immorality and sensuality which they practiced." Some in the church had been living in sexual sin, and they had not repented. Impurity is moral uncleanness. Sexual immorality is any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. Sensuality is shameless indulgence with no self-control. Paul would mourn over them, the way one mourns for the dead. A true shepherd does not shrug off sin in the church. It breaks his heart. And he longs for those caught in it to repent while there is still time.

Chapter 12 Summary

Paul turns to visions and revelations of the Lord. He tells of a man in Christ who fourteen years before was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, whether in the body or out of it he does not know, and heard inexpressible words. That man was Paul himself, but he will boast only in his weaknesses. To keep him from becoming proud, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He begged the Lord three times to remove it, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." So Paul boasts in his weaknesses and takes pleasure in hardships for Christ, because when he is weak, then he is strong. Paul ends his foolish boasting. The Corinthians should have commended him, since the signs of an apostle were done among them, and his only wrong was not being a burden to them. He is coming a third time, seeking not their money but them, and he will gladly spend and be spent for them even if he is loved less. He and Titus never exploited them. All he has said is for their building up. He fears that when he comes he will find quarreling, jealousy, anger and gossip, and some who have not repented of sexual sin.

My thorn is pride. God has not removed it, and I have to fight it every day. Paul learned that God's grace is enough and His power is made perfect in weakness. Pride tells me I am strong. Grace tells me I do not have to be.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul speak of himself as "a man in Christ" when describing his vision? (12:2-5)

2. Where was Paul taken, and what did he hear? (12:2-4)

3. Why does Paul refuse to boast about his vision? (12:5-6)

4. Why was Paul given a thorn in the flesh, and who sent it? (12:7)

5. How did Paul respond to the thorn, and what was the Lord's answer? (12:8-9)

6. What does Paul mean when he says, "when I am weak, then I am strong"? (12:10)

7. What did Paul want from the Corinthians, and what did he refuse to take? (12:14-15)

8. What sins did Paul fear he would find in Corinth? (12:20-21)

9. Is there a thorn in your life that God has not removed? How might His grace be enough for you in it?

10. Paul said he would "spend and be utterly spent" for others even if he was loved less (12:15). Who is God calling you to love like that?

Chapter 13: Examine Yourselves

Scripture

13:1-14 This third ***time*** I am coming to you. "By ***the*** mouth of two or three witnesses every word will be established." I have said before and I say beforehand, as being present the second time, and being absent now I write to those who have sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare ***anyone***, since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you but is powerful among you. For indeed, if He was crucified out of weakness, yet He lives by ***the*** power of God. For indeed we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by ***the*** power of God toward you. Test yourselves ***to see*** whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not recognize yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are unapproved? But I hope that you will know that we are not unapproved. Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not so that we may appear approved, but so that you may do what is good, though we may be as unapproved. For we cannot ***do*** anything against the truth, but for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong; and this also we pray ***for***, your perfection. Because of this I write these things while absent, so that when present I may not deal severely, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for demolition. Finally, brothers, rejoice, be perfected, be comforted, think the same ***thing***, be at peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit ***be*** with you all. Amen.

Chapter 13 Preview

Paul closes his letter with a firm warning and a tender blessing. He is coming to Corinth for the third time, and every charge will be settled by the testimony of two or three witnesses. He has warned those who keep on sinning, and he warns them again: when he comes, he will not spare them. Some in Corinth wanted proof that Christ really speaks through Paul. Paul says they will get it. Christ was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God, and Paul, weak in Him, will live with Him by God's power toward them.

Then Paul turns the question around. Instead of testing him, they should test themselves to see whether they are in the faith. He prays that they will do what is right, even if that means he never has to show his authority. He writes all this before he comes, so that when he arrives he will not have to be severe. The letter ends with a call to rejoice, be restored, be comforted, agree, and live in peace, with a greeting, and with one of the best known blessings in the Bible, naming the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *This third **time** I am coming to you. "By **the** mouth of two or three witnesses every word will be established."*

"This third time I am coming to you." Paul had been to Corinth twice before: when he started the church, and on the painful visit (2:1; 12:14). Now he is coming again.

"By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word will be established." Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 19:15. Under the Law of Moses, no one could be convicted of a crime on the word of only one witness. There had to be two or three. Jesus used the same rule for dealing with sin in the church (Matthew 18:16). Paul is saying that when he comes, he will deal with the sin in Corinth fairly and carefully. He will not act on rumors. Every charge will be proven by witnesses. Some think Paul also means his three visits, or his repeated warnings, are themselves like witnesses against the unrepentant. Either way, church discipline must be done with justice, not gossip.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 19:15 (quoted)

13:2 *I have said before and I say beforehand, as being present the second time, and being absent now I write to those who have sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare* ***anyone****,*

"I have said before and I say beforehand, as being present the second time, and being absent now I write." Paul had warned them in person on his second visit, and now he warns them again in writing. They cannot say they were not told.

"To those who have sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare anyone." The warning is for those who had been living in sin (12:21) and for anyone else who might follow them. Paul has been patient. He stayed away to spare them (1:23). But patience has a limit. If they do not repent, he will act. God is patient with us too, but His patience is meant to lead us to repentance, not to make us careless (Romans 2:4).

13:3 *since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you but is powerful among you.*

"Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me." Some in Corinth doubted that Paul was really Christ's apostle. They wanted proof that Christ spoke through him. They were impressed by the bold, boastful false teachers, and Paul seemed weak by comparison.

"Who is not weak toward you but is powerful among you." Paul reminds them that Christ is not weak. He had worked powerfully among them. They had been saved through Paul's preaching. They had seen the signs of an apostle (12:12). If they wanted proof that Christ spoke in Paul, they only had to look at what Christ had already done among them.

13:4 *For indeed, if He was crucified out of weakness, yet He lives by* ***the*** *power of God. For indeed we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by* ***the*** *power of God toward you.*

"For indeed, if He was crucified out of weakness, yet He lives by the power of God." Here is the pattern of Paul's whole ministry. Jesus went to the cross in weakness. He let men arrest Him, beat Him, and nail Him to a cross. To the world, that looked like defeat. But He was raised and now lives by the power of God.

"For indeed we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by the power of God toward you." Paul shares in that same pattern. In himself, he is weak. But he is united to the risen Christ, and so the power of God works through him. When he comes to Corinth, they will see that power.

Weakness and power are not opposites in the Christian life. God's power shows itself through weakness, just as it did at the cross and the empty tomb.

13:5 *Test yourselves **to see** whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not recognize yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are unapproved?*

"Test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves." The Corinthians had been testing Paul. Now Paul turns it around. Before you put me on trial, put yourselves on trial. Are you really in the faith? To test and to prove both mean to examine something to see whether it is genuine, the way a metal worker tests gold.

"Or do you not recognize yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are unapproved?" Every true believer has Jesus Christ living in him by His Spirit (Romans 8:9-10). Paul expected that most of them, when they looked honestly, would see Christ at work in their lives. But some might find they were unapproved, failing the test. The word means not genuine, like a coin that turns out to be fake.

How should we take this today? Paul is not telling believers to live in constant fear, always wondering if they are really saved. He is calling people who claim to be Christians to an honest look at their lives. Is there real faith in Jesus? Is there the fruit of the Spirit? Is there a love for God and His Word, and a hatred of sin? Bible teachers who believe a true believer can never lose salvation read this verse as a call to make sure our faith is real, since some who claim Christ were never truly His (1 John 2:19). Bible teachers who believe a person can turn away read it as a warning to keep on in the faith. Both agree that the Christian life should show signs of new life, and that the answer to doubt is to look to Christ and His promises, not to our own feelings.

If you test yourself and find no real faith in Christ, the answer is simple. Turn to Him today. He has promised to receive all who come to Him (John 6:37). If you test yourself and see His work in you, even if it is weak, thank God and keep going.

13:6 *But I hope that you will know that we are not unapproved.*

"But I hope that you will know that we are not unapproved." Paul is confident about himself. When they test him, they will find he passes. He is a genuine apostle.

There is an argument hidden here. If the Corinthians examined themselves and found that Christ was in them, then they would have to admit that Paul was genuine, because they came to Christ through Paul's preaching. Their own faith was the proof of his ministry (3:2-3). They could not say Paul was a fake without saying their own faith was fake too.

13:7 *Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not so that we may appear approved, but so that you may do what is good, though we may be as unapproved.*

"Now I pray to God that you do no evil." Paul's prayer for them is not about himself. He prays that they will stop doing wrong.

"Not so that we may appear approved, but so that you may do what is good, though we may be as unapproved." This shows Paul's selfless heart. If the Corinthians repented, Paul would not need to come with power and prove his authority. Some might then say he never showed he was an apostle. Paul does not care. He would rather look weak and have them do right than look strong by having to punish them. A good leader cares more about his people's holiness than his own reputation.

13:8 *For we cannot **do** anything against the truth, but for the truth.*

"For we cannot do anything against the truth, but for the truth." Paul is bound by the truth. He cannot use his authority to go against what is true and right. Everything he does must serve the truth.

This means Paul would never punish someone who had repented, or act unfairly to protect himself. His authority only works in line with God's truth. That is a good guardrail for every leader. True spiritual authority never works against the truth. Whenever a leader uses his position to cover up wrong or to punish the innocent, he has stepped outside his authority.

13:9 *For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong; and this also we pray **for**, your perfection.*

"For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong." Paul is glad to be weak if it means the Corinthians are strong in faith and obedience. He would rather not have to use his power against them. If they are strong, he can come in gentleness.

"And this also we pray for, your perfection." The word for perfection means being restored, made complete, put back in order. It was used for setting broken bones and mending torn nets (Mark 1:19). Paul prays that the church would be mended and made whole. That was the goal of everything he wrote.

13:10 *Because of this I write these things while absent, so that when present I may not deal severely, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for demolition.*

"Because of this I write these things while absent, so that when present I may not deal severely." This verse explains the whole letter, and especially chapters 10 to 13. Paul wrote strongly now so that he would not have to act strongly later. He was giving them every chance to repent before he arrived.

"According to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for demolition." Paul repeats what he said in 10:8. His authority from the Lord was meant to build up, not tear down. Discipline, when it must come, is meant to restore, not destroy. That is how God disciplines His children too (Hebrews 12:10-11). He wounds to heal.

13:11 *Finally, brothers, rejoice, be perfected, be comforted, think the same **thing**, be at peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

"Finally, brothers, rejoice, be perfected, be comforted, think the same thing, be at peace." Paul ends with five short commands. Rejoice: even after all the trouble, there is reason for joy in Christ. Be perfected: be restored and made complete, the same word as in verse 9. Be comforted: receive the comfort God gives, which Paul spoke of in chapter 1. Think the same thing: be of one mind, united in Christ. Be at peace: stop the quarrels and live in peace with one another.

"And the God of love and peace will be with you." This is the only place in the New Testament where God is called "the God of love and peace." When we obey these commands, we will know His presence among us in a special way. A church full of joy, unity, and peace is a church where God's presence is felt.

13:12-13 *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.*

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." In Paul's day, a kiss on the cheek was a common greeting among family and close friends, as it still is in many parts of the world. Among believers it showed that they were one family in Christ. Paul calls it holy, meaning it was to be pure, sincere, and free of any wrong motive. In our culture a warm handshake or a hug often does the same job. What matters is a real, pure love for one another.

"All the saints greet you." The believers with Paul in Macedonia sent their greetings. The Corinthians were not alone. They were part of a family of churches across the world. Some Bibles number these two sentences as one verse, which is why the verse numbers at the end of this chapter differ in some translations.

13:14 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit **be** with you all. Amen.*

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." Paul ends with one of the most beautiful blessings in the Bible. It names the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, three Persons who are one God. It is one of the clearest places in the New Testament where all three are named side by side.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is His undeserved favor, seen most clearly at the cross (8:9). The love of God is the Father's love, the source of our salvation (John 3:16). The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the sharing, the partnership, that the Spirit creates between us and God, and among believers. And Paul prays this for you all, every one of them, even those who had opposed him. After thirteen chapters of tears, defense, and warning, Paul's last word is grace. That is how God always deals with His people. The last word is grace.

Chapter 13 Summary

Paul is coming to Corinth a third time, and every charge will be established by two or three witnesses. He has warned those who keep on sinning, and he will not spare them if they do not repent. Some wanted proof that Christ spoke through Paul, and Paul says they will see it, because

Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God, and Paul, weak in Him, will live with Him by God's power. Paul tells them to test themselves to see whether they are in the faith and to recognize that Jesus Christ is in them. He prays that they will do no wrong and will do what is right, even if he seems to fail the test, because he can do nothing against the truth. He rejoices to be weak if they are strong, and he prays for their restoration. He writes this while absent so that when he comes he will not need to be severe, since his authority is for building up, not tearing down. He closes with a call to rejoice, be restored, be comforted, agree, and live in peace, with greetings, and with a blessing naming the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What rule from the Law of Moses does Paul quote in 13:1, and why does he use it?

2. What warning does Paul give those who keep on sinning? (13:2)

3. What proof were some in Corinth asking for? (13:3)

4. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus show the pattern of weakness and power? (13:4)

5. What does Paul tell the Corinthians to do in 13:5, and why does he turn their question around?

6. Why does Paul pray that they will do right, even if he seems unapproved? (13:7)

7. What does Paul say his authority was given for? (13:10; compare 10:8)

8. What five commands does Paul give in 13:11, and what promise goes with them?

9. If you were to test yourself honestly (13:5), what signs of Christ's life in you would you look for?

10. The letter ends with grace, love, and fellowship (13:14). Which of these do you most need to receive, or show to someone else, this week?

Conclusion

2 Corinthians is Paul's heart laid open. In the first seven chapters, he told a hurting church about the God of all comfort, explained why he changed his plans and wrote with tears, and showed them what real ministry looks like: ministers of a new covenant, clay jars carrying a priceless treasure, ambassadors pleading with the world to be reconciled to God. In chapters 8 and 9, he called them to the grace of giving, following the Lord Jesus, who became poor so that we might become rich. In the last four chapters, he defended his apostleship against false apostles who preached another Jesus, and he boasted, not in his strength, but in his weakness.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with 2 Corinthians, one lesson rises above the rest. God's power does not depend on our strength. The false apostles in Corinth looked impressive, spoke well, and boasted loudly. Paul was beaten, poor, plain in speech, and carrying a thorn God would not remove. Yet God's power rested on Paul. The Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (12:9). That is still true for every believer who feels weak, worn out, or overlooked.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you in whatever you are carrying. Our outer man is wearing out, but our inner man is being renewed day by day, and our light and momentary affliction is producing an eternal weight of glory (4:16-17). One day every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (5:10). Until then, our ambition is to please Him, to live for the One who died for us and rose again, and to carry the message of reconciliation to a world that needs it.

Paul's message is the same for us today as it was for the believers in Corinth. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new" (5:17). How does that happen? "For He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (5:21). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation" (6:2).

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve. You are a new creation in Christ, and now you are His ambassador too (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

Old and New Testament Links in 2 Corinthians

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
3:3	Jeremiah 31:33	alluded to
3:3	Proverbs 3:3	alluded to
3:3	Ezekiel 36:26	alluded to
3:3	Ezekiel 11:19	alluded to
3:3	Exodus 31:18	alluded to
3:3	Deuteronomy 9:10	alluded to
3:6	Jeremiah 31:31	alluded to
3:7	Exodus 34:29-30	alluded to
3:13	Exodus 34:33-35	alluded to
3:16	Exodus 34:34	alluded to
4:6	Genesis 1:3	alluded to
4:13	Psalm 116:10	quoted
5:10	Ecclesiastes 12:14	alluded to
5:17	Isaiah 43:19	alluded to
5:17	Isaiah 65:17	alluded to
6:2	Isaiah 49:8	quoted
6:9	Psalm 118:18	alluded to
6:14	Deuteronomy 22:10	alluded to
6:16	Leviticus 26:12	quoted
6:16	Ezekiel 37:27	quoted
6:17	Isaiah 52:11	quoted
6:18	2 Samuel 7:14	quoted
6:18	1 Chronicles 17:13	quoted
6:18	Isaiah 43:6	alluded to
7:6	Isaiah 49:13	alluded to
8:15	Exodus 16:18	quoted
9:9	Psalm 112:9	quoted
9:10	Isaiah 55:10	alluded to
10:17	Jeremiah 9:24	quoted
11:3	Genesis 3:1	alluded to
11:3	Genesis 3:13	alluded to
11:24-25	Deuteronomy 25:3	alluded to
13:1	Deuteronomy 19:15	quoted

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, about 1830. Public domain.

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