

2 CORINTHIANS BOOK OF TREASURES



2 CORINTHIANS 1:1 - 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

PART 1

**TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL
HELPS**

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Chapter 1. The Beginning of a Passionate Letter

2 Corinthians 1:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

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

We now open the curtain on Paul's most intensely personal and deeply emotional letter, the **book of 2 Corinthians**. Nowhere is Paul's heart so torn and exposed as in this letter.

Second Corinthians bears a fierce tone of injured love, of wounded, relentless affection. **The first letter to the Corinthian church *removed* the roof of the church** where we could look into what was going on in this church with all of its many problems.

This second letter to the Corinthians *reveals* Paul's great love for the people and his concern for the Lord's work. The first letter reveals Paul as the instructor who answers questions and sets 117-matters right. In this letter, he is the loving pastor pouring out his life so his spiritual children might spiritually mature and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. **This letter gives a clear, focused view of Christian ministry and says a great deal about Christian suffering, service, giving, and spiritual victory.**

What was Corinth like? What was the atmosphere like that this church was facing?

Corinth was one of the most celebrated cities of Greece. Corinth exceeded all the cities of the world, for the splendor and magnificence of its public buildings, such as temples, palaces, theaters, porticos, baths, and other edifices. These buildings were all enriched with beautiful columns, capitals, and bases, from which the Corinthian order in architecture took its rise.

Corinth is also celebrated for its statues, especially of **Venus, Neptune, Diana, and Apollo**. The temple of Venus was not only very splendid, but also very rich, and maintained not less than 1000 courtesans (*prostitutes*), who were the means of bringing an immense concourse of strangers to the place. The population of Corinth was largely immigrants and opportunists who were seeking a better life. Corinth became the popular answer to Rome's overpopulation. A large portion of the population consisted of freed slaves. Ex-Roman soldiers seeking a better life for their families were drawn to Corinth.

The wealth and financial prosperity of the people led to corruption and perversion. In fact, Nero felt very comfortable here. He never visited Sparta or Athens, but he spent a lot of time in Corinth.

The Corinthians were as lewd as they were learned. Public prostitution formed a considerable part of their religion. They were accustomed in their public prayers to request their pagan gods to multiply their prostitutes! They did not think there was anything wrong with having sexual encounters with these temple prostitutes because they considered it as an act of worship to their gods.

In fact, the Greek word “**to Corinthianize**” came to mean “**to practice sexual immorality.**” This was the philosophy and mentality that Paul encountered when he preached here.

Sports were also important to the Corinthians. Every five years the **Isthmian games** were held. These games were only second to the **Olympic Games**. Athletes competed in running, throwing, leaping, and wrestling. Paul alludes to these games in different parts of his epistles.

The city embraced the commerce of the whole Mediterranean Sea, from the straits of Gibraltar on the west to the port of Alexandria on the east, with the coasts of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor.

Corinth was destroyed in **146 B.C.** by the Romans and had remained uninhabited for a hundred years, **until 44 B.C.** when **Julius Caesar** rebuilt it. So when Paul visited the rebuilt Corinth in **49-50 A.D.**, it was just over eighty years old with a population of some **80,000** people. Yet, during its short history, this city had become the third most important city of the Roman Empire, behind Alexandria and Rome itself. Situated on the isthmus of Greece, it was variously called “**The Master of Harbors**” or “**The Crossroads of Greece.**” This background information will bring clarity to some of the passages we will encounter as we read through the Corinthian letters.

The questions we want to address now are these, “**Why did Paul write this second letter? What was he trying to accomplish?**” Paul had several purposes in mind when he wrote **2nd Corinthians**.

1. To Commend their Actions:

He commended the church for disciplining an immoral member of the church and encouraged them to forgive and restore him when he repented. ([1 Corinthians 5](#); [2 Corinthians 2:6-11](#))

2. A Change in Plans is Explained:

He intended to visit them but there was a change in plans. ([1 Corinthians 16:3-7](#); [2 Corinthians 1:15-22](#)).

3. A Challenge is Answered:

Paul’s authority as an apostle was being questioned. ([2 Corinthians 10-12](#)).

4. To Compose a Plan for his visit:

He wrote them to prepare them for his planned visit. ([2 Corinthians 13](#))

5. To Coax or Cheer the Church to Give:

He encouraged them to give to the Jerusalem saints. ([2 Corinthians 8-9](#))

6. To Contradict Accusations that were False:

Paul was being accused of wrong motives ([2 Corinthians 4:1-2](#)). There were a majority of folks that had repented of their sins in the church and dealt with their sin problems thoroughly.

There was a minority in the church, however, who challenged Paul's authority, suspected his motives, and questioned the validity of his ministry. Paul's response to these believers is an amazing mixture of tender love and stern rebuke.

The book of [2nd Corinthians](#) is a great book and filled with wonderful, treasured truths.

Here are some of the treasures we will dig up for inspection and admiration.

1. The Treasure of our Stability and Showing Forth Christ

[2 Corinthians 4:8-11 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ ***we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;***

⁹ ***persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;***

¹⁰ ***always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.***

¹¹ ***For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.***

After conducting Beethoven's magnificent Ninth Symphony, Arturo Toscanini brought down his baton to a burst of applause. The audience went crazy and roared its approval. Toscanini and his orchestra took repeated bows. When the cheering finally subsided, Toscanini turned back to his musicians and leaned over the podium. Voicing his words in whispers, he said to them: "**Gentlemen, I am nothing.... Gentlemen, you are nothing..... but Beethoven.... Beethoven is everything, everything, everything!**"

Beloved, the principle here is the same for us. No matter who you are or what you have accomplished, you are nothing, but the Lord Jesus Christ is everything! When that gets cemented in our minds, we won't even try to be first or to be a big shot. We'll just be satisfied to be the least of saints used in the hands of God Almighty. Jesus put it this way, "**Without me, you can do nothing.**"

[John 15:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ ***I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.***

2. The Treasure of Suffering's Purpose

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,
¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

3. The Treasure of our Substitute

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

4. The Treasure of the Seat of Judgment

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

5. The Treasure of Spiritual Rebirth

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

6. The Treasure of the Sweetness of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NASB)

⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

7. The Treasure of our Spiritual Weapons

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (NASB)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,
⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

8. The Treasure of our Sufficiency and Satisfaction.

2 Corinthians 3:5 (NASB)

⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

9. The Treasure of Servanthood

2 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

Our servanthood to Christ is expressed in our servanthood to others.

10. The Treasure of Separation

2 Corinthians 6:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

11. The Treasure of Strength when we are Weak

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

The gospel does not ride on health and wealth but on weakness. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not one of splash and flash, but of meekness and weakness in the believer.

The Christian life is full of paradox. In giving, we receive and in losing, we find. In dying, we live. Meekness brings strength into our lives and weakness puts power on display.

George Matheson was the author of the song “*Oh Love that will not Let me Go.*” Like the Apostle Paul, Matheson had his own thorn in the flesh and source of affliction. **Born in 1842, in Glasgow, Scotland,** George had eye trouble throughout his entire childhood. By the time he entered the ministry, he was almost totally blind. Yet, for 40 years he preached the Word of God all throughout Scotland. Because of his ability to memorize his sermons and large portions of Scripture, many folks did not realize he was blind. George recorded the lessons he learned from his difficulties and trials in his journal *Thoughts for Life’s Journey*.

Here are some thoughts he wrote:

My soul, reject not the place of thy prostration! It has ever been the robing room for royalty. Ask the great ones of the past what has been the spot of their prosperity. They will say, “It was the cold ground on which I once was lying.”

1. **Ask Abraham;** he will point you to the sacrifice of Moriah.
2. **Ask Joseph;** he will direct you to his dungeon.
3. **Ask Moses;** he will date his fortune from his danger in the Nile.
4. **Ask Ruth;** she will bid you to build her monument in the field of her toil.
5. **Ask David;** he will tell you that his songs came from the night.
6. **Ask Job;** he will remind you that God answered him out of the whirlwind.
7. **Ask Peter;** he will extol his submission in the sea.
8. **Ask John;** he will give the palm to the Isle of Patmos.
9. **Ask Paul;** he will attribute his inspiration to the light that struck him blind.
10. **Ask one more, the Son of Man;** Ask Him whence has come His rule over the world. He will answer, “From the cold ground on which I was lying, the Gethsemane ground; I received my scepter there.”

George Matheson, along with Paul, recognized that God’s power is perfected in weakness, not in degrees or diplomas, not in accomplishments or accolades, not in wealth or in wisdom, but in weakness.

It is the leg that limps which leans on something other than itself for support. So God may touch our leg so we might learn to lean on Him. **Do you rely or lean upon the Lord in your life? How dependent are you upon Him to live day by day?** This is the challenge of Scripture.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ **Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.**

⁶ **In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.**

Philippians 4:6 (NASB)

⁶ **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

1 Peter 5:7 (NASB)

⁷ casting all your anxiety [cares] on Him, because He cares for you.

As this letter opens, in the first two verses, Paul addresses his relationship with God, our relationship with one another, and our relationship with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

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

Paul addresses his apostleship right up front and his relationship with God. He takes the bull by the horns and gets down to business. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. What does this mean? The Greek word for “**apostle**” is *apostolos*, which is used 80 times in the Bible. An *apostolos* was a person sent by an authority with a commission, such as an ambassador. Cargo ships were called apostolic ships because they were dispatched with a specific shipment with a specific destination. The idea of the word “**missionary**” comes from the word “**apostle**.” We are to be like apostles in the sense that we are ambassadors for Christ, missionaries sent to this world for a specific mission.

An apostle of Jesus Christ, such as Paul, met several requirements.

1. He was chosen by God ([Acts 9:15](#)).

Acts 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

2. He was personally commissioned by Jesus Christ ([Acts 9:6](#)).

Acts 9:6 (NASB)

⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.

3. He had seen the risen Savior ([1 Corinthians 9:1-2](#)).

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

² If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

4. He was a recipient of divine revelation ([Galatians 1:10-12](#)).

Galatians 1:10-12 (NASB)

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

¹¹ For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

There were never many of them and there has not been any for almost two thousand years. The voice of the last apostle was silenced when John died of old age at Ephesus. **There are no apostles today because no one meets these requirements.** We have God's complete revelation of truth in the Scriptures.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. He did not appoint himself as one. He was chosen by God to represent and be an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not apostles, but we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. We are to be telling others about Him.

Paul addresses our relationship with one another by speaking of Timothy. Timothy is a brother in the Lord. The messenger of God is not above other servants; he is a brother to all other servants. Regardless of his call and ministry, he is one among all brothers who serve under the will of God.

Romans 12:3 (NASB)

³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Philippians 2:3-4 (NASB)

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

This letter was not intended exclusively for the Christians in Corinth, but also for all the believers scattered through the province who were connected with the church in Corinth. Paul is not addressing a single house church; rather, he is speaking to the church of God that is represented in the city of Corinth through many house churches and throughout Achaia.

Caesar Augustus divided Greece into two provinces, **Macedonia** and **Achaia**. **Macedonia** included **Illyricum**, **Epirus**, and **Thessaly** (much of what we call **Yugoslavia**) while **Achaia** referred to all the southern part of Greece, including **Corinth**, **Cenchreae**, and **Athens**. There were believers scattered all throughout the region of **Achaia**.

Paul greets them by wishing them grace and peace:

2 Corinthians 1:2 (NASB)

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

This was the common greeting that Paul and other New Testament writers extended to the early Christians who received their letters.

The word “**grace**” conveys the idea of “**Good day to you,**” or “**I am so glad to see you.**” The New Testament writers, however, give the term “*charis*,” the Greek word for “**grace**,” a spiritual connotation that relates to God’s indispensable blessing extended to the recipient.

Grace is God’s great kindness toward those who are undeserving of His favor but who have placed their faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace flows from God. As oil makes a machine function smoothly, so the grace that comes from God facilitates the relationship between Himself and the believer.

Paul wishes them “**peace**” also. Grace is the fountain of which peace is the stream. Because we have **grace from God** we have **peace *with* God** and the **peace *of* God**.

Philippians 4:7 (NASB)

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The word “**peace**” is a translation of the Hebrew greeting “**Shalom**.” **Shalom** has a deeper meaning than just “**peace**.” In context, the word intimates absence of tension between two parties and the presence of goodwill. Further, the Hebrew expression connotes **completeness, prosperity, ease, health**.

The one who sends greetings, therefore, wishes that the recipient may enjoy both spiritual and material prosperity. Where do these blessings come from? The answer is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to know God’s peace, then you must know Him and receive His saving grace. Put your faith in Christ today.

Chapter 2. Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's People

2 Corinthians 1:3-11 (NASB)

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

⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

⁶ But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer;

⁷ and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*.

Paul was an outstanding Christian who was committed to doing the will of God in his life. Even though he loved the Lord and was probably one of the greatest Christians that ever lived, he had bad things happen to him. He faced circumstances that were *terrible, traumatic, taxing, trying, and terrifying*.

Why would the Lord allow these awful things to happen to such a wonderful, godly man? Why does He allow bad things to happen to you? The answer to these questions are found here at the dawn of **2 Corinthians**.

Let's answer the question on why bad things happen to God's people. As we journey through this chapter, **we will find that God uses our trials to teach us vital lessons.**

I. OUR PERILS ARE NOT AN OBSTACLE TO GOD'S CARE FOR US—[2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)

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

⁴ who **comforts** us in all our affliction so that we will be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God.

Lesson one is this, **“In spite of what you are facing, the Lord can comfort you. Your perils are not an obstacle to Him.”**

He is worthy of our praise and all the blessings from our lips because He is a blessing. Because of the work of Jesus Christ, we have hope and comfort.

The title **“Lord Jesus Christ”** summarizes all of His redemptive work. The word **“Lord”** describes His sovereign deity. Jesus is God. The word **“Jesus”** (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name **Yeshua**; **“God saves”**) describes His saving death and resurrection.

The word **“Christ”** (**“anointed one”**) describes Him as the King who will defeat God's enemies and rule over the redeemed earth and the eternal kingdom. Our Lord is the God of ALL comfort because of His power and care over our lives. **He is to be praised and blessed by our lips for many reasons.**

Here are a few.

1. Because He gives and He also takes away.

[Job 1:21 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

2. Because of the spiritual blessings He gives us.

[Ephesians 1:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

3. Because we have been born again to a living hope.

[1 Peter 1:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4. Because He lives. We serve a living Savior, not a dead god.

Psalms 18:46 (NASB)

⁴⁶The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; And exalted be the God of my salvation,

Let me share a true story with you that I had read years ago, to help you better understand this point. In the late 1960s, while expecting their third child, Bill and Gloria Gaither were going through a traumatic time. Their firstborn, Suzanne, was 4, and her sister Amy was three months old. The timing for another baby wasn't ideal. On top of that, Bill was recovering from a bout with mononucleosis. The breakup of the marriage of Bill's sister, Mary Ann, had left his family devastated. What's more, a close friend's accusation that Bill and Gloria were using their ministry just to make a buck blindsided the couple and plunged Bill into a deep depression.

Gloria also remembers it as a time of fear and sadness. The educational system was being infiltrated with the **"God is dead"** idea, while drug abuse and racial tension were increasing. The thought of bringing another child into the world was taking its toll. But after a simple prayer by one of Bill's close friends—a prayer that commanded the devil to back off—both Bill and Gloria recall that the strength of the Holy Spirit seemed to come to their aid. Christ's resurrection, in all its power, was reaffirmed in their hearts. They were assured that the future, left in God's hands, would be just fine.

In July, 1970, a healthy baby, Benjamin, was born. Inspired by the miracle of their son's birth, **"Because He Lives"** poured out of the Gaithers' grateful hearts. The song clearly affirms the hope believers have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Precious praise for God poured forth from the pen of Bill like treasured oil from West Texas sand, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know who holds the future, my life is worth the living, just because He lives."

People turn to all sorts of things for comfort. There is a whiskey called "Southern Comfort." Southern Comfort Whiskey is not going to comfort you my friend. It will eventually ruin your marriage, your home, and your job. Others turn to drugs for comfort, but there is no comfort there. True comfort comes from God. We have a lot to be thankful for, even though we may be facing trials in our life. Our Lord is the God of all comfort and can help us to overcome our fears, terrors of the past, bad dreams, and failures.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

⁴who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

This word **"comfort"** is the key word in this section. It occurs ten times as a noun or verb. The word **"comfort"** inspires the thought of agreeable temperatures, of being in a warm home during the winter, or of enjoying cool relief from the heat in summer.

We think of comfortable living quarters equipped with modern appliances and conveniences. We reflect on enjoyable experiences in the past and on a feeling of contentment in the present. However, the term “**comfort**” which is derived from the Latin words *con* and *forte*, means “**to make strong together.**” It shows a *relational* aspect that greatly overshadows the idea of individualistic comfort. The word “**comfort**” implies that one party strengthens another. For instance, medical doctors and nurses aid their patients in recovery from physical ailments or a counselor helps a person to overcome periods of depression.

In the Greek language, the word “**comfort**” means much more than mere sympathy. It is from the Greek word *paraklesis* {*par-ak'-lay-sis*}. This word communicates the idea of one person standing alongside another to encourage and support his friend. The same word describes the Holy Spirit who is at our side through thick or thin, up or down, fear or courage, rich or poor, sick or healthy. The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter or our *Parakletos*.

This word “**Comforter**” comes from the Greek word *parakaleo*, a verb which means “**to encourage.**” This verb, *parakaleo* was used several ways in Greek literature which reveals the work of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and why we have great comfort from the Lord.

a) It was used to call an advocate into court.

The Greek word for advocate is *parakletos*. The word “*para*” means “**along side**” and “*kaleo*” means “**to call.**” John was the only one who used this term in the New Testament. The “*parakletos*” was the one called alongside to assist, help, defend, or intercede on the behalf of another or to give counsel. The advocate counseled, coached, and championed the cause of another in court. He was a helper, supporter, and a witness giving favorable testimony. In Rome, boys of good families replaced their toga with a purple stripe at the age of seventeen and put on a white toga of a man. They were then presented as speakers or advocates in the courts. Our Lord is our advocate and defends us against the accusations of Satan.

1 John 2:1 (NASB)

¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

The *parakletos* was also one who lent his presence to his friends. In a military court martial, the officer who defended the accused soldier was called the prisoner’s friend. The *parakletos* was also called in to help in a situation with which a man by himself could not cope alone. The Lord is our friend too. He is a friend that sticks closer than a brother and helps us to cope with conflicts, concerns, and when we are crushed by utter despair and feelings of betrayal and worthlessness.

b) It was used to call in a coach to train a team at his own expense.

He counsels and gives advice to the team. The Holy Spirit is our trainer and teacher too, giving us direction in our lives. He shows us what to do if we will let Him lead us.

John 16:13 (NASB)

¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

John 14:26 (NASB)

²⁶ But the Helper [Comforter], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

c) It was used to call in the Greek gods as helpers.

The Holy Spirit is our helper ([Hebrews 13:6](#)).

Hebrews 13:6 (NASB)

⁶ so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”

d) It was the word of the rallying cry.

It was used in speeches of the leaders and soldiers who urged or encouraged each other in battle. *Parakaleo* meant to challenge the timid soldiers to fight on courageously. This is what the soldiers who were fighting for the independence of Texas did when they shouted “**Remember the Alamo!**” The Holy Spirit gives us boldness to live for Christ and do His will ([Acts 4:31](#)). The Holy Spirit cheers us on to face everyday life with courage and to go forward with our lives in spite of the tragedies and defeats of our past.

Acts 4:31 (NASB)

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

The *parakletos* then, is an encourager. He is one who puts courage into the faint-hearted and makes an ordinary man cope with dangerous, difficult situations. He is a helper, counselor, and the One who stands by you. He puts courage into the faint hearted. He keeps a man on his feet when, if left to himself, he would collapse. He encourages a man to pass the breaking point. Such is what the Holy Spirit and Jesus do for us.

The Lord is our encourager and comforter. No matter what difficulty we face, He has the ability and power to comfort us. Have you lost a loved one in death? The Lord can comfort you! Have you failed or suffered a defeat? He can and will come to your side. Have you faced a traumatic experience that has left you insecure or afraid?

The Spirit of God will restore your joy if you will surrender your life and problems to Him. Don't turn your back on the Lord because of your trials. Embrace Him and trust in Him. This is what Job did in spite of all of his sufferings. He was determined to trust God no matter what.

Job 13:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.”**

In **1858**, Scottish missionary **John G. Paton** and his wife sailed for the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu). Three months after arriving on the island of Tanna, his wife died. One week later his infant son also died. Paton was plunged into sorrow. Feeling terribly alone, and surrounded by savage people who showed him no sympathy, he wrote, *“Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me. As for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows... but for Jesus, and His fellowship, I would have gone mad and died.”*

Paton's trials were terrible, abominable, deplorable, detestable, formidable, horrible, irritable, and miserable. He was able, however, to cope with his complications because God's comfort was accessible, acquirable, available, credible, and possible. Beloved, because our perils are not an obstacle to His comfort, our trials are bearable, tolerable, and we can be comfortable in His care. We not only enjoy comfort from the Lord through the Spirit of God who indwells us, but also through the Word of God. This is why it is so important to read the Bible.

Romans 15:4 (NASB)

⁴ **For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

Psalms 119:50-52 (NASB)

⁵⁰ **This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me.**

⁵¹ **The arrogant utterly deride me, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law.**

⁵² **I have remembered Your ordinances from of old, O Lord, And comfort myself.**

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

⁴who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Our Lord comforts us in all our tribulations and afflictions. This word “afflictions” is from the Greek word *thlipsis* {*thlip'-sis*}. It means “pressure, tribulation, distress, affliction, or pressing together.” **R. C. Trench** writes, “*When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were so pressed and crushed to death, this was literally thlipsis.*”

Sometimes there falls upon a man’s spirit the burden and the mystery of this unintelligible world. In the early years of Christianity, the man who chose to become a Christian chose to face trouble, trials, and tribulation. There might well come to him abandonment by his own family, hostility from his heathen neighbors, and persecution from governmental authorities. In spite of the hurricanes of Hell, believers can anchor themselves to the comfort that God provides in such harrowing circumstance. The promise to all believers is that God will faithfully sustain and strengthen them as long as they are obedient to His will, until His appointed time to bring them to Himself. Notice what Paul said later in this letter about the comfort of God in tribulations.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NASB)

⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

⁸we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

¹¹For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Philip Crosby, in his book *March Till They Die*, tells of a forced march of American and European soldiers in Korea. In November of 1950, the North Koreans were being pushed north, and they were taking with them the Americans and Europeans they had captured as prisoners of war. It was a terrible march. They were forced to go sometimes twenty miles a day though they were emaciated, hungry, and suffering.

Soldiers who couldn’t keep up would fall back, and shots rang out. They had been executed. **Philip Crosby** and his friends, as they passed close to those GI’s who were having a hard time keeping up, would say slowly in a comforting whisper, “God is near us in this dark hour. His love is real. His mercy is real. His forgiveness is real. His reward is waiting for us.”

Beloved, are bad things happening to you? God is near, His love is real, His mercy is real, His forgiveness is real, His reward and blessing are waiting for you. Our Lord allows bad things to happen to us to show us this is true. Our problems are not an obstacle to His comfort.

II. PREPARATION IS BEING MADE TO COMFORT OTHERS— [2 Corinthians 1:4-7](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:4-7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

⁶ But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer;

⁷ and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

Another reason why bad things happen to God's people is the Lord is using our trials to *prepare us for ministry*. He is equipping us to comfort others down the road of our future. Paul put it this way, "That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble." Again, the Greek word *parakaleo* is used here for "comfort," which means "to call to one's side, to encourage."

God allows us to go through the *School of Hard Knocks* to make us "soft and tender," that we may be enabled to tenderly comfort others who need it. We are not comforted to be *comfortable* but to be *comforters*. Our trials are for the benefit of others, for their comfort and salvation.

A godless ruler confirmed this truth and did not even realize it. **Adoniram Judson**, the renowned missionary to **Burma**, endured untold hardships trying to reach the lost for the Lord Jesus Christ. For seven heartbreaking years he suffered hunger and privation. During this time he was thrown into Ava Prison, and for 17 months he was subjected to incredible mistreatment. As a result, for the rest of his life he carried the ugly marks made by the chains and iron shackles which had cruelly bound him.

Undaunted, upon his release he asked for permission to enter another province where he might resume preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The godless ruler indignantly denied his request, saying "*My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might SAY, but I fear they might be impressed by your SCARS and turn to your religion!*" This ruler realized that suffering amplifies the message of the one who is speaking.

Beloved, God does use our suffering to bring about the salvation and comfort of others. In fact, many times people will not give a Christian the time of day, they will not open their hearts or their ears until they witness the life of that Christian when he is on the stage of suffering. Suffering sifts the chaff of hypocrisy from the lives of people. Hypocrisy provides a foundation of sand, not rock. Your life will crash like a house built on sand when the storms clash against your phoniness.

On the other hand, when those without Christ witness our faith, peace, joy, and strength, when we are going through the hurricanes of suffering, then they have a sense of security they are witnessing a Christian that is real, authentic, and that his message is truly genuine. If they come to this conclusion, they are more prone to believe that Jesus Christ is the answer and solution to the needs they have in their own lives and put their faith in Him. Paul told us that people are reading our lives.

2 Corinthians 3:2 (NASB)

²You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

Paul is revealing here in [2 Corinthians chapter one](#), the secret of combating **depression and discouragement**. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself and remaining down in the dumps, go to the side of another, encourage them, and emotionally and spiritually lift them up. Turn your *misery, your melancholy, your mourning, your misfortune, your maladies, and your mishaps into ministry!* Use the burden of your brokenness and bitter pain to be a blessing! Like a sprinter on a track relay team that passes his baton to the next runner on the team, we are to pass the baton of comfort to those who need our love and help. When God uses you to invest your life into another, it creates a ripple effect. The person you comfort can be used to be a blessing to someone else. The comfort they receive from God, they can pass to another.

2 Corinthians 1:5 (NASB)

⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

In verse five, Paul reveals the *proportion* of the comfort we receive from God. He said, *“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”* He shows us that the cares of life cannot outdo the grace of God. The greater our suffering and affliction, the greater will be our comfort from the Lord. God's salve is in proportion to the extent of our wounds. That salve is stored in the believer so that at the appropriate time he might dispense it to another in need.

Paul assured the Corinthians as they shared in Paul's suffering, they would share in God's comfort too. God has grace, strength, and encouragement to meet any circumstance that we may face because He has already been where we are now.

The Lord knows what it is like to be you.

1. He knows what it is to be human.
2. He knows what it is to suffer.
3. He knows what it is to be rejected and betrayed.
4. He knows what it is like to be poor and homeless.
5. He knows what it is like to be falsely accused and slandered.

If you want to hear God's voice speak, allow your soul to be quieted long enough so that you can hear the One who was in the beginning say to you, "Draw near to me and I'll draw near to you."

Our Lord knows the depth, dread, and the dregs of suffering. One day an unbeliever vented his rage upon a Christian who was trying to comfort an unsaved man in his grief. The unbeliever snarled, "Where was your God when my son was killed?" Quietly and wisely the Christian replied, "He was in the same place as when His son was killed." Beloved, our Lord is no stranger to suffering even though He is God.

Hebrews 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

The ministry of comfort and encouragement is amply seen in a story about Natalie Gilbert. When 13-year-old Natalie Gilbert was asked to sing "**The Star-Spangled Banner**" at a nationally televised NBA Western Conference playoff game, it was a dream come true. But what happened on the day of her performance was more like a nightmare. On April 25, 2003, Natalie bravely stood alone at mid-court in Portland's Rose Garden Arena. As she began to belt out the familiar words of the national anthem before a capacity crowd, however, her mind went blank. She forgot the words. Closing her eyes and shaking her head, she appeared on the verge of tears.

At that moment **Maurice Cheeks**, the head coach of the Portland Trailblazers, walked toward her. Cheeks put his arm around the girl and began singing with her. He told CBS Sportsline, "I didn't even know if I knew all the words, but as many times as I've heard the national anthem, I just went over and continued to sing. The words started coming back to me and I just tried to help her out." As he reminded the girl of the lyrics she'd forgotten, he encouraged the crowd to sing along and they did. Together, the whole arena made it all the way through, to "the home of the brave."

What was an ordinary situation turned into an extraordinary situation of urgency and need for comfort and assistance. The need of one brought forth the comfort and encouragement of many. I dare say that people, who normally didn't sing *The Star Spangled Banner*, sang it on that day. Beloved, this is a great story of how we are to come to the side of others in order to encourage and comfort them, not just watch them flounder in fear, frustration, and failure.

We have seen so far that God allows bad things to happen to His people for several reasons.

1. *To show that our Perils are Not an Obstacle to God's Care for Us*
2. *To Prepare Us for Ministry and to Comfort Others*
3. *Thirdly, to get us to Place our Trust in God when we are Under Pressure*

III. OUR PRESSURES ARE TO PROMOTE A TRUST IN GOD—[2 Corinthians 1:8-10](#)

God also allows bad things to happen to God's people to teach them to trust in God when pressure comes into their lives. Paul uses a personal illustration to teach this truth to the Corinthians and to assure them they can seek refuge in the Lord and He will care for them. When Paul was in Asia, he went through the ringer. You talk about pressure, he went through it. Notice his description of his ordeal.

A. They were Crushed

[2 Corinthians 1:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

Paul was overwhelmed and pressured beyond his own ability to endure. He was “**burdened excessively.**” What does he mean? These words come from the Greek word *bareo* {*bar-eh'-o*} which means “**to burden, to depress or weigh down; to overcome.**” Paul was weighed down beyond what was credible, even beyond what any natural strength could support. His circumstances were bad. He was pressed out of measure or beyond his own ability to cope with the situation. Can you relate to what he was going through? There is no part of St. Paul's history known to us which can justify these strong expressions, except his being stoned at the city of Lystra. If Lystra is not what he is talking about, the facts to which he refers are not on record.

B. They were Confounded and felt Confined

[2 Corinthians 1:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

A college student shared this story while attending college. He visited a psychiatric institution with a group of students to observe various types of mental illness. The experience proved to be very disturbing. He remembered one man who was called “No Hope Carter.” His was a tragic case. A victim of venereal disease, he was going through the final stages when the brain is affected by the disease. Before he began to lose his mind, this man was told by the doctors that there was no known cure for him.

He begged for one ray of light in his darkness, but had been told that the disease would run its inevitable course and end in death.

Gradually his brain deteriorated and he became more and more despondent. When the student saw him in his small, barred room about 2 weeks before he died, he was pacing up and down in mental agony. His eyes stared blankly, and his face was drawn and ashen. Over and over he muttered these two forlorn and fateful words: “**No hope! No hope!**” He said nothing else, and no one could pierce the veil of darkness that enveloped him. The despair that this man faced was very close to what Paul felt in his own life.

The trials and pressures were so intense for Paul that living became a burden. He despaired of life. The word “**despaired**” is from the Greek word *exaporeomai* {*ex-ap-or-eh'-om-ah-ee*} which means “to be utterly at loss, to be utterly destitute of measures or resources, to renounce all hope, to be in despair or perplexed; to have no passage, no exit or escape.” Paul saw no escape from the desperate situation that threatened his life. He felt trapped. Have you ever felt this way?

In the 1800’s **Christina Georgina Rossetti** penned these words of desperation. Perhaps you can relate to her.

*I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf
O Jesus, quicken me.*

C. They were Convinced

2 Corinthians 1:9 (NASB)

⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

Paul’s circumstances were so bad that he truly believed that he was going to die. The word rendered “**sentence**” is from the Greek word *apokrima* {*ap-ok'-ree-mah*} which means properly “**an answer, a judicial response, or sentence.**” Here it is synonymous with “**verdict.**” Paul felt that he was condemned to die for the sake of the Gospel. He truly felt as if he were under the sentence of death and with no hope of acquittal. The apostle was called to contemplate the hour of death as imminent.

God, however, was watching over him in his trials. Beloved, when God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and His eye on the thermometer. I like what **Ruth E. Renkel** said, “*Never fear shadows. They simply mean there’s a light shining somewhere.*”

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)

¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NASB)

**⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,
⁷so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

D. They were Confident

2 Corinthians 1:9 (NASB)

⁹indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

In 1835, a man visited a doctor in Florence, Italy. He was filled with anxiety and exhausted from lack of sleep. He couldn't eat, and he avoided his friends. The doctor examined him and found that he was in prime physical condition. Concluding that his patient needed to have a good time, the physician told him about a circus in town and its star performer, a clown named Grimaldi.

Night after night he had the people rolling in the aisles. "You must go and see him," the doctor advised. "Grimaldi is the world's funniest clown. He'll make you laugh and cure your sadness." "No," replied the despairing man, "he can't help me. You see, I am Grimaldi!" Grimaldi was helpless and could not comfort himself. He was like many others facing the same dilemma today. There are going to be times we feel helpless, empty, and need genuine comfort that truly satisfies.

Paul explains why God allowed him and his friends to go through such desperate circumstances. He explains why bad things happened to them. Their pressures were to promote a trust in the Lord, not in their own selves and schemes. In fact, God uses the trial to reveal your helplessness and inability to solve your problem.

We often depend on our own skills and abilities when life seems easy, but we turn to God when we feel unable to help ourselves. When this happens, the light bulb comes on and we begin to develop the "*I Need the Lord's Help*" philosophy. Trusting in the Lord with your life and depending on God is a realization of your own powerlessness without Him and your need for His constant touch in your life. God is our source of power, and we receive His help by keeping in touch with him. With this attitude of dependence, problems will drive us to God rather than away from him.

Most people just don't know the strength of their faith until it is tested. The testing reveals if there are any weaknesses or doubts. When the *doubts, the despair, the discouragement, and the distress* are faced with faith and a confident resolve to rely on the Lord, then God honors that faith and strengthens the believer to face the next test when it comes his way. This is why the constant challenge of Scripture is to trust the Lord, especially in times of difficulty.

Proverbs 3:5 (NASB)

⁵ **Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.**

Psalms 37:3 (NASB)

³ **Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.**

Psalms 115:11 (NASB)

¹¹ **You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield.**

Psalms 118:8 (NASB)

⁸ **It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man.**

God's power comforted Paul and delivered him from the hour of his death until it was God's time for him to come home to glory. Paul had confidence that the Lord could deliver him at any time. Paul spoke of God's deliverance in three tenses in verse ten:

2 Corinthians 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ who **delivered** us from so great a *peril of death*, and **will deliver** us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He **will yet deliver us**,

1. Past Tense: *delivered*
2. Present Tense: *will deliver*
3. Future Tense: *will yet deliver us*

When Paul writes this letter, he knows that the same God who delivered him in the past is able to deliver him day by day, and will continue to deliver him until that final, grand moment when he will be completely released from the tribulations and persecutions of this world. His time is in God's hands and so is yours. Stop worrying about what might happen to you and just LIVE! Live your life for Christ! God allows the bad things in your life to get you to trust in Him all the time.

Why do bad things happen to God's people? Paul has given us several answers so far.

1. *To show that our Perils are Not an Obstacle to God's Care for Us*
2. *To Prepare Us for Ministry and to Comfort Others*
3. *To get us to Place our Trust in God when we are Under Pressure*
4. *Fourthly, to Promote Prayer in the Life of Believers*

IV. TO PROMOTE PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF BELIEVERS— 2 Corinthians 1:11a

2 Corinthians 1:11 (NASB)

¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*.

God also allows bad things in the lives of God's people to move His people to pray for themselves and for one another. Paul understood the importance of prayer, as did James, if he was to wage spiritual warfare and attain victory.

James 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Romans 15:30 (NASB)

³⁰ Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

Ephesians 6:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Philippians 1:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 5:25 (NASB)

²⁵ Brethren, pray for us.

Paul's difficulties made him dependent upon the Lord and drove him to pray. The Arabs have a proverb, "All sunshine makes a desert." The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence and security. It makes us think that we are well able to handle life alone. For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity, ten thousand rise in days of adversity. As **Abraham Lincoln** said, "*I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go.*"

It is often in misfortune, in misery, or in malady, that a man finds out who are his true friends and his need for God's help in his life. This is why the Lord allows bad things to happen to God's people, so that they will learn to seek Him. The Lord likes to hear from us. He likes to hear from you. How often do you speak to Him? Is it only in times of distress or do you speak to him in times of delight?

Isaiah 55:6 (NASB)

⁶ Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

Some folks will not pray because they have a problem with apathy that puts them in spiritual slumber, actions that are sinful, attitudes that are sour, or an adamant spirit that is rebellious toward the Lord. The Bible warns us of several elements that will hinder our prayer life.

What Hinders Our Prayers

1. Stability that is lacking—

James 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

2. Sin in our lives—

Psalms 66:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Isaiah 59:2 (NASB)

² But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear.

3. Selfishness—

James 4:3 (NASB)

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

4. Stubbornness toward God—

Zechariah 7:13 (NASB)

¹³ “And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,” says the Lord of hosts;

Proverbs 1:24-28 (NASB)

²⁴ “Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;

²⁵ And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof;

²⁶ I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,

²⁷ When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you.

²⁸ Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me.”

God also informs us how to get our prayers answered and how to pray properly.

What Are the Conditions for Successful Praying

1. Contrition—

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2. Complete Surrender of our heart to the Lord—

Jeremiah 29:13 (NASB)

¹³ “You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart.”

3. Consecration to Christ—

James 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

4. A Compliant or obedient attitude—

1 John 3:22 (NASB)

²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

5. Confidence or faith in the Lord—

Mark 11:24 (NASB)

²⁴ “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.”

Not long before his death, **Henri Nouwen** wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*. He writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists, called the Flying Roudellas. They told Nouwen there’s a special relationship between flyer and catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches. As the flyer swings high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. He arcs out into the air. His job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck him from the air. One of the Flying Roudellas told Nouwen, “*The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.*” The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him, but he must wait. We too, must learn to wait on the Lord and trust Him.

Why do bad things happen to God's people?

1. *To show that our Perils are Not an Obstacle to God's Care for Us*
2. *To Prepare Us for Ministry and to Comfort Others*
3. *To get us to Place our Trust in God when we are Under Pressure*
4. *To Promote Prayer in the Life of Believers*
5. *In the fifth place, To get us to Praise God and Give Thanks in Everything*

V. TO PRAISE GOD AND GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING— [2 Corinthians 1:11b](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many **persons** on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*.

God also allows bad things to happen to God's people so that He will be praised when He answers our prayers and we will learn to be grateful. It is the will of God that we have a thankful spirit.

[1 Thessalonians 5:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The word “**persons**” used here is literally translated in the Greek language “**faces.**” The Greek term portrays faces lifted upward to God in prayer and those same faces praising God for Paul's deliverance.

When God answers your prayers, do you remember to thank and praise Him or do you go on your way and forget what He has done? Many Christians are weak in praising the Lord and it is for this reason He sometimes allows bad things to happen in your life so you will learn to praise Him no matter what. Look for opportunities to praise Him.

The editors of *Religion Today* reported on August 10th, 1999, that teenagers held a praise service during a traffic jam. Thirty-nine members of a youth group and eight chaperones from Northside United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, were returning wet and tired from a rafting trip when their chartered bus became stuck in a traffic jam on Interstate 24 because of an accident a mile ahead. The teens invited other motorists to use the bathroom in their bus, played with children in nearby cars, and obtained permission from the driver of a flatbed truck nearby to use his trailer for a praise service.

So there on Interstate 24, 47 teenagers climbed onto the flatbed, and pulled out several guitars and a harmonica. People gathered around to listen as they sang songs they had learned weeks before at Jubilee Weekend in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

Before long, 25 more teens arrived and climbed aboard the truck, including those from a Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee. The bus was filled with lines of people waiting for the bathroom, and the flatbed was surrounded by an audience. People with food began to pass it out to those who didn't have any. Some motorists on the other side of the interstate, where the traffic was moving, pulled over to take photographs. The praise service lasted two hours, ending when the students got word that the wreck was about to be cleared and they should return to the bus. "What a witness it was," one participant said. Beloved, sometimes the Lord allows traffic jams or road blocks in our life so that we will stop and praise Him.

Psalms 7:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ I will give thanks to the Lord according to His righteousness And will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.

Psalms 107:8 (NASB)

⁸ Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!

Psalms 150:6 (NASB)

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

This is the last verse in the book of Psalms.

Chapter 3.

A Closet with No Skeletons

[2 Corinthians 1:12-14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

¹³ For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end;

¹⁴ just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

The next portion of [2 Corinthians](#) is very relevant and practical for us today. These verses provide answers on what to do when your integrity is under attack. They express to us the triumph of transparency, the importance of integrity, and the comfort that comes from having a closet with no skeletons.

Now what is going on here? The answer is Paul's integrity is under attack. Paul wrote [2 Corinthians](#) to defend himself against the attacks and assaults of the false apostles at Corinth.

[2 Corinthians 11:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

There were deceptive men that were determined to discredit him, weaken and undermine his authority, and then replace God's truth with false teaching. These liars had to destroy the people's trust in Paul before they could make head-way with them with their false doctrines. If they could destroy their confidence in Paul, they felt they could destroy their confidence in his message. The false teachers launched a three-pronged attack on Paul's credibility and integrity.

1. **On the moral level**, they accused him of secretly being a wicked sinner, justly suffering all the time because of the chastening of God. They must have been saying that there was more in Paul's conduct than met the eye. **In other words, there must be skeletons of perversion in his closet.**
2. **On the motive level**, they accused him of being **insincere**, **deceptive**, and **manipulative**. They charged that he was not what he appeared to be on the surface; that in reality, he was using the Corinthians for his own selfish purposes. They portrayed Paul as a manipulator, scheming to defraud the Corinthians and to promote his personal agenda. In short, according to the false apostles, Paul's motives were corrupt, his words untrustworthy, and his actions devious. **There were skeletons of corruption in his closet.**

3. **On the *message level***, they charged that Paul misrepresented God’s Word and was a liar and a false teacher. There were those who said that Paul in his letters did not quite mean what he said. **There were *skeletons of deception in his closet***. What hurt Paul more than those **baseless, slanderous lies** was the sad fact that some in the Corinthian congregation believed them.

No matter how godly you may live, there will always be some that will be critical of your life. The best thing you can do is live your life in such a way that no one will believe your critics. This was Peter’s counsel for us.

1 Peter 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.**

Paul refutes these false prophets and assassins of his character by the evidence of his character. His transparent life was the foundation of his defense. We will examine his *confidence, his conscience, his conduct, and his clear-cut message*.

I. THE CONFIDENCE OF PAUL—2 Corinthians 1:12a

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

The word “**proud confidence**” is derived from the Greek word *kauchesis* {*kow'-khay-sis*} which means “**act of glorying, boasting, proud confidence, or rejoicing.**” Paul frequently used this word *kauchēsis*, and the related noun and verb forms in this letter. **Twenty-nine** of their **fifty-nine** uses in the New Testament are found in 2 Corinthians. Negatively, *kauchēsis* describes unwarranted boasting in one’s achievements and merits.

Boasting in the form of human arrogance is sin, for our God must receive all glory and honor. Human pride must be banished and God is to be glorified. Christians, therefore, should never glorify or extol themselves but only glory in the Lord Jesus. If this is not done, then the boasting is bad. This is what James talked about in chapter four.

James 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.**

Boasting can also be used, however, of legitimate confidence in what God is doing in your life as it is used this way in this verse.

Paul gives God the glory for enabling him to live a godly life by His grace. In a nutshell, he praises the Lord for the fact he does not have skeletons in his closet. This gave him confidence in ministry.

2 Corinthians 7:4 (NASB)

⁴ Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

2 Corinthians 7:14 (NASB)

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

2 Corinthians 8:24 (NASB)

²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

2 Corinthians 11:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.

Rejoicing or boasting in the Lord and what the Lord accomplishes in His people is appropriate. In fact, God Himself delights in such boasting:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB)

²³ Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

1 Corinthians 1:31 (NASB)

³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

2 Corinthians 10:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD.

Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas addressed the issue of glory in a recent speech. He said his brother's death caused him to re—evaluate his own life. Baring his soul, as he often does in public talks, Thomas added, ""Work became irrelevant. Being on the Supreme Court became meaningless." Thomas said he realized that the three F's—**faith, family, friends**—are paramount, "not who is smartest, not who has written the most opinions..."

Let me ask at this point, "Are you thrilled about what the Lord has done in and with your life or are you ashamed because you have not let Him have His way in your heart? Have skeletons of sin in your closet robbed you of your joy and your effectiveness for Jesus Christ?"

II. THE CONSCIENCE OF PAUL—[2 Corinthians 1:12b](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

During the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, **Selena Roberts** wrote in the *New York Times*: About 10 yards past a security checkpoint along the path of a cinder-block hall inside the Salt Lake Ice Center, a panel of nine judges filtered into a room for a standard post-competition meeting last Tuesday morning. Twelve hours removed from the controversial moment when gold medallions were draped over the Russian team of Yelena and Anton, instead of Canada's Jamie Sale and David Pelletier, the judges assembled for a review of the decision under Ron Pfenning, the head referee.

At first, it was business as usual as the judges sat around a table, pouring over marks and scores for several skaters. Then the meeting took a bizarre turn. Ron Pfenning, known as a gentle and meticulous caretaker of skating, handed each judge a piece of paper with a passage about honesty and integrity. As each person passed back the pieces of paper, the judge Marie-Reine Le Gougne began to sob. "It was a rambling avalanche of words," Pfenning said. "I hadn't asked her a question. She had been teary-eyed through a lot of the meeting. It was an outburst: 'You don't understand. You don't understand. We're under an awful lot of pressure. My federation, my president Didier, said I had to put the Russians first.'"

Didier was the president of the French Figure Skating Federation. Pfenning said that when Marie called out Didier's name, he knew he had to report the incident to the International Skating Union. For several minutes, the weeping and wailing from Marie Le Gougne grew so loud that a person in the room stripped tape over the crack in the door in an apparent soundproofing effort. The two high-ranking skating officials said no one embraced Marie, the stylish 40-year-old Frenchwoman, as she cried out. Many of the judges saw her as a pathetic figure. Some had seen her crying in the same way while standing in the hotel lobby after the competition. They already knew why she was distraught. They said, "Her conscience had caught up to her."

1. What was behind this scandal? It was alleged that this was part of a deal to get an advantage for the French couple Marina and Gwendal in the ice dance competition which was to follow a few days later. However, in a signed statement, Le Gougne denied taking part in such a deal and also stated that she had truly believed the Russian pair deserved to win, even though she revealed the scheme earlier. The final outcome of this whole controversy is the Canadian couple had their silver medal upgraded to a gold medal with the Russian couple. Marie was immediately suspended for a total of three years and was barred from the 2006 Winter Olympics.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² For our proud confidence is this: the **testimony of our conscience**, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

This story shows that the witness or testimony of our conscience can be very powerful and distressing, especially when we are under conviction. Paul spoke of the “**testimony**” of his conscience in this portion of chapter one. The word “**testimony**” is from the Greek word *marturion* {*mar-too'-ree-on*} which means “**testimony, witness, or proof.**” Paul, in essence, said that the proof or the evidence of his conscience revealed there were no skeletons in his closet. There was no reason for him to be ashamed of anything he had done.

The apostle spoke repeatedly about the conscience in his letters. The conscience is the soul reflecting on itself. Both the Greek word *suneidēsis* {*soon-i'-day-sis*} (**conscience**) and the English word “**conscience**” have the idea of “**knowing oneself.**” According to [Romans 2:14](#), even those without God’s written law have an innate moral sense of what is right and wrong. They instinctively obey God’s Law, even though they have not heard it. The instinct comes from God, the Creator of all men.

Romans 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

2. The conscience is not infallible. Seeing that man has been affected by sin, both a person’s perception of the standard of right and wrong and the function of the conscience itself are contaminated and influenced by sin. For this reason, the conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of your behavior. Let me illustrate. One day, children lined up in the cafeteria of a religious school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The teacher made a note: “Take only one, God is watching.” At the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A boy wrote a note: “Take all you want, God is watching the apples.”

It is possible that the conscience may excuse you for that which God will not excuse or your teacher will not excuse. Sin is so deceitful that believers will sometime sin without their conscience being aware of it. Thus, they must constantly examine themselves in light of Scripture, allowing God to be the final judge. Like David, they must constantly pray,

Psalms 139:23-24 (NASB)

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;

²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

On the night of **November 27, 1983, Avianca Flight 011**, en route from Paris to Bogota via Madrid, approached Madrid's Barajas airport. The weather was good, and there were no mechanical problems with the 747 jet. The crew was experienced; the pilot had more than 20,000 hours of flying time and had made this same approach twenty-five times before. Yet, with its flaps extended and its landing gear down, the jumbo jet smashed into a series of low hills about seven miles short of the runway. The plane cartwheeled, broke into pieces, and came to rest upside down. Tragically, 181 of the 192 people on board lost their lives.

Investigators determined that a series of errors by the crew caused the crash. The crew misunderstood the reality of their location. They thought they knew the truth about the plane's position, but they did not. Shockingly, the final and fatal error came when the pilot, so sure he knew where he was heading, ignored the computerized voice of the plane's GPWS (Ground Proximity Warning System), which repeatedly warned him, "Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!" The cockpit recorder had his strange reply to the warning. He said, "Shut up, gringo" and switched off the warning device. The next moment, he was dead with the rest of the victims because he ignored the warnings.

That tragic story is a compelling illustration of the way people often ignore the truth of their life's direction and the warning messages from their conscience. **The conscience is a warning system, placed by God into the very framework of the human soul.** Like physical pain, which warns of damage to the body, the conscience warns of damage to your life and your soul. It reacts to the proximity of sin, warning you to "Pull up! Pull Up! Get out of here! Don't do it!" before it suffers the terrible consequences of sinful choices.

3. To reject the voice of your conscience is to invite spiritual catastrophe. We cannot reject the voice of our conscience with exemption from problems or pain. We will get stung. Unfortunately, society today aggressively tries to silence the conscience. People have been taught to ignore any and all conviction or guilty feelings that the conscience produces, viewing them as harmful to their self-esteem or mental health. They believe their problems stem not from their sin, but from external factors beyond their control. Sin and guilt are not viewed as moral and spiritual problems. Instead, they are viewed as psychological issues or even health problems, as sins are labeled as diseases or are blamed on someone else. The voice of your conscience cannot be safely rejected, for those who attempt to do so face spiritual ruin. The skeletons will invade their closet.

1 Timothy 1:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

1 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

Titus 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are **defiled** and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.**

The word “defiled” in [Titus 1:15](#) is from the Greek word *miaino* {*me-ah'-ee-no*} which means “to dye with another color, to stain, to defile, pollute, or contaminate.” Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure, but nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted. Their conscience has been dyed with sinful attitudes and reasoning.

Since the conscience holds people to their highest perceived standard, it is vital for spiritual victory that Christians set that standard to the highest level. **This is done by obeying the Word of God.** As they continually fill their minds with the truths of Scripture, Christians clarify God’s perfect standard of right and wrong. Their consciences will then call them to live according to God’s standards. Our conscience is not like a torch or lamp. It functions much like a skylight. It does not produce its own light. Instead, it lets moral light in. This is why Paul stressed repeatedly that we keep our conscience clear. This was one of the key goals of Paul’s life. It was a goal that he reached with consistency.

1 Timothy 1:5 (NASB)

⁵ **But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**

The purpose of Paul’s instruction was that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine, sincere faith.

Acts 23:1 (NASB)

¹ **Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”**

2 Timothy 1:3 (NASB)

³ **“I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.”**

Having a clear conscience was a key defense against slander or being accused of having skeletons in your closet. Remember what Peter said?

1 Peter 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.**

This brings us to a very important question, “**How do you get a clear conscience?**” The Bible provides the answer.

How do You Clear Your Conscience and Maintain It?

1. The Way of God's Salvation must be Chosen.

Jesus said that He was the only way to Heaven. If you want your conscience cleared, you must ask Christ to forgive and cleanse you of your sins and trust Him for eternal life. This is the first thing you must do.

John 14:6 (NASB)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

At the point of our salvation, God cleanses the conscience from its lifelong accumulation of guilt, shame, and self-contempt. No matter what you have done, there is forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 9:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 10:22 (NASB)

²² Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The conscience of the born again sinner is cleansed at salvation and the guilt of our sins are removed because we have been pardoned by the Lord.

Psalms 32:5 (NASB)

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

Psalms 103:12 (NASB)

¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Colossians 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

2. The Word of God must be Obeyed.

Once you have become a Christian, then it is vital you make the Bible an important part of your life. It is your spiritual food and source of strength to do what pleases God.

We are to read it, study it, learn its truths, meditate upon them, and put them into practice.

Psalms 37:30-31 (NASB)

³⁰ **The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice.**

³¹ **The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip.**

Psalms 119:11 (NASB)

¹¹ **Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.**

1 Peter 2:2 (NASB)

² **like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.**

The great eighteenth-century English hymn writer **Isaac Watts** composed the following stanzas about the pursuit of righteousness and obedience to God's Word:

*Blest are the undefiled in heart,
Whose ways are right and clean,
Who never from the law depart,
But fly from ev'ry sin.*

*Blest are the men who keep Thy Word
And practice Thy commands;
With their whole heart they seek the Lord,
And serve Thee with their hands.*

*Great is their peace who love Thy law;
How firm their souls abide!
Nor can a bold temptation draw
Their steady feet aside.*

*Then shall my heart have inward joy,
And keep my face from shame,
When all Thy statutes I obey,
And honor all Thy Name.*

3. Watchfulness and Prayer

Proverbs 4:26 (NASB)

²⁶ Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established.

Solomon warned us to watch our path and the result was our way would be sure and safe.

Matthew 26:41 (NASB)

⁴¹ “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus used Peter's drowsiness to warn him about the kinds of temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to keep watch and pray. In other words, be alert and aware of the possibilities of temptation. We are to be spiritually equipped to fight temptation. Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can't resist it alone.

Prayer is essential because God's strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan's power. Prayer also keeps our heart warm and tender toward Christ. God wants us to be alert to His leading in our lives. By watching and praying, we can discern what He is trying to do in us, for us, and through us.

National Football League running back Sherman Smith, the “Sherman Tank,” stood six feet four inches tall and packed 225 pounds of solid muscle. His reputation for bowling over defensive linemen with his speed and strength raised his celebrity to near-cult status in the Pacific Northwest, where he played for the Seattle Seahawks. Then, without warning, out of the clear blue, the Seahawks traded their most popular player to the San Diego Chargers. Everything changed overnight for this running back, whose Christian faith was as rock solid as his abs.

Sherman wasn't with the Chargers for more than a few weeks when he seriously injured his knee. While in rehabilitation, Sherman wondered, “Lord, what are you doing? Why did you ship me to San Diego?” Sherman got his answer. He realized that God was directing his path and putting him where he was needed.

While Sherman's knee mended in San Diego, he had the opportunity to lead one of his teammates to the Lord Jesus Christ. That converted party-guy, Miles McPherson, became a youth evangelist that eventually reached thousands for Christ. Miles is now the pastor of Rock Church in San Diego, California, and reaches thousands of people for Christ every week with the Gospel. They have five services on Sunday to contain the crowds. The mission of their church is to save, equip, and send out soul-winners for Jesus Christ. He says, “Everything we do from Sunday services, to ministries, to small groups only helps to fulfill this mission. It is a church with a purpose.”

4. Be Wary of Your Pride

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB)

¹² **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.**

Pride creates complications for us. It leads us to behave in an offensive way where we will need to clear our conscience with God and others. It makes us **unteachable**, **rude**, **harsh**, **selfish**, and **insensitive to the needs of others**. When we have hurt others, our pride hardens our heart toward repentance and restoration. Avoid your pride like you would avoid a nest of hornets.

We have seen so far that you can clear and maintain your conscience by:

1. *The Way of God's Salvation*
2. *The Word of God*
3. *Watchfulness and Prayer*
4. *Being Wary of Your Pride*
5. *Next, Warrant the Seriousness of Sin*

5. Warrant the Seriousness of Sin

Romans 4:25 (NASB)

²⁵ **He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

One sin brought death upon the human race. It caused Adam and Eve to be kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Our sin led to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. If we are going to clear our conscience, we need to take our sin seriously and warrant or realize the destructive effects it has on our life and the lives of others. Such understanding will be a deterrent in doing wrong in the future.

Psalms 39:1 (NASB)

¹ **I said, "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence."**

6. Willfully and Wittingly make Up Your Mind to Do what is Right

Maintaining a clear conscience demands that you make up your mind to please the Lord and live a godly life. It involves a resolve to dissolve the desire to disobey the Lord and let nothing divide your heart from fellowship with Him.

Psalms 119:106 (NASB)

¹⁰⁶ **I have sworn and I will confirm it, That I will keep Your righteous ordinances.**

On February 14, the business of Valentine's Day is to ardently pursue love interests and warmly renew those already in progress. Daniel Webster, a 19th century lawyer and statesman, was courting his wife-to-be, Grace Fletcher. As he held strands of silk thread for her, he suggested, "Grace, we've been engaged in untying knots. Let us see if we can tie a knot which will not untie for a lifetime." They stopped right then and tied a random silk knot that would be almost impossible to untie. Grace accepted Webster's proposal. After they passed from this world, their children found a little box marked "***Precious Documents.***" Among the contents were letters of courtship and a tiny silk knot. It was one that had never been untied.

Beloved, those who know the love of Jesus Christ can boldly say—

Romans 8:38-39 (NASB)

³⁸ **For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,**
³⁹ **nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The love of God is everlasting for His children. His mind is made up. Have you made up your mind to walk with Him and do what is right?

7. Withstand the First Hint of Temptation

James 1:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**
¹⁵ **Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**

The trail from temptation to *throwing in the towel* to sinful living is a quick one. Why? The flesh loves to cater to its desires. It likes to "**feel good.**" If you are going to maintain a clear conscience, then temptation must be "**nipped in the bud.**" If David would have looked the other way when he saw Bathsheba and squelched the temptation he faced at that moment, he could have prevented the heartache of his failure and the murder of a great warrior.

8. Wrongs Must Be Made Right with Others

Acts 24:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **"In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men."**

Restitution involves repairing or replacing that which was damaged. If you have damaged someone's reputation by slandering them, then you need to publicly restore their name because you don't know how far your slander has traveled.

If you have offended someone privately, then you go to that person and seek their forgiveness privately. If you have done something that has entered the public arena such as a moral failure, then you seek repentance publicly, especially with your church family. You go as far as the ripple goes.

Public repentance is necessary for your testimony because people don't know what is going on in your life unless you tell them. If you got your life right with God, then tell them and seek forgiveness for your bad example and offensive behavior. After Zacchaeus met the Lord, he wanted to make restitution with others who were offended by his dishonesty.

Luke 19:8 (NASB)

⁸ Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."

Unwillingness to get your life right with people indicates a pride problem and spiritual immaturity. You will continue to struggle in your Christian growth until you clear your conscience.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

Paul has been presenting his case that he had no skeletons in his closet. **His life was above reproach, his integrity was intact, his character was Christlike, his sincerity was sterling, his veracity was valid, his candidness was clear, and his faithfulness was flawless.**

The witnesses to his character were first of all his confidence and secondly, his conscience. The third area of evidence was his conduct. The principles that he shares about his own conduct should be mimicked in our own personal lives.

III. THE CONDUCT OF PAUL—[2 Corinthians 1:12c](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

The attacks made against Paul on a moral and motive level were refuted by the conduct of Paul. He confronted those who were accusing his character, that he was not genuine, or he was concealing hidden motives. Paul had nothing to hide at all. He was transparent and above board. Blessed is the man who has nothing to hide! Paul's conduct was in this world.

This word “conduct” is from the Greek word *anastrepho* {*an-as-tref-o*}. It is an interesting word. It means “to turn upside down, to turn hither and thither or to turn one's self about from a course of conduct; the behavior of a person.” This verb *anastrepho* is formed from two words, *ana* which means “again,” and *strepho*, which means “to turn; a continual coming back again to the point from which he set out; a circulation; beginning, continuing, and ending every thing to the glory of God.” This same word is used in these familiar verses.

[John 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and **overturned** their tables.**

[1 Timothy 3:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one **ought to conduct** himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**

There are several thoughts we will address here from this word “conduct.” First of all, Paul's life as well as the Christians of the early church did turn the world upside down.

[Acts 17:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶ **When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also.”**

Paul had a huge impact on the early church and still is impacting the world for Christ today. His life did go in circles in the sense that he began for Christ, he continued for Christ day by day, and he ended his life living for Christ. He was consistent like a circle, repeating his walk with God each day. Our lives are to regularly and daily revolve around the Son of God as the planets revolve around the sun.

Christ is to be the center of our lives. When we have this attitude and put it into practice, we can keep the skeletons out of our closet and God can use us in a very special way to reach others for Him.

Edward Kimball is probably not known to you. He lived over a hundred years ago. He was a Sunday school teacher in Boston, where a young teenager became part of his class. The young man was a country boy. He didn't know the ways of the city or of the church, but he came to Kimball's Sunday school class. When the teen first came to his class, Edward Kimball handed him a Bible. When Mr. Kimball said, "Turn to the Gospel of John," the country boy didn't know how to find the Gospel of John.

Edward Kimball recognized what was happening, and while the other boys were snickering, he opened the Bible to the Gospel of John and handed it back. When he asked the boys to read, the country boy fumbled as he read. Edward Kimball had a big perspective, and he saw possibilities in the boy. Kimball worked with him, and after some months he went down to the store where the boy was working, went into the back room where he was stacking boxes, and led Dwight to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was the beginning of the ministry of **Dwight L. Moody**, this continent's greatest evangelist during the last century. You didn't know Edward Kimball, an obscure Sunday school teacher who had a vision, *but* his conduct, concern, and compassion led to the conversion of a young man in a room where he was stacking boxes, and led Dwight to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me repeat: That was the beginning of the ministry of **Dwight L. Moody**, this continent's greatest evangelist during the last century. You didn't know Edward Kimball, an obscure Sunday school teacher who had a vision, *but* his conduct, concern, and compassion led to the conversion of a young man who became an influential Christian that God used in a great way. God used both of these men in His own way.

Such was the case with Paul. God used him mightily. When we examine Paul's life and conduct we find that it was characterized by several traits which defend his behavior.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

A. Simplicity: "that in holiness"

What is Paul talking about when he uses the word "**holiness**"? This word is derived from the Greek word *haplotēs* {hap-lot'-ace}. The word means "**sincerity, mental honesty, the virtue of one who is free from hypocrisy, not self-seeking, generous.**" Paul refuted any charges of hypocrisy, greed, or selfishness.

People who are hypocritical and greedy tend to struggle with skeletons in their closet because of choices they have made in their past, but are unwilling to clean their slate and make matters right in their lives. God’s challenge to us is to flush the hypocrisy out of our lives.

James 3:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.**

Romans 12:9 (NASB)

⁹ **Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.**

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

B. Sincerity that was Godly: “and godly sincerity”

What is godly sincerity? This word is from the Greek word *heilikrineia* {*li-ree'-ni-ah*} which means “**unmixed, purity, integrity, sincerity.**” It is an interesting word used to describe genuineness of character. It originally might have pictured the sifting of grain, which in this verse would remind believers they need to sift impurities out of their lives and be like pure, wholesome grain.

This word has another meaning. It is derived from two Greek words meaning “**sun**” and “**to judge.**” If we make those two into a compound word, it would literally mean “**testing by sunlight or sun-tested.**” It describes something which can bear the test of being held up to the light of the sun and looked at with the sun shining through it.

In Bible times, the finest pottery was thin. It had a clear color, and it brought a high price. Fine pottery was very fragile both before and after the firing process. This pottery would often crack in the oven. Cracked pottery should have been thrown away, but dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling cracks with a hard pearly wax that would blend in with the color of the pottery. This made the cracks practically undetectable in the shops, especially when painted or glazed. The wax, however, was immediately detectable if the pottery was held up to light, especially to the sun. In that case the cracks would show up darker. It was said that the artificial element was detected by “**sun-testing.**”

Honest dealers marked their finer product by the caption *sine cera*—“**without wax.**” This caption forms our English word “**sincere.**” Beloved, happy is the man whose every action will bear the light of day and who, like Paul, can claim that there are no hidden actions in his life. May our lives be *sin cera*, genuine, and without wax.

May we test our lives for the wax of phoniness, and keep the skeletons out of our closet. When held up to the light of God's Word, the presence or absence of sinful cracks will be apparent. That's why it is so important for us to feed daily on the Scriptures and to allow our lives to be shaped by their power.

Psalms 119:9-11 (NASB)

⁹ **How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word.**

¹⁰ **With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.**

¹¹ **Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.**

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, **not in fleshly wisdom** but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**

C. Sophia or wisdom that was not fleshly or carnal.

The word *sophia* is the Greek word for **wisdom**. Paul said his wisdom was not fleshly or carnal wisdom. Paul's Christlike conduct was not achieved by his own power, strength, or efforts, but by the grace of God working in his life. Fleshly wisdom cannot produce holiness and godly sincerity, because it is nothing more than the manifestation of sinful man's rebellion against God. Such wisdom is not wisdom at all, but foolishness.

I never cease to be amazed at the stupidity of wicked people and Christ rejectors, especially those kinds of folks who are in leadership positions in government, science, and education. Their anti-God, **perversion-promoting programs, policies, and philosophies** are *atrocious, fallacious, ferocious, infectious, nauseous, noxious, obnoxious, and vexatious*. Their philosophy of life and their actions are foolish.

1 Corinthians 3:19-21 (NASB)

¹⁹ **For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*";**

²⁰ **and again, "*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.*"**

²¹ **So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you.**

Worldly wisdom will breed skeletons in your closet. Paul challenged us to stay away from the mold of this world.

Romans 12:2 (NASB)

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

God's grace and working enables us to remove the skeletons from our closet and live a consistent, Christlike Christian life that is characterized by ***victory over vices***, ***maturity in matters*** of daily living, and ***purity in our ponderings, practices, and pronouncements***.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Colossians 1:29 (NASB)

²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Philippians 1:6 (NASB)

⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

What the Lord has started in you will finally be completed when Christ returns to this earth.

Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

¹³ For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

J. Sidlow Baxter said, "What God chooses, He cleanses. What God cleanses, He molds. What God molds, He fills. What God fills, He uses." Beloved, let the Lord work in your life and use you. A person can be a Christian for many years yet remain spiritually immature. Therefore, it's possible for a new Christian to be far more grown up in the Lord than someone who has been saved for 40 years. A good example of this is found in an incident described by **Ethel Barrett** in her book ***It Only Hurts When I Laugh***.

Ethel said that when D.L. Moody became a Christian, he developed such a hunger for God's Word, spent so much time reading it, ***and was so quick to obey it that he became a "menace"*** to some believers. His rapid spiritual growth was an embarrassment to certain people who, though they had been saved for many years, never grew up in Christ. Week after week in the church Moody attended, he would share a new experience he had with the Lord. Finally, some of the older saints who just couldn't stand feeling humiliated by his exemplary life, went to Moody's uncle and urged him to quiet down his nephew.

Ethel Barrett drew this conclusion about Moody: ***"His robust spiritual health and bounding energy disturbed their napping; he was just too much. So, while they were sucking their thumbs, he was growing until he left them far behind. Moody grew more in a few years than they did in thirty."***

Beloved, let me ask, “Are you growing spiritually?” Are committed Christians an embarrassment to you? Realize that spiritual growth will help you to keep the skeletons out of your closet. Paul’s closet had no skeletons.

1. *His Confidence confirmed this.*
2. *His Conscience confirmed this.*
3. *His Conduct confirmed this.*
4. *Next, his Clear-Cut message confirmed this.*

IV. THE CLEAR-CUT MESSAGE OF PAUL—[2 Corinthians 1:13-14](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³ For we write nothing else to you than what you **read** and **understand**, and I hope you will understand until the end;
¹⁴ just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

Not only can the Corinthians examine Paul’s conduct, but also they can scrutinize his epistles which would include those addressed to them and those sent to other churches. When the wording of a written communication is not clear, the message is likely to be misunderstood. Paul makes it very clear that his message was aboveboard and straightforward. There was nothing that was vague or written between the lines that the people could not understand. There were no hidden meanings or ulterior motives. He did not say one thing and mean another. Paul hoped they would acknowledge this.

It is interesting to note that both the word “**read**” and the word “**understand**” in [verse 13](#) are compound forms of the verb *ginōskō* (to know), forming a play on words in the Greek language. There is a play on words found in this verse that cannot successfully be reproduced in the English language.

The Greek word for “**read**” is from the word *anaginosko* {an-ag-in-ocē'-ko} which refers to what they know from reading his letters and the Greek word for “**understand**” is from *epiginosko* {ep-ig-in-ocē'-ko} refers to what they know through personal contact and thorough acquaintance with Paul. They are being assured that the two are in complete harmony. What Paul wrote in his letters was perfectly consistent with who he was in person. What he said, he meant and did not waver because he wanted God’s message to be clearly understood so it could be put into practice. **Does what you say match with what you do?**

What Paul said about his message is the essence of truth. There is no need to waver on the truth because it is always the truth. There is no need to be ashamed of the truth. Truth breeds confidence and security. Deception is not necessary in speaking the truth. It is open to scrutiny and inspection and does not fear that inspection. It was Paul’s prayer that if they did not understand everything completely, they would some day be proud of what the Lord did through Paul just as Paul was proud of what the Lord did in their lives.

At the **Judgment Seat of Christ**, Paul would be fully vindicated by the Lord and the fruit of his labor would be fully realized. The apostle looked forward to that day, when the presence of those to whom he had ministered would bring him great joy. These same truths hold for you and me. What you have done for Christ will come out into the open one day when you stand before the Lord. If you have faithfully served Him, you will behold the faces of those touched by your life.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ **For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?**

²⁰ **For you are our glory and joy.**

Philippians 2:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.**

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

¹¹ **Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.**

Adoniram Judson and his sweet wife, Ann, were missionaries in India and Burma. During their tour of service, Adoniram was arrested as an enemy agent when his homeland, England, and the nation in which he served became disenchanted with one another. Immediately, Judson was imprisoned. The tiny cell in which he was incarcerated was so crowded and small that the prisoners had to take turns sleeping. There was not enough room for all of them to lie down. The hot sun beating upon the dingy cell caused unbearable suffering through heat prostration. The stench of body odor, urine, and manure also became obnoxious as the men were never allowed to bathe. The flies were terrible.

One day the government officials decided to punish the prisoners and Judson was hoisted into the air by his thumbs. Pain wracked his body as he remained suspended between heaven and earth for hours at a time. His precious helpmeet, Ann, would come by the prison daily and look inside the cell. The agony of her husband tore at her heart. From her eyes a stream of tears would flow like a broken necklace of pearls. However, this soldier of the cross always encouraged her man by saying, **“Hang on, Adoniram. Hang on, Adoniram. God will give us the victory.”**

As the sands of the hourglass continued to flow for days and weeks, faithful Ann no longer made the visits to the prison and Adoniram’s loneliness escalated. No one had informed him that she was dying. All he had now was a memory of his sweetheart saying, “Hang on, Adoniram. God will give us the victory.”

Months later, upon his release, he immediately began the search for Ann. As he approached the area where he formerly lived, he saw a child so begrimed with dirt that he failed to recognize the little one as his own child. He dashed into the tent and saw the form of a woman so small and weak from malnutrition, that she appeared to be a skeleton. Her beautiful long-flowing hair had also fallen out and she was bald.

As Adoniram called out to Ann, “Ann, Ann! It’s me Adoniram!” she failed to respond. It seemed as though she were already dead. He took her into his arms and wept. The hot tears dropping on her angelic face revived Ann and she said, “Hang on, Adoniram.... God will give us the victory.”

Adoniram lost his sweetheart, but not his faith and courage. He continued under dire circumstances to preach the Word of God and to build churches. When this man of God was buried, scores of churches had come into existence through his labors for Christ. Adoniram and Ann ran their race for Christ and finished pressing toward the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Are you running your race for Christ or are you just sitting by on the bench watching others serve the Lord because you have skeletons in your closet? Beloved, hang on! God will give you the victory if you will repent of the wrongs in your life and if you will purposely serve Christ with your life!

Chapter 4. Complications from Cancelled Plans

2 Corinthians 1:15-24 (NASB)

¹⁵ In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing;

¹⁶ that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.

¹⁷ Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time*?

¹⁸ But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.

¹⁹ For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.

²⁰ For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,

²² who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

²³ But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.

²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

Have you ever made plans, such as for a trip, only to have them cancelled? Perhaps the weather was bad, you got sick, someone died, your car broke down, or the airline went on strike. The list is almost endless. Plans that get cancelled have a tendency to create complications. If you have a setback or cancellation of plans, you have to resort to **Plan B** or maybe **Plan C**, which can be costlier, demand more sacrifice, take up more time, or cause you to experience great disappointment because you missed out on something that was very important to you. Do you know what I am talking about?

Such was the case with the Apostle Paul. He had planned a trip to a church and the plans were changed. Unfortunately, the change in plans spurred an attack on his character from those that were looking for faults in Paul that they could fester. This portion of Scripture provides a response to the accusations against Paul. It reveals the foolish thinking of bitter people. Better yet, it also reveals important insight about the character of God, His promises, and His enablement in helping us to have character and integrity in our own lives. Notice [verses 15](#) and [16](#).

I. THE CONFIDENCE OF PAUL—[2 Corinthians 1:15-16](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:15-16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ In this **confidence** I intended at first to come to you, so that you might **twice receive** a blessing;

¹⁶ that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.

The word “**confidence**” is from a Greek root word *peitho* {*pi'-tho*} which means “**to be persuaded, to make friends, to have faith, trust, or confidence.**” Paul was persuaded and confident that the Corinthians respected him and were his friends as [verse 14](#) indicated.

[2 Corinthians 1:14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ Just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

He was also confident in his integrity based on his **conscience, conduct, and clear-cut message**. He felt secure in their love and support.

Let me ask right here,

- (1) “Do people feel confident in your friendship and love for them?”
- (2) What kind of friend are you?
- (3) What kind of husband or wife are you?
- (4) What kind of son or daughter are you?
- (5) How much of your time do you spend griping, complaining, or nagging?
- (6) Do little, petty things set you off like a rocket, causing you to explode and lash out in anger or are you patient with those who love and care about you even when they do things that irritate you?”

If you are a lousy friend or struggle in loving others, ask the Lord to calm you down and help you with your impatience and temper. Spend more time reading the Bible and pray more about those things that bother you. Realize that petty matters will not mean a hill of beans ten years from now. Purposely work on expressing gratitude and love to other people through your words, notes, cards, calls, or gifts to them. Instead of being a burden, why not be a blessing to someone today! Do this especially if you are down in the dumps!

2 Corinthians 1:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ **In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing.**

The confidence that Paul had caused him to plan to stop by and visit the Corinthians on his way to the Macedonian church and then upon his return from Macedonian to Judea, he would stop by and see them again. Thus, a double visit and double blessing. This is the idea behind the words “**twice receive a blessing.**”

The word “**blessing**” is from the Greek word *charis* {*khar'-ece*} which means “**grace, joy, pleasure, or delight.**” In fact, Tyndale renders this: “**that ye might have had a double pleasure.**” The idea is that they had been formerly gratified and benefitted by his residence among them. He believed that his coming and fellowship would do them good. Paul had been with them formerly almost two years. His residence there had been pleasant to them and to him. He did not doubt that it would be so again.

2 Corinthians 1:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **That is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.**

Paul also desired that they would “**and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea (vs. 16).**” This phrase does not mean merely that the Corinthians said “**Good-bye**” to Paul. In the early church, it was a phrase that obligated Christians to supply a missionary with money, food, beverage, clothing, and protection provided by traveling companions. This phrase is from the Greek word *propempe* {*prop-em'-po*} which means “**to send forward, to escort, to fit someone out with the needs for a journey.**” Paul wanted the Corinthians to show their generosity by sending him on his way to Jerusalem with both the collection for the saints and the necessary supplies he needed for the journey.

II. THE CRITICISM OF PAUL’S CHANGE IN PLANS—

2 Corinthians 1:17

2 Corinthians 1:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?**

Paul had hoped that he would be able to come to Corinth, but he hadn’t come there yet. There was a change in plans. It happens. Complications developed as some of his enemies in Corinth were critical saying that he didn’t mean what he said. They accused him of being **fickle, insincere, unconcerned** about their feelings, and unreliable. Now Paul is telling them that he certainly was sincere and not wishy-washy. He may have used the words of their criticism in his response. He asked, “**Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?**”

In other words, “Do you think I was **careless, fickle, or vacillating** back and forth when I made my plans?” This is the idea behind the word “**vacillating**.” He continued and said, “**Do you think I am like people of the world that say “Yes” when they really mean “No?”**”

Paul’s plan changed, but his principles were not altered at all. Paul finds it incredible that any at Corinth could really have thought that a change in plans pointed to a change in character. Such reasoning was idiotic, but that is the nature of those who are **bitter, jealous, or filled** with hate.

When you are bitter or jealous toward someone, you become very unreasonable, unacceptable, unbearable, unbelievable, uncomfortable, uncontrollable, unexplainable, and unlovable. The actions of others are twisted into faulty assumptions as their character is assassinated by insane charges. You become focused on any fault you can find or make up. The result of such anger and bitterness is the poisoning of your soul. That’s what bitterness does to you. Couples who have suffered a divorce need to be especially careful about venting their bitterness about their former spouse to their children. You can spiritually poison your kids by your anger. Notice the warning from the writer of Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be **defiled**.**

Bitterness not only troubles you, it defiles others around you who are infected by your bitterness. In fact, the word “**defiled**” is from the Greek word *miaino* {*me-ah'-ee-no*} which means “**to dye with another color, to stain, defile or pollute.**”

In his book *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Secret of More*, author and **Pastor Mark Buchanan** illustrates God’s love through the story of Tracy. He writes: “Tracy is one of the worship leaders at our church. One Sunday, as she sat at the piano, she talked about the difficult week she’d just been through. It was chaotic, she said—a mess of petty crises on top of a rash of minor accidents, all mixed up in a soup can of crazy busyness. It had left her weary and cranky.

She got up that Sunday to lead worship and felt spent, with nothing more to give. However, Tracy’s 8-year-old daughter, Brenna, helped her gain new perspective earlier that morning. When Tracy had walked into the living room, the window was covered with scrawl. Using a crayon, Brenna had scribbled something across the picture window, top to bottom and side to side. At first, it seemed like one more mess for Tracy to clean up. Then she saw what Brenna had written: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindnece, goodnece, faithfulnece, gentlnece and selfcantrol* (in Brenna’s delightful spelling).”

Mark writes: “Tracy stopped, drank it in. Her heart flooded with light. It was exactly what she needed to be reminded about: the gift of the fruit of the Spirit that arises, not by our circumstances, but by Christ within us. And then Tracy noticed one more thing

Brenna had written at the edge of the window: *Love one another*. Only Brenna, in her creative spelling, had written: "*Love won another*." **As Mark concludes:** "It's what Jesus has been trying to tell us all along. You were won that way. Now go and do likewise." Beloved, don't let bitterness rob you of your love for your husband, wife, kids, parents, or others in your life.

2 Corinthians 1:17 (NASB)

¹⁷Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time*?

There is another area we want to address before we move on. Paul says that when he says "yes," he means "yes," and when he says "no," he means "no." Christians today ought to be that kind of people. They should not use lightness or carelessness in making appointments and arrangements in the business world and in their daily appointments. We are not to be **fickle** or **flippant** with our promises. Christian men, women, teenagers, and children need to stand by the things that they have said. We are to be alert to what we are doing and not apathetic. We are to do the best job we can for those we serve. If we fail to behave this way, we can make some foolish mistakes. Consider some rumored notes from hospital charts that may have been written by a sleepy intern or a worn out, frazzled nurse.

These were submitted by Marshall Shelley, editor, Leadership Journal.

1. *The patient refused autopsy.*
2. *Patient has left white blood cells at another hospital.*
3. *Patient has chest pain if she lies on her left side for over a year.*
4. *On the second day, the knee was better, and on the third day it disappeared.*
5. *The patient has been depressed since she began seeing me in 1993.*
6. *She is numb from her toes down.*
7. *Occasional, constant, infrequent headaches.*
8. *Patient was alert and unresponsive.*
9. *Patient has two teenage children, but no other abnormalities.*

Beloved, keep your word and fulfill the responsibilities for those who are depending or counting upon you. Pay your bills, be on time, follow instructions, do your best, have a great attitude, keep your promises, and be thankful for what you have. If you do these things, others around you will be blessed, encouraged, and respect you. On the other hand, if we cannot be trusted, if our word is unreliable, then how can we expect people to believe us when we share the Word of God with them? Whether you like it or not, people look at you.

Romans 12:11 (NASB)

¹¹Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB)

³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

III. The Clarity and Confidence in God’s Word—[2 Corinthians 1:18-20](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:18-20 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ **But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.**

¹⁹ **For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.**

²⁰ **For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.**

It’s hard to imagine how excited **Norreasha Gill** must have been in May, 2005, when she won the big “100 Grand” contest run by her Lexington radio station, WLTO-FM. **According to the Associated Press**, “She won by listening to the station for several hours and being the tenth caller at a specified time.” The night before she went to collect her prize, she promised her three young children that they were going to get a minivan, a home with a backyard, and lots of shopping. The next morning she went to the station but was asked to return later. When she got home, there was a phone message from the station manager explaining that she had won a Nestle’s 100 Grand candy bar, not \$100,000.

Norreasha sued them for deceptive advertising. The station manager offered her \$5,000, but she wouldn’t go for it. “I said I wanted \$95,000 more. Nobody would watch and listen for two hours for a candy bar.” The message of the station was considered deceptive or very vague for sure. At this point, I don’t know what the final outcome is about this matter. There are many things like this today. Such is not the case when it comes to the Word of God. God’s message is clear and the consequences of our obedience or disobedience to Him are certain.

Paul makes it clear that as God is faithful, Paul’s word was also faithful and did not waver or vacillate. His message was not a “**Yes**” then “**No**” message. It was not fickle and unstable. What Paul told them about Jesus Christ was *true, dependable, and reliable*. God’s Word is true and His promises are true and can be trusted. That is very important, especially in those times when we encounter complications from a change in our plans and are *setback, tripped up, or moved aside*. The *reliability, dependability, believability, capability, credibility, durability, impeccability, infallibility, and sensibility of the Word of God* gives us a firm foundation from which we can live our lives and face our storms and complications when there is a change in our plans. **D.L. Moody** said, “God never made a promise that was too good to be true.” His promises are good and they are always true!

[Psalms 119:86 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸⁶ **All Your commandments are faithful; They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!**

Isaiah 55:11 (NASB)

¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, **Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**

Psalms 93:5 (NASB)

⁵ **Your testimonies are fully confirmed;** Holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore.

John 17:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; **Your word is truth.**

IV. THE COMMISSION OF THE LORD—2 Corinthians 1:21

2 Corinthians 1:21 (NASB)

²¹ Now He who **establishes** us with you in Christ and anointed us is God.

When you experience complications from changes in your plans, when your life is turned upside down by the viciousness of others, you need strength to face LIFE and face people. Where do you find this kind of strength and stability? Paul offers the answers here. The Lord “**establishes**” us. What does this mean?

This word is from the Greek word *bebaioo* {*beb-ah-yo'-o*} which means “**to make firm, establish, confirm, or make sure.**” It is a technical, legal term denoting a seller’s guarantee of the validity of a purchase. It is in the **present tense** and refers to God’s present, continuous, strengthening and enablement of believers in their faith in Christ.

God establishes believers in Christ at salvation. This is the work of saving grace that puts believers into union with Him. We have God’s guarantee of salvation when we have been redeemed by Him through faith in Him. We also have His guarantee of saving, life-changing grace to become like Christ because He lives within us. He is ever with us and will never leave us. He provides power and strength to face life day after day and the complications that arise when our plans change. If you have the Spirit without the Word, **you blow up**. If you have the Word without the Spirit, **you dry up**. If you have both the Word and the Spirit, **you grow up**.

Romans 8:1 (NASB)

¹ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

²⁰ “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Our Lord gives us calm and confidence when complications arise from cancelled plans. **How?**

The establishment of the Christian continues day after day through the work of the Holy Spirit. First of all, the Holy Spirit convicts of sin when we do wrong. The Lord Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came into the world, He would convict the world of *sin, righteousness, and judgment*. He also indwells us and revives us when we need reviving. He comforts us when we are broken hearted for He ever lives within us. We belong to Him.

John 14:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.**

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

¹³ **For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**

One of the most well known hymns of the church is the song “*A Mighty Fortress*.” It was written by **Martin Luther** who faced weakness and intense turmoil in his life during the time it was written. It was a terrible time for Luther. The year was 1527, which was one of the most trying years of his life. It’s hard to imagine he had the energy or spirit to compose one of Christendom’s most memorable hymns in this difficult time.

On April 22, a dizzy spell forced Luther to stop preaching in the middle of his sermon. For ten years, since publishing his 95 Theses against the abuse of indulgences in the Catholic Church, Luther had been attacked by political and theological storms. At times his life had been in danger. He faced severe depression and anger as he battled with reformers over the issue of the Lord’s Supper and its meaning.

On July 6, as friends arrived for dinner, Luther felt an intense buzzing in his left ear. He went to lie down, when suddenly he called, “Water or I’ll die!” He became cold, and he was convinced he had seen his last night. In a loud prayer, he surrendered himself to God’s will. With a doctor’s help, Luther partially regained his strength, but this depression and illness overcame him again in August, September and late December.

Looking back on one of his bouts, he wrote his friend Melanchthon, “I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints [his friends], God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below.”

Meanwhile, in August, the plague had erupted in Wittenberg. As fear spread, so did many of the townspeople, but Luther consider it his duty to remain and care for the sick. Even though his wife was pregnant, Luther's house was transformed into a hospital, and he watched many friends die. Then his son became ill. Not until late November did the epidemic abate and the ill begin to recover.

During that horrific year, Luther took time to remember the tenth anniversary of his publication against indulgences, noting the deeper meaning of his trials: "The only comfort against raging Satan is that we have God's Word to save the souls of believers." Sometime that year, Luther expanded that thought into the hymn he is most famous for: "***A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.***" The following verse, translated by **Frederick Hedge** in **1853**, comes from one of more than sixty English versions. It shows Luther's confidence in God and the strength God gave to him to serve the Lord and face his complications and change in plans.

*And though this world with devils filled
should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim? We tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure.
One little Word shall fell him.*

2 Corinthians 1:21 (NASB)

²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and **anointed** us is God.

Not only does the Lord establish us, but He also anoints us. What does this mean? The word "**anointed**" is from the Greek word *chrío* {*khree'-o*} which not only means "**to anoint, but to endue Christians with the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to the believer to serve Christ and strengthen other believers.**" To anoint someone is to *commission* them for service. We have been commissioned for service by the Lord at the moment of salvation. We are saved to serve Him and have already been equipped by Him to do His will whatever it may be. This truth is reflected in the fact that the **present tense is not used for anoint**, but the **aorist tense or past tense**. God's Spirit *guides, empowers, and teaches* us that we may serve Him.

John 16:12-13 (NASB)

¹² "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now.

¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

The anointing of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we have already been equipped by the Lord to face the complications that arise from the changes in our plans.

You have what you need to do what needs to be done, and to respond the way the Lord would have you to respond when changes take place. Better yet, we are to be mindful that our plans and will need to be in line with God's will for our lives. This is why we are to seek His direction and leading. Sometimes the Lord changes our plans because our will is in conflict with God's will or He is trying to direct us on a different path. Paul did not return to Corinth when they expected him because God's will led him in a different direction.

V. The Confirmation & Collateral of the Holy Spirit—[2 Corinthians 1:22](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:22 \(NASB\)](#)

²² Who also **sealed** us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

We are not only established and anointed by the Spirit of God, we are also sealed. Because we do not directly and immediately receive the fullness of all of God's promises when we first believe, we may sometimes be tempted to doubt our salvation and wonder about the ultimate blessings that are supposed to accompany it. Some of our blessings are reserved in Heaven for us ([1 Peter 1:3-4](#)).

[1 Peter 1:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*

As one means of guaranteeing His promises to those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior, God has sealed or confirmed them in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise. What *the Father decrees, the Son accomplishes*, and to the work of the Son, *the Holy Spirit sets His seal!*

The sealing of the believer is the Spirit's "Amen" to the work of Jesus Christ. The *sealer* is God. The *seal* is the Holy Spirit. The *sealed ones* are the believers. What is the significance of the sealing of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to you and me, especially when we encounter complications from our cancelled or changed plans? We will see that because we are sealed, we can have *stability* when we are *shaken*, *serenity* when we are *stressed*, and *security* when we are *scared*. A look at the seal will explain this statement.

1. A Seal is for PRESERVATION and SAFETY

Jude 1:1 (NASB)

¹ **Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:**

Preserving is a simple process. The housewife takes the fruit of the harvest, seals it within a jar to avoid fermentation and corruption, and reserves it for a day of safe feasting around the table of fellowship. The Christian is called the *Fruit of Christ's passion*. We are preserved in Christ and sealed within Christ by the Holy Spirit unto a future day.... the day of redemption. God has given us power to preserve us from the evil of this age. What a blessing to know this, especially when we have complications from a change in our plans and go through difficult trials.

Galatians 1:4 (NASB)

⁴ **Who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.**

2. A Seal Signifies AUTHENTICITY and GENUINENESS

The Holy Spirit sets His seal that the work of Christ is satisfactory. Documents in ancient times were sealed with clay or wax and stamped with a metal or stone seal on a ring or worn around the neck. It was the same as a signature. The document was not considered valid, the real thing, or genuine without the seal. The seal had to be present to be authentic and genuine. The presence of the Holy Spirit proves the believer is genuine also and has been truly born again. It is not *lip service, religious activity, or good works*, but the witness of the Holy Spirit that makes our profession of faith authentic. His presence indicates we belong to the Lord. We can rest assured that we are under His care when we encounter difficult complications from a change in our plans.

Romans 8:9 (NASB)

⁹ **However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

3. A Seal Signifies SECURITY and APPROVAL

In ancient times the seal of a king represented *security* and *inviolability*. When Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, King Darius and the nobles placed seals on the stone over the den's entrance so nothing would be changed. To break the seal without the king's consent could mean forfeiture of your life.

The tomb of Jesus was sealed. Why? It was feared that the disciples would steal his body and claim He arose. No one dared to defy the law or tamper with the seal of the Roman government. The fact that the seal was on the tomb or placed on a document showed the approval of the one placing the seal.

The believer belongs to God and is *safe*, *secure*, and *protected* because he is part of a finished transaction. He has been bought with a price and belongs to the Lord Himself. Our salvation is approved by God. He rejoiced when we put our faith in Him.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

John 10:28-29 (NASB)

²⁸“And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

²⁹My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.”

We are secure in Him.

4. A Seal Signifies OWNERSHIP

2 Timothy 2:19 (NASB)

¹⁹Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “**The Lord knows those who are His,**” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NASB)

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, **and that you are not your own?**

John 10:14 (NASB)

¹⁴“I am the good shepherd, and **I know My own** and My own know Me.”

The Ephesians would understand the seal of ownership. Ephesus was a maritime city, trading in timber by the ship masters was big business. The method of purchase involved these steps:

1. The merchant selected the timber.
2. He stamped his signet of ownership on the log.
3. The owner sent the agent later with his signet and matched seal. He would claim the property and carry it off for the master's use.

In the north lands of Canada, cut trees are carefully stamped with the seal of the owner so that months later the tree can be identified and claimed. The logs are stored in frozen rivers. In the Spring thaw, they float them down the river to the mills. There is no difficulty identifying them with the seals on the logs. Ranchers in Texas brand their cattle to prove they belong to them.

The Christian is stamped and sealed for identification by the Lord. The Lord seals us unto the day of redemption. His seal is our security and mark of ownership which is revealed by the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our life. If you are facing complications from a change in your circumstances or plans, you can have peace knowing that you belong to Him and He will do what is best for you and will provide solutions to your complications.

We have seen several functions of a seal so far.

1. *Preservation and Safety*
2. *Authenticity and Genuineness*
3. *Security and Approval*
4. *Ownership*
5. *Next, Destination*

5. A Seal is for DESTINATION

Truckers put seals on their loads to prove that the load has not been tampered with until it arrives at its final destination. We are sealed until we reach God's destination for us. Notice these two verses in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:30 (NASB)

³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom **you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

Ephesians 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, **with a view to the redemption** of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

The word **"you were"** and **"with a view"** are not synonymous. The differences in these words are these:

1. *With a view* speaks of **"incompleteness"** and *you were* speaks of **"completion."**
2. *With a view* speaks of arrest or stopping; *you were* speaks of arrival.
3. *With a view* signifies continuance of an action up to the time of another action.

For example, "I will play until Mom calls me for supper." *You were* on the other hand, places a limit and implies termination. It speaks of reaching the destination.

Being sealed unto the day of redemption implies destination. There will be a day of redemption when our salvation will be finally complete. The roots of redemption lie in the past in the Cross.

The fruits of our redemption are future at His coming. It is then we will receive everything He has planned for us. The *past*, *present*, and *future* work of redemption are seen in [2 Corinthians 1:10](#).

2 Corinthians 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Who **delivered us** from so great a *peril of death*, and **will deliver us**, **He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.**

1. He has “**delivered us.**” This is the past work of Christ.
2. He “**will deliver.**” This is His present work.
3. He will “**yet deliver us.**” His future work.

Life may be difficult right now. Your circumstances may be complicated and your dreams may have gone up in smoke, but thank God one day we will not have to deal with trials and heartaches anymore. We will be with the Lord.

6. The Seal is for PRESENTATION

The day of redemption will be a day of presentation. For example, at Christmas time gifts are wrapped and sealed for presentation in beautiful packages. The careful sealing of the gifts are a *sign of love and care*. *Sloppy, carelessly wrapped packages* that are *wrinkled, spotted, crumpled, and torn* speak of relieving an obligation rather than bestowing a gift of affection and respect. When Christ presents His Church, which has been sealed by the Holy Spirit, it will be a “**glorious church**,” not having spot or wrinkle ([Jude 24-25](#)).

Jude 1:24-25 (NASB)

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,
²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

The Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance in Christ. This is what Paul was speaking about in [verse 22 of 2 Corinthians 1](#) when he mentioned the “**Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.**” He used the same word in [Ephesians 1:14](#).

2 Corinthians 1:22 (NASB)

²² Who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a **pledge**.

Ephesians 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Who is given as a **pledge** of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

The word “*pledge*” is the Greek word *arrabon* {**ar-hrab-ohn**}. It meant the down payment to guarantee the final purchase of some commodity or piece of property.

It was caution money deposited by a purchaser in pledge of full payment. In [2 Corinthians](#) and [Ephesians](#), it is God's pledge of future blessedness, a guarantee that God will complete what He started. Our promised spiritual blessings in heavenly places will one day be completely fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of what the Lord will completely fulfill when we go home to Him or when He returns.

The word “**pledge**” also means “**engagement ring**.” The ring is an assurance, a guarantee that the promise made will be kept. Christ is the bridegroom and the Church is His bride. The Holy Spirit is the evidence of His love for us. We know that Jesus will come and claim His bride because He has given us His promise and His Spirit as the engagement ring.

1 John 3:2 (NASB)

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

VI. THE CALL FOR GOD AS A WITNESS—[2 Corinthians 1:23-24](#)

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 (NASB)

²³ But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.

²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

Paul's integrity was under assault and he calls upon the Lord as his witness that he was telling the Corinthians the truth. He was not fickle and unstable. The reason Paul did not return to Corinth was to spare the Corinthians from a severe rebuke. The apostle wanted to avoid the necessity of inflicting punishment and exercising severe and painful discipline on the church for the corruption that existed within it. If he went among them in their state of disorder, he would feel it to be necessary to exert his authority as an apostle, and remove at once the offending members from the church.

He expected to avoid the necessity of these painful acts of discipline, by sending to them a faithful and affectionate epistle, and thus inducing them to correct their problems on their own and reform. It was not, then, a disregard for them, or a lack of attachment to them, which had led him to change his purpose, but it was the result of tender affection.

Paul did not desire to pull rank and lord his authority over the church. He wanted to be an encourager and helper of their joy. He also stayed away so that their faith might be strengthened and that they might grow up in the Lord on their own. This is one of the reasons God permits many of us to undergo certain hardships and certain difficulties in our lives. The trials we face are for the purpose of strengthening our faith and our life.

Widely regarded as the greatest composer ever, **Beethoven** began losing his hearing at age 31 and was completely deaf 16 years later. As he became more and more deaf, Beethoven grew profoundly depressed. Shortly before his death, **Beethoven** wrote, “O how harshly was I repulsed by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing. But little more and I would have put an end to my life.”

Even so, **Beethoven** persisted. He felt called to produce his art, and he would not quit. As his prison of silence grew quieter, he had to rely on his “**inner ear**”, his memory of sounds. All the odds were against him, and so it would have turned out, had it not been for something inside **Beethoven** that just would not bend. He would not quit.

In the midst of his affliction, he wrote: “There is no greater joy for me than to pursue and produce my art. Oh, if I were only rid of this affliction, I could embrace the world! But I will seize it by the throat; most assuredly it shall not get me wholly down.”

Beethoven continued to compose even after he became completely deaf. The most enduring and beautiful works **Beethoven** ever conceived were entirely created during this period of total deafness including the monumental Ninth Symphony. The complications that he encountered from a change in his plans did not defeat him, and should not defeat us either.

Chapter 5. The Rigors of Restoration

2 Corinthians 2:1-11 (NASB)

¹ But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.

² For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?

³ This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be *the joy* of you all.

⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

⁵ But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.

⁶ Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority,

⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort *him*, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love for him.

⁹ For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

¹⁰ But one whom you forgive anything, I *forgive* also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, *I did it* for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

¹¹ so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Solving problems or conflicts with people presents a variety of challenges. It has its great rewards, but also has its rigors. The difficulty that goes with conflict is the stress it places upon our lives. This is why most people try to avoid it and just get along with others or ignore petty annoyances. They don't like the *residue of resentment, rebellion, or resistance* that can shadow confrontation. There are times, however, where conflict cannot be avoided. A parent may have to confront their child, a friend may have to deal with a problem with another friend, or a pastor may have to handle a situation in the church that cannot be ignored.

Such was the case with the Apostle Paul. There was a serious problem of sexual immorality that existed in the church at Corinth and Paul had no choice but to deal with it because the people were not doing so.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (NASB)

¹ It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

² You have become **arrogant** and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

In fact they considered such behavior as normal or were proud of it. This is the idea of the words “**arrogant**” which are derived from the Greek word *phusioo* {foo-see-o'-o}. Why they would have a proud attitude about perversion does not make any sense, but that is what happens when people ignore or excuse sinful behavior. They lose their common sense.

Paul had no choice but to deal with this problem and it created stress and tension between him and the people in Corinth. In fact, it caused him to change his plans in visiting the church until the problem could be resolved by that local church. This incident *reveals the rigors of restoration* but also the *rewards that result* from dealing scripturally with sin problems and restoring a wayward brother or sister in Christ. The rigors are worth the rewards that come from doing what is right and helping others who are struggling or have fallen to get back on their spiritual feet and live right. It also reveals the great love that Paul had for these people, even for those who had been sinful.

Notice verses one through three.

I. SORROW OR PAIN IS AVOIDED—[2 Corinthians 2:1-3](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:1-3 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

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

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

Paul is saying that he made up his mind to not bring sorrow and grief to these people with another painful visit by him. If he caused them to be grieved, who would encourage him? It certainly would not be the church if they were grieving. Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians admonishing them to deal with their sin problem so that when he arrived at the Corinth church again, he could rejoice with them all instead of being grieved by sin that still existed in the church.

Now what is the story behind this statement? What has actually transpired that caused Paul to write such a statement? There are several ideas that have been offered about what happened. Based on what I have studied, I will give you my conclusion. When Paul found out about the immorality that existed in the Corinthian church, he wrote the letter that we know as [1 Corinthians](#) to them to deal with problems in this church. When Paul found out that the problem of immorality was not dealt with in the church, Paul made a second visit to Corinth to deal with the problem.

We know he made a second visit based on [2 Corinthians 12:14](#) and [2 Corinthians 13:1](#) because he was preparing to see the Corinthians *a third time*. This visit was not recorded in the book of Acts.

2 Corinthians 12:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ **Here for this third time I am ready to come to you,** and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children.

2 Corinthians 13:1 (NASB)

¹ **This is the third time I am coming to you.** EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

On this second visit, matters evidently got pretty heated. This is when Paul came to them in sorrow or heaviness as mentioned in [2 Corinthians 2:1](#).

2 Corinthians 2:1 (NASB)

¹ **But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.**

Paul had instructed the church to remove this man from the church, and possibly his friends heatedly opposed Paul when he arrived. The process of restoration was rigorous at this time.

1 Corinthians 5:13 (NASB)

¹³ **But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.**

When Paul arrived, there was evidently a confrontation with this man who *insulted, verbally attacked* Paul, and challenged his apostolic authority to have him disciplined in the church. In other words, “*Who are you to tell me what to do or how to live? What gives you the right?*” He may have physically attacked Paul too. The fact that the man had not been dealt with reveals he may have been very influential in the church or in the city of Corinth. He may have been a wealthy business man, very popular, or a big guy that intimidated others with his size. This is speculation but a strong possibility.

Paul left Corinth and returned to Ephesus where he wrote a severe, stern letter to the church to deal with this problem. Evidently, nothing had been resolved. This letter was delivered by **Titus to the Corinthians**. As far as we know, this stern letter has been lost and is unavailable now. Paul expressed here in chapter two that he did not want to return to Corinth until the church had properly dealt with the source of sorrow in the church. This is why there was a change in plans in his visit. He did not want his next visit to be a source of grief and conflict again, but a time of rejoicing because the church had been obedient to the Lord. He said what needed to be said. Now the ball was in their court. They needed to act.

It was from **Titus** that **Paul** learned that these people were longing for Paul's fellowship and expressed deep sorrow. They realized that they had nothing to be proud of at all. Instead, what was tolerated brought shame and reproach on their testimony in the community. They had dealt with this man and the man repented of his sin. The spiritual surgery was painful, but brought forth the healing of the church and the wayward Christian.

2 Corinthians 7:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.

As we look at these first three verses in chapter two, we note important insights about the *rigors of restoration* and *concepts about confrontation*. The sensitivity and patience that Paul had with the Corinthians did not mean that he was unwilling to discipline them if they did not repent. His desire for the purity of the church made him willing to cause them sorrow if necessary. If he did, the only thing that would make him glad would be the repentance of those whom he made sorrowful. It was his concern for purity in the Corinthian church that prompted the letters he wrote to them. *Sensitivity and the desire to avoid unnecessary confrontation must always be balanced with a commitment to the purity of the church.*

There is an old story of a ship that was traveling across the Mediterranean, and one of the passengers cut a hole through the side of the ship. The sailors came and demanded to know what he was doing. "What difference does it make to you?" he asked. "The hole's under my own bunk." The hole may be under his bunk. It may be his hole, but it affects the whole ship.

The same truth holds when it comes to Christians that are living wickedly. When sin is allowed to fester in the church, it will weaken it. For this reason, it **must** be **confronted** and **corrected** even at the expense of people getting upset or angry. Yes, restoration can be rigorous at times.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NASB)

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

2 Corinthians 2:9 (NASB)

⁹For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

Paul wrote them to test their obedience in all things.

2 Corinthians 7:8 (NASB)

⁸For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while.

The Apostle Paul was not sorry that he had sent a severe letter to them, even though he was sorry at first because he knew it was difficult and painful for them for a short time. The issue, however, had to be addressed and the problem had to be solved, no matter how difficult it was.

Paul was not eager to chew them out or rebuke them. He hesitantly used severity and rebuke. He used it as a last resort. Paul used rebuke only when he was forced to use it and there was nothing else left to do. Sometimes you have to confront others about that which is wrong because when you ignore or avoid the problem, it only leads to future problems which tend to be greater in magnitude because no warnings or rebukes have been offered. *As people pursue a downward course in sin, the destructiveness of their decisions become greater.* Addictions can become stronger or their actions may have more far-reaching consequences which may affect them for the rest of their lives.

Today, there are some people whose eyes are always focused to finding fault with others and whose tongues are always tuned to criticize. I call them Gestapo squads. It is as if they are on a mission to destroy other people by griping about every little petty thing and blowing it out of proportion. When I was in seminary, there were students who were like this. They always wondered why they did not have many friends.

Paul was not like that at all. In this he was wise. If we are constantly critical and fault-finding, if we are habitually angry and harsh, if we rebuke far more than we praise, the plain fact is that even our rebuke loses its effectiveness. Our rebuke can become ignored because it is so constant. The more seldom a man rebukes, the more effective it is when he does. Our main focus should be to look for things to praise in others, not to condemn. If criticism is necessary, use it sparingly and carefully.

Notice something else about Paul's rebuke and sternness. When Paul did rebuke, he did it in love. He never spoke merely to hurt. Some people enjoy inflicting pain on others with their harsh words, but Paul was not like this at all. He never rebuked to cause pain; he always rebuked to restore joy. It is possible to hate the sin but love the sinner. If someone has to be confronted or rebuked, then realize the effective rebuke is given with the arm of love round that person. The rebuke of blazing anger may hurt and even terrify people, but the rebuke of hurt and sorrowing love alone can break the heart.

Revelation 3:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

We have seen first of all that *Sorrow was Avoided*. We will now look at the *Sincere Desire of Paul's Heart*. Notice [verse 4](#).

II. THE SINCERE DESIRE OF PAUL'S HEART—[2 Corinthians 2:4](#)

2 Corinthians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ For out of much **affliction and **anguish** of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.**

Paul was in great anguish when he wrote his letter of stern rebuke to the Corinthians. Remember, this letter is not a reference to [1 Corinthians](#), this is a letter of rebuke that was written after his second visit with them. Paul did not have the attitude, "I'll show them! I'll let them have it between the eyes!" No, he wrote this letter with tears flowing from his eyes like dangling pearls. **His heart was full of affliction and anguish.**

What does this mean? The word "affliction" is from the Greek word *thlipsis* {*thlip'-sis*} which means "pressed or squashed together, distress, or tribulation." It was a traumatic time for Paul. The word "anguish" is from the Greek word *sunoche* {*soon-okh-ay*'}. It carries the idea of being surrounded by *pressure, squeezed, or imprisoned*.

The root word *sunecho* {*soon-ekh'-o*} was used to describe the attack of a city, the pressing of your hands together or holding your ears. It was also used to describe a cattle squeeze that forced the cattle into a position where they could not move so the rancher could administer medication. This is how Paul felt in dealing with this problem. It was stressful but he had no choice. Sometimes, you have to face the same type of situation in trying to help or restore someone. **Restoration can be rigorous.**

It is not fun, especially for parents or grandparents, to discipline their kids or grandchildren. If you don't, however, you are going to **rear a bum, a brat, a bully, a burden, and possibly a burglar** or some other kind of criminal. Children need to learn the value of boundaries and the meaning of the word "No!"

I like the story that tells of a man named John who possessed a compulsion to tear paper. After years of therapy, John was still tearing paper. His family was losing hope. Finally, they took John to a new therapist. This fellow walked with John around the room and quietly talked with him. When John left the office, he was cured. The family was overjoyed. They asked the therapist what he had told John. The therapist said, "I told him, 'Don't tear paper.'" Evidently, the parents did not stress this or the boy had no respect for his parents.

Parents, when your kids are bad, tell them “**No**” and enforce it. You won’t *warp* them and *mess* them up psychologically. You are not being a blessing to them by letting them have their own way and running the home. If they grow up being selfish and getting their own way all the time, then a catastrophe tends to strike when they get married. Their spouse will resent their selfishness and the marriage will be *strained* or *dissolved*. For some, they struggle to get married because the people they date detect their selfishness in time and terminate the relationship. Momma, don’t let those kids walk all over you. Teach them what is *right* and *rule your roost!*

Proverbs 29:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.**

It is also not fun when a pastor has to deal with wayward people in his church, but there are times that is necessary. Preaching hard against sin is not fun either, but crucial for the health of the church. **Preach the Word and let it do its work.** Don’t worry about tickling ears. Aim for the heart. That is the only way you are going to help people grow in the Lord. If you live to please people, misunderstandings will depress you, but if you live to please the Lord, you can face *misunderstandings* or *conflict* with *faith* and *courage*. **You can deal with the rigors of restoration.**

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**

³ **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,**

⁴ **and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.**

Paul was truly trying to help these people. His goal was not to grieve the Corinthians, but to express his great love for them. Some of the greatest acts of love are demonstrated by people who will confront you when you are doing something that is going to destroy your life. They are willing to *risk your anger* to *spare you of anguish*. They do this because they really care about your life. Solomon spoke of this kind of love. Solomon also mentioned that a wise man will recognize the value of correction and its benefit.

Proverbs 27:5 (NASB)

⁵ **Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.**

Proverbs 9:8 (NASB)

⁸ **Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.**

III. The Stress and Sorrow on the Entire Church—[2 Corinthians 2:5](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ **But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.**

The translation here is difficult. Here is what Paul is saying. Paul said that if anyone has caused sorrow, he has not only hurt Paul, but to put it mildly, he has hurt or grieved the entire church at Corinth. Everyone was affected by what this person did, not just Paul.

For this reason, it was the responsibility of the church to discipline this man. ***The burden was on the leaders at the Corinth church, not upon Paul.*** Notice that this remark is very delicately done. He does not mention the offender by name. The apostle makes his remark general, that it might be as tender and kind to the offending brother as possible. They would know whom he meant.

Paul did not bash this person over the head. He did not want to say too much about the offense or exaggerate it. Instead, he downplayed the incident and cautioned the Corinthians not to blow it up out of proportion. All that Paul said in regard to him was as tender as possible. He did not harshly charge him with sin. Instead, he gently insinuates that he **“had caused grief and had pained the hearts of his brethren.”** The man had repented; the incident was closed; and it was time to move on. The same attitude should be adopted when you have conflicts with others. ***If the matter gets resolved, then move on and stop picking at the wound.***

In the rigors of restoration we have seen so far.....

1. *Sorrow was Avoided*
2. *The Sincere Desire of Paul's Heart*
3. *The Stress & Sorrow on the Entire Church*
4. *Next, The Scriptural Counsel about Forgiveness*

IV. THE SCRIPTURAL COUNSEL ABOUT FORGIVENESS—[2 Corinthians 2:6-8](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:6-8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶ **Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority,**

⁷ **so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.**

⁸ **Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.**

The majority of the people in the church opposed what this man did and Paul said this was sufficient punishment for what he had done. The discipline had accomplished all that he had desired. It had ***humbled him***, and ***brought him to repentance***; and doubtless led him to put away his wife since it was an incestuous marriage.

Now that this was accomplished, it was proper that he should be again restored to the privileges and fellowship of the church. No evil would result from such a restoration, and their duty to their penitent brother demanded it. His name is carefully protected so that his identity would be protected when this epistle should be read, as Paul doubtless intended, by other churches, and be transmitted to future times.

The church was urged to forgive the offending brother. What had evidently happened was the church put him on probation instead of pardoning him. When someone is pardoned, the slate is wiped clean. On the other hand, **probation** keeps a person feeling *watched, distrusted, and unsettled*. Paul told the Corinthians to pardon the offender for he has suffered enough. **He no longer needed discipline; he needed forgiveness and reassurance** from the people.

The rigors of restoration are very difficult. It is not easy and it was not easy for the church at Corinth. When someone is living in sin, it is not easy to try to persuade them to change direction. **So how do you do this? How do you restore someone? What are some basic steps you can follow to try to spiritually restore someone?**

The Rigors of Restoration

A. Consideration of Yourself.

We are to examine ourselves first before we confront others about their sin. We are to judge ourselves first always. Many cannot or will not approach others that need help because they cannot get past this first step. This is why it is so important to clear your conscience with God and men so you can be used to help others in the future.

Matthew 7:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?

⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

1 Corinthians 11:31 (NASB)

³¹But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

¹Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

We are to approach the offender with meekness and humility and be careful not to fall or yield to temptation ourselves.

B. Concentration on Scripture

If you are going to try to restore someone, it is important to know the Word of God. If someone is wrong, they need to know why they are wrong. Show them in the Bible.

Filling your life with Scripture will also develop spiritual wisdom, patience, love, strength, and maturity in your own life.

Psalms 119:11 (NASB)

¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

Psalms 1:1-3 (NASB)

¹ How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

C. Confrontation with the Sinner

When you are spiritually prepared, you then can approach the brother or sister in Christ. [Matthew 18](#) gives principles on how to do this. Deal with the issue privately first. If this fails, then take someone with you and try again. *Remember, the goal is to try to help the person spiritually.*

Matthew 18:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.”

D. Cancellation of Social Relationships

If the sinner is unwilling to *repent* or *turn from sin*, then the Bible teaches that *there is to be a break in fellowship with that person*. The separation in fellowship is not for the purpose of being mean, but for the purpose of getting the sinner to realize the seriousness of his sin and **bring him or her to a place of repentance** and *restoration*. Restoration is the goal of the whole ordeal. This step of isolation is like a child that is sent to the corner by his teacher.

Matthew 18:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ **I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;**
¹⁰ **I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.**

The basic steps we have seen so far in trying to restore someone are:

1. *Consideration of Self*
2. *Concentration on Scripture*
3. *Confrontation with the Sinner*
4. *Cancellation of Social Relationships*

E. Contemplation and Supplication

If the person does not repent, continue to pray for them throughout the day. Ask God to change their heart and bring them to repentance.

James 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

F. Consolation for the Sorrowful, Submissive Sinner

God has a way of turning the deepest pain into victory. Because Ethiopian Christians faithfully ministered to a convicted murderer in jail, God brought salvation to Mohammed Ahmed, who was convicted of killing an evangelist named Tulu on February 2, 2005. Tulu was the fifth eldest child of eight, but suffered from an unidentified disease that made him physically weak and a slow learner. During July of 2001, Tulu accepted Christ and experienced God's healing hand. His health improved to such an extent that he was able to attend secondary school in a predominantly Muslim area in southern Ethiopia.

Tulu devoted time to prayer and studying the Word of God. He became known for his warmth and affection when witnessing about God's love to the community. However, some Muslim extremists did not appreciate the change in Tulu's life and attacked him with a spear five months after his conversion. Even though the spear penetrated his skull, after intensive treatment he miraculously recovered. "During this time," recalls his mother, "there were only four believers in our area, but through Tulu's persecution, 50 people came to know Christ as their Savior, including his father and me."

Mohammed confronted Tulu at a secondary school on that tragic day in 2005. Mohammed swung his machete and hit Tulu's throat with a single blow as he shouted the Jihad (Islamic) war cry: "Allahu Akbar!" The family tried to rush Tulu to a nearby clinic, but the young evangelist took his final breath and died en route. He was only 19 years old.

Two local church leaders in southern Ethiopia have permission to visit prisoners at least once a week. During such a visit, the church leaders approached Mohammed with a few words of encouragement. Though at first he was not receptive, the leaders continued to demonstrate God's unconditional love. As the leaders continued to invite him to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, he started to show interest. Because of their patience in sharing the gospel and their reassurance that they held no grudge against him, God's grace broke through and Mohammed accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord.

Mohammed confessed religious fanaticism, fanned by Muslim extremists, was the real reason for Tulu's murder. He sincerely regretted what happened. The two church leaders taught Mohammed and three other Muslim-background believers while in prison. On March 5, a little more than two years after the murder, Mohammed was baptized in the name of the God he once persecuted. The prison authorities escorted him and the other three prisoners to the church compound and witnessed their baptism. When the excited converts were asked to give their testimonies before being immersed, Mohammed made sure all the witnesses understood that he was being baptized in the name of the Almighty God, testifying of His redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is power in forgiveness and that is what Paul was stressing to us here in [2 Corinthians](#).

If the sinner repents, he is to be forgiven. Paul stresses the importance of this issue in [2 Corinthians 2](#). Paul said “forgive” him in [verse seven](#).

[2 Corinthians 2:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ So that on the contrary you should rather **forgive** and comfort *him*, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

What is he saying? The word “forgive” is from the Greek word *charizomai* {*khar-id'-zom-ah-ee*} which means “to do something pleasant or agreeable to someone, to do a favor, to show one's self gracious, kind, benevolent; to grant forgiveness or to pardon; to give graciously and freely.” Remember that he is using this term in reference to someone who has been offensive. He is saying we should invest in the life of the offender who has repented.

[Ephesians 4:32 \(NASB\)](#)

³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Forgiveness is difficult for people in this day because it is viewed by many *as a sign of weakness* instead of *a godly virtue*. Some of the “self help” books teach that many of your problems can be traced and blamed upon others. They claim that you are not responsible for your failures. This philosophy is supposed to make the person feel better and remove his guilt. Everyone is a victim. *Vengeance, retaliation, be number one at any cost*, are all promoted by this philosophy and seeking *forgiveness* and *restoration* are *demoted* and *considered unnecessary* because you have supposedly done nothing wrong. You are not responsible. Such teaching is *destructive* and *unproductive* because the source of failure is not addressed and the problems don't get solved.

Beloved, when we refuse to forgive someone, we lose and pay a high price. Our unwillingness to forgive others **produces** *hatred, bitterness, animosity, anger, and retribution*. It not only clogs up the arteries, but also the courts with thousands of vengeful lawsuits. Refusing to forgive imprisons people in their past. Unforgiving people keep their pain alive by constantly picking at the open wound and keeping it from healing. Bitterness takes root in their hearts and defiles them. Anger rages out of control and negative emotions run unchecked. **Life** is filled with *turmoil* and *strife* instead of *joy* and *peace*.

On the other hand, when we forgive others, it frees us from the past. **Forgiveness** is *liberating, exhilarating, and healthy*. Forgiveness relieves tension, brings peace and joy, and restores broken relationships. When we are unwilling to forgive others it shows a lack of love. Forgiveness, on the other hand, fulfills the royal law of love according to James.

James 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well.

Forgiving love is a precious jewel, a rich treasure in the life of any church. Without it, churches and homes are *torn, split, and fragmented*. When people practice forgiveness, people can emotionally and spiritually heal and backsliders can be restored to spiritual usefulness and maturity.

2 Corinthians 2:7 (NASB)

⁷ So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Paul also added the fact they were not only to forgive him but to “**comfort**” him. This word “**comfort**” is from the Greek word *parakaleo* {*par-ak-al-eh'-o*}. It is a word used to describe the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. It means “**to call to one’s side, to speak to, to comfort or instruct, to encourage.**” This is especially important for a person who has been away from the Lord and has repented. He needs to know that he is loved and still accepted by other believers. How do you comfort someone who needs restoration?

Concepts for Comforting Others who Need Restoration

- 1. Assure** the person of your love and concern for them. Verbalize your concern and express it in your actions toward them.
- 2. Attention** is needed. Do not ignore them. Sit with them and talk to them.
- 3. Ask** how they are progressing as they try to get back on their spiritual feet.
- 4. Associate** with them. Do things together. Invite them to fellowship with you.

2 Corinthians 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love for him.

5. Affirmation is essential. They need reassurance at first that they are truly loved and accepted. This is what Paul was speaking about in [verse 8](#) when he urged they must “reaffirm” their love for him. The word “reaffirm” is from the Greek word *kuroo* {*koo-ro'-o*}. This word means “to give authority, to establish as valid, real, and genuine.”

They were to give strong expressions and assurances of their love and concern for him. There was to be no room for doubt. **Don't forget that discipline is for the purpose of correction, not vengeance.** When the person repents, get them back on their spiritual feet. Notice that Paul urged them. He did not order it because Christian love must be *unforced, spontaneous, and genuine* or else it ceases to be what it professes to be.

2 Corinthians 2:7 (NASB)

⁷ So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort *him*, **otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.**

Paul stressed the importance of forgiveness and confirming our love, “**otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.**” He did not want the repentant sinner to become overwhelmed by excessive *grief, sorrow, and discouragement*. This is a strong expression, denoting intensity of grief. We speak of a man being drowned in sorrow. That is the idea here. The figure is probably taken from deep waters, or from a whirlpool which seems to swallow up anything that comes within reach. Excessive grief or calamity, in the Scriptures, is often compared to such waters.

Psalms 124:2-5 (NASB)

² “Had it not been the LORD who was on our side When men rose up against us,

³ Then they would have swallowed us alive, When their anger was kindled against us;

⁴ Then the waters would have engulfed us, The stream would have swept over our soul;

⁵ Then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.”

By excessive grief, the offending brother would be destroyed. His life would waste away under the effect of his excommunication and disgrace, and the remembrance of his offence would prey upon him, and sink him to the grave. Despair can drive a person to suicide or deeper sin. *This is why it was vital that he be restored.*

V. SUBMISSION IS TESTED—[2 Corinthians 2:9-10](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:9-10 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

¹⁰ But one whom you forgive anything, I *forgive* also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, *I did it* for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

The reason Paul had written the earlier letters to the Corinthians was to test them to see if they would be obedient to Paul's instructions. If they had forgiven anyone for anything, Paul also forgave that person. Paul's desire was that the Corinthians take the lead in forgiving the repentant sinner. He held no grudges at all against the offender.

VI. THE SCHEMES OF SATAN—[2 Corinthians 2:11](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

When we fail to obey God's Word, Satan can *outsmart*, *outwit* or *take advantage* of us. This happens because we let it happen. Our choices open the door for him to get a grip into our lives. Paul spoke of this in his letter to the Ephesians. He warned us to not give ground or give Satan an opportunity to work in our lives. This is part of the rigors of restoration. *We must be on guard against an unforgiving heart when we are offended or hurt.*

[Ephesians 4:27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁷ And do not give the devil an opportunity.

Satan's goal for the church is the opposite of God's. God wants *humble, merciful, joyful, loving, obedient* fellowship with Him and with one another. Satan wants the church to be in a condition where sin reigns supreme. If sin is confronted, Satan wants it done so in a *harsh, graceless, merciless* manner. Both failing to deal with sin and failing to forgive repentant sinners can destroy a church. The hard work of disciplining sinners and restoring those who repent is a true test of a church's love for the Lord and the spiritual maturity of that church.

Paul acknowledged Satan as a valid adversary. He was familiar with Satan's purpose and schemes.

So what are the *devices* or the "thought-out" schemes of Satan that he uses to destroy or ruin Christians?

We will mention six of his most effective ones.

The Devices of the Devil

1. Deception

Satan deceives believers into thinking that things are more important than the Lord. This is the deception of riches. He also deceives Christians into thinking that sin will not hurt them. It will.

Galatians 6:7 (NASB)

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

Matthew 13:22 (NASB)

²² “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Satan desires that we not receive the blessings that God has for us. **Chuck Swindoll** shared a story that took place some years ago. The people of Texas were being plagued by a Mexican bandit who continuously slipped across the border and robbed their banks.

His name was Jorge Rodriguez. He had become bolder and more successful, and yet, they could never capture him before he hightailed it back across the border to his hideout in the mountains of Mexico. Finally, they had enough of this so they hired a well-known detective and sent him down into Mexico to get back their money. He set off for the small town reputed to be the hideout of Rodriguez.

The detective found the small Mexican town, walked into the saloon, and, lo and behold, there in the corner was the man he was after, Jorge Rodriguez. “Aha!” he said, “I’ve found you!” and he pulled out his gun. “Where have you hidden the millions you have stolen from our banks in Texas? Tell me, or I’ll blow you away!”

At this point another man, Juan Garcia, who was also in the saloon, stepped up to the detective and said, “Sir, you are wasting your time talking to Jorge like this. He doesn’t understand a word of English. He has no idea what you just said. Would you like me to translate for you.?” The detective said, “Yes, of course. Tell him to confess to me where the money is or I’ll kill him.”

So Juan Garcia turned to Jorge and jabbered away at him for a few moments in Spanish. There was much gesturing and chattering, and Jorge told Juan in Spanish that if he would take the man to the well that was just a mile out of town, climb down into the well, and remove the third brick, there he would find more than \$3 million in gold. When Jorge was finished speaking, Juan, the helpful translator, turned around to the detective and said, “Senor, he says that he has absolutely no idea where the gold is. I’m sorry.”

Beloved, this is the way Satan works. He wants to rob you of God's blessings and all that the Lord has for you. He will endeavor to get you to doubt God's promises. He does not want you to have eternal life or the rewards that come from faithfully serving the Lord. This is why John and Paul issued a warning to us that reminds us to beware of Satan's deceptions.

2 John 1:8 (NASB)

⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

2 Timothy 3:13 (NASB)

¹³ But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad to worse*, deceiving and being deceived.

2. Discouragement

Satan tries to use our discouragement or fatigue to get us to quit. If he can **shift our focus from faith to focusing upon our *frustrations, fears,* and *feelings*** of hurt, then he can fuel our discouragement to the point where we want to give up. In [1 Kings 19](#), we find this is what happened to Elijah who said, "**.....It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers (vs. 4).**" Paul admonished us to not quit in his letter to the Galatians.

1 Kings 19:4 (NASB)

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Galatians 6:9 (NASB)

⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

An elderly lady was once asked by a young man who had grown weary in serving the Lord, whether he ought to give up the struggle. "I am beaten every time," he said dolefully. "I feel I must give up." Smiling into the troubled face before her, the elderly woman wisely replied, "Did you ever notice that when the Lord told the discouraged fishermen to cast their nets again, it was right in the same old spot where they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing?" Beloved, the moral of this lesson is don't give up. ***Blessing will eventually come if you will not become discouraged and quit.***

3. Distraction

Satan has a clever way of getting us distracted and off course to the point we don't grow in the Lord. The story of **Atalanta** is a great illustration of Satan's tactics. **Atalanta** was a gorgeous maiden of passing beauty and was exceeding swift of foot. Her hand in marriage was offered to any Greek who would beat her on the race course. Many men tried and failed, and as a consequence, they forfeited their lives.

At last, **Hippomenes** ventured his fate and set off from the mark with the maiden on his heels. As she was about to pass him with her blazing speed, he threw out on the course a glittering golden ball. **Atalanta** pounced after the toy while the young man shot ahead in the race.

Again she overtook the young man, and again he enticed her from the race course. A third time he played his trick of distraction upon her, and she bounded after the golden ball as he passed the finish line, won the race, escaped death, and claimed his beautiful bride. Not by the superior speed of her opponent was **Atalanta** overcome, but by her own folly in being distracted and leaving the course for a mere toy.

Has this same pattern often been the undoing of the saint in his race for the Lord Jesus Christ? How many Christians have been defeated in their Christian lives because they have been distracted by the trifling prizes of the world and have become consumed in the mundane trivial affairs of this life?

We tend to be so easily distracted from serving our Savior. We as a people are distracted by being *busy with our activities*, by *bombs from attacking adversaries*, by the *burdens of the affairs* of this life, and by *beliefs that are atheistic*. Mankind is distracted from God's glory by the *contractions* from his *conflicts*, the *satisfaction* of his *sin*, *selfishness*, and *sensuality*, by the *attraction* of *allurements* and *temptations*, by the *subtraction* of his *security* and *serenity*, by the *reactions* of those who *resist*, and by the *transactions* of *temporal*, *business affairs*. These things can turn the heart from God.

When a person's heart is turned away from the Lord, he is facing the wrong direction. The distractions of Satan can make one unstable. When the love for the Lord fades for a love for something else, you will be unstable. **Satan** can use *money*, *fame*, a *handsome*, *attentive man* or *beautiful woman* to distract us and get our eyes off of God. Such was the case with King Solomon who started out so well, but got sidetracked later.

1 Kings 11:1-4 (NASB)

¹ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,

² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.*" Solomon held fast to these in love.

³ He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

⁴ For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*.

2 Timothy 4:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Revelation 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

Beloved, don't get off course in your walk with God. You will cease to grow spiritually. Many a Christian has been lured off the path of God's will by some attraction of the world. What is Satan using to try to distract you? Is it *money, men, women, fame*, or popularity that he is using to get you sidetracked? Don't be distracted by the cares of this life and snared in Satan's traps.

2 Timothy 2:26 (NASB)

²⁶ And they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Mark 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ But the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

4. Defeat

1 Peter 1:6 (NASB)

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.

Psalms 51:3-4 (NASB)

³ For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

Psalms 51:12 (NASB)

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.

Some believers feel they are totally worthless after they have suffered a spiritual defeat and scarred their lives by their sin. Peter struggled until the Lord restored him. Those who have suffered defeat need our love and encouragement. We can help them get the joy of their salvation back.

We are looking at the common devices of Satan. We have seen so far that he uses:

1. *Deception*
2. *Discouragement*
3. *Distraction*
4. *Defeat*
5. *Next, we will look at Depravity*

5. Depravity

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (NASB)

¹ It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

² You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

Sin will ruin your testimony and effectiveness in telling others about Christ. For this reason Satan tempts us to ruin. If for some reason you mess up, clear your conscience with God and men.

Acts 24:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men."

6. Division and Disunity

1 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB)

³ For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

When there is division among believers, then it becomes difficult to reach others for Christ and encourage other believers because the focus of the divided is not on these things. The focus has been shifted to those we are angry with and their faults.

2 Corinthians 2:11 (NASB)

¹¹ So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Paul said we need to obey the Lord, "**So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.**" Beloved, restoration is hard work but it yields great rewards and blessings in our own lives and the lives of others. Do not fear or be hesitant to help another get on their spiritual feet.

In **May of 1990**, the cargo ship *Hansa Carrier* was hit by a severe storm during its voyage from South Korea to the United States. In the middle of the tempest, a large wave swept 21 shipping crates into the sea, five of which contained Nike shoes. About six months later, a dedicated beach scavenger named Steve McLeod spotted a clump of Nikes while walking along the Oregon coast. Then another. Then several piles of the gleaming, plastic footwear. Soon, McLeod's Cannon Beach apartment was packed with several styles and sizes of Nikes, each of which he carefully cleaned, dried, and de-barnacled. There was only one problem: the vast majority of the shoes were left-footed.

This phenomenon attracted the attention of local scientists working to decipher the Pacific's ocean currents. With the help of **Nike** and the *Hansa crew*, they determined that the shoes had not been connected during their ocean voyage. Furthermore, the slight toe curvature of the **right-footed shoes** caused them to tack northeastward into the Alaska Current, while the **left-footed Nikes** slid neatly into the southeast-bound California Current. Thus, for months, a small physical difference forced each shoe farther and farther away from its mate.

Once Steve McLeod had put these pieces together, he began contacting other known scavengers for news of another Nike windfall. Sure enough, he heard about a large number of shoes that had beached to the north along the Queen Charlotte Sound. A meeting was arranged and, in one day, 1,200 pairs of Nike tennis shoes were re-united using serial numbers. Once the pair became whole again, it went home with whomever it fit. Their restoration made them useful and of value. *This is what the Lord does with the restored believer.* He makes that Christian useful and valuable in the cause of Christ. **The rigors of restoration have their rewards.**

Chapter 6.

The Fragrance of Our Life

2 Corinthians 2:12-17 (NASB)

¹² Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,

¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.

¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

¹⁶ to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

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

We are confronted with *smells* and *fragrances* every day. Some are *pleasant* and some are *repulsive*. I love the smell of certain perfumes like Red Door perfume, Royal Copenhagen Cologne or Mustang Cologne for men, cinnamon rolls, steak on the grill, or garlic and onions cooking in an Italian dish. There are also smells that make me gag or curl my nose such as *dead animals*, *skunks*, *sewage*, or *body odor*.

In fact, the other day my wife walked by me and I smelled the stench of sweat and body odor. I said, "Elia, that dress smells. I have never smelled that smell on you since I have known you." She said in a defensive, you're-in-trouble tone, "What do you mean? I don't smell!" I said, "The dress smells!" and I went over to her to smell it. Guess what? For some strange reason it didn't smell. Now I'm wondering, "Where is that aroma coming from?" So then I smelled me. Guess what? The problem was under my own nose and arm pit. I was the one that smelled so I cleaned myself off and put on some cologne and more deodorant. Needless to say, my wife gave me the riot act about this the rest of the day. She really teased me big-time on this one.

Yes, fragrances do affect us in a positive or negative way. In this portion of Scripture, Paul addresses the issue of the importance of the *fragrance of our life* and the *fragrance of Christ* in a world that is filled with the stench of sin. This is why he urged the Corinthian church to *forgive* and *restore* the backslidden Christian involved in immorality in the church because of the effect it would have on the repentant sinner and also because of the example the church would have in a lost community.

As we examine this portion of Scripture, we will focus our spiritual magnifying glass on three areas:

- 1) *The Feelings of Paul's Distress*
- 2) *The Fragrance of Our Lives*
- 3) *Fraudulent Living is Rejected*

I. THE FEELINGS OF PAUL'S DISTRESS—[2 Corinthians 2:12-13](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:12-13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,

¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.

Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel. Troas was a seaport on the Aegean Sea in western Asia Minor which is Turkey today. It was about ten miles from the famous city of Troy, for which it was named. Troas was founded in **300 B.C.**, and Emperor Augustus had granted it the coveted status of a Roman colony.

The apostle wanted to go to Corinth, but there were unresolved problems in that church which kept him from going. That, however, did not stop Paul from preaching. He made the decision to take the treasure of God's Word somewhere else. **Where one door closed, another door of opportunity to serve Christ opened up.** He had a passion to make his life count for the Lord and share with others the message of Jesus Christ.

He was.....

- 1) *committed to Christ*
- 2) *fitted for fighting Satan*
- 3) *knitted to the Pneuma or the Spirit of God*
- 4) *outfitted for the opportunities God put on his path*
- 5) *submitted to the Savior's will for his life.*

[1 Corinthians 9:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

The fragrance of the Lord was on his life.

God opened the door of opportunity for Paul. He can do the same for you too.

You may have loved ones that you are trying to reach for Christ right now, but the opportunity to get through to them has not presented itself yet. Keep praying and be alert for the opportunity to surface to speak with them again. Many times, when you least expect it, the door opens to share the Lord with others who are ready to listen to what you have to say.

God opened the door of opportunity to preach in Troas, but there was a problem which distracted Paul and made him very *uneasy* and *stressed*. He had *no rest, no ease* or freedom in his spirit. He could not find Titus and was very concerned about his welfare. So he decided to leave Troas and look for his dear friend in Macedonia. This is what he felt the Lord wanted him to do.

Even though a door may open for you, it does not necessarily mean you are to walk through it unless God leads you to do so. For example, the door was open for Jonah to get on a ship going to Joppa, but it was not the direction the Lord wanted him to go.

Who is Titus? Who is this guy? Titus probably gets the Pauline service award with 20 years as Paul's co-worker. He was born a Gentile, and when he became a Christian he did not get circumcised. When Titus accompanied Paul on a visit to Jerusalem, some Jewish Christians insisted Paul's companion be circumcised according to Jewish law. As Paul put it, he **"did not submit even for a moment,"** and **Titus remained uncircumcised.**

Titus thus served as a powerful symbol of justification by grace, not by the law. He served with Paul during his extended stay in Ephesus as a **"partner and fellow-worker,"** and from there, Titus tackled his toughest assignment which was to combat grave immorality in the Corinthian church and mediate their reconciliation with Paul.

Titus put his pastoral skills to work and reported back to an anxious Paul who was awaiting a response to his severe second letter to the Corinthians. He reported to Paul that they had repented and wanted to see Paul. **Titus was later appointed the first pastor of the troubled church at Crete,** where Paul wrote him about the qualities of a good pastor. **Eusebius reports that Titus died there in 96 A.D.** and was buried in the ancient capital, Gortyna.

Paul was concerned about this man because he could not find him. Distractions do come in our lives. When they occur, our responsibility is **to keep our focus on the Lord** and seek **His direction and leadership.**

The fact that Paul was so concerned about Titus **reveals the fragrance** of his love and concern for others. **Is the fragrance of love in your life?** Teenagers, do you have a love and concern for others, especially those who are much older than you? Senior Christians, do you demonstrate love and concern for teenagers? What about the Lord? Are you dedicated and in love with Him? **If you are, the fragrance of your love will be evident to all by the way you live.**

John 13:35 (NASB)

³⁵ **"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

A class of little girls was learning to spell. They spelled a number of small words, such as **"pig," "cat," "dog," "cow,"** and amused themselves by imitating the sounds that these animals make.

Then little Mary was asked to spell **"love."** She didn't stop to give the letters, but ran and threw her arms around the teacher's neck and kissed her on the cheek. **"We spell 'love' that way at our house,"** she said.

The girls laughed, but the teacher said, “That is a beautiful way; but do you know another way to spell 'love'?” “Oh, yes,” cried Mary, “I spell love this way,” and she began to put the books in order on her teacher's desk. “I spell love by helping everybody when they need me.”

II. THE FRAGRANCE OF OUR LIVES—[2 Corinthians 2:14-16](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:14-16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ **But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.**

¹⁵ **For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;**

¹⁶ **to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?**

This is a very interesting section of Scripture. Paul was so thankful for God's leadership of his life, and the fact that he was a servant or slave of the Lord. This truth is seen in the Greek word for “**triumph**.” It is the word *thriambeuo* {*three-am-byoo'-o*} which means “**to lead in triumph**.” It can also carry the meaning of “**making a spectacle of someone or something**.”

In fact, this reading appears in a number of ancient translations of the Greek text, including the Coptic and the Syriac, and has merit. In the Greek, the phrase “**leads us to triumph in Christ**” is actually rendered “**who always leads us in His triumphal procession in Christ**.”

Now what is Paul talking about or referring to here? Paul is painting a picture of what is known as the **Roman Triumph** and is picturing the Lord as “**The Conqueror**” of his life. He was thrilled at the way God opened doors of opportunity for him and also God's direction that helped him to look for Titus. He knew that the Lord was in control of his path.

Now what is a Roman Triumph? The highest honor which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph which was something like an American ticker-tape parade, yet different. To receive this fantastic honor, certain requirements had to be met.

1. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field.
2. The war must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home.
3. A minimum of five thousand of the enemy must have fallen in one engagement.
4. A positive extension of territory must have been gained for Rome, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled.
5. The victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war.

What was this parade like? In an actual Triumph parade, the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol. The streets were *decorated* and *garlanded* and the people were *shouting* and *cheering* the participants, especially the honored general.

At the front of the parade there came the *state officials* and *the senate*. These officials were followed by the trumpeters. In the shadow of the trumpeters were the spoils taken from the conquered land. After the spoils were displayed in the parade, there came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships.

As the procession continued, the *captives* or *prisoners of war*, *enemy princes*, *leaders* and *generals* walked in chains, awaiting pending imprisonment or death in the arena of the Circus Maximus where the helpless captives would entertain the people by fighting wild beasts. These prisoners were shadowed by *lictors* who would smack the prisoners with their whipping rods. Next came the musicians with their lyres playing triumphant music in praise of the general.

Finally there came the victorious, conquering general himself. He stood in a magnificent chariot, adorned with ivory and plates of gold and usually drawn by two to four beautiful white horses. Other animals have been used to draw the chariot. When Pompey triumphed over Africa, his chariot was drawn by elephants. Lions drew the chariot of Mark Antony. Others have used tigers or deer. The children would sit at the feet of the general in his chariot, ride on the chariot horses, or follow behind him in another chariot.

The general was also adorned in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he carried an ivory scepter with the Roman eagle at the top of it. A slave would hold over his head the crown of Jupiter. In order to keep him humble amidst these great honors this slave would remind him of his faults and vices. He would warn him of pride and the fact that glory is fleeting.

The general's army followed his chariot wearing all their decorations and shouting, "*To triumph!*" their cry of triumph. The people would throw flowers at the general and the army. The procession was closed by the priests and their attendants, with the different sacrificial utensils, and a white bull, which was to be the chief sacrifice to the Roman gods. The priests would swing their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. They would be burning the incense to their gods to whom they gave credit for the victory. All the way through the procession would be clouds of smoke from the incense, sometimes even obscuring the procession as it passed by. It was a rare and special day for all. This is the picture that was in Paul's mind.

The questions at this point we want to address are, "What did this picture of the triumphal procession mean to Paul?" Why is he using this illustration? How did he see himself in relation to it? Some think he saw himself as a victorious soldier. I believe he saw himself as a conquered subject.

Paul viewed himself as God's captive. He was a prisoner of Christ who was led by the Lord until the day he died. He sees the conquering Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in that conquering train.

Paul was an enemy of God's people, putting many to death. God, however, conquered him on the Damascus Road when he trusted in Christ and surrendered to God's call for his life. The Lord was *his master* and he was *His servant* or *slave* who followed the Lord to the day of his death. His life was not his own for he was the Lord's slave, following the *orders*, the *directions*, and the *leadership* of Christ to his time of death.

Galatians 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, **I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.**

Titus 1:1 (NASB)

¹ **Paul, a bond-servant** of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,

Paul was eventually executed for the cause of Jesus Christ. He may have been charged with the burning of Rome with the rest of the Christians. There were plenty of people who wanted to gain Nero's favor. Paul was not killed by the lions in the Roman arena.

2 Timothy 4:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.**

The tradition is that Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded on the Ostian Road just outside of Rome. Nero died June, 68 AD, so that Paul was executed before that date, perhaps in the late spring of that year (or 67). It is possible that Luke and Timothy were with him. He lived for the Lord no matter what the cost so that Christ's *power*, *majesty*, and *glory* would be manifested in his life. He finished what God led him to do. His epitaph is recorded in **2 Timothy 4**.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NASB)

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Because of his submissiveness to the Lord as a *servant* or *slave* of Christ, because he was letting the Lord lead him, he was a victorious Christian and had no regrets.

This is one of the great paradoxes of Scripture. **You become victorious when you become a servant or slave to Christ.** You become a leader, you become great, when you become a *servant* to others and *follow* the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 (NASB)

⁸ **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;**

⁹ **persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;**

¹⁰ **always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

Matthew 20:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ **"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,**

²⁷ **and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;**

If you want the fragrance of Christ in your life, **be saved** and **be a servant** of the Lord.

In **Cremona, Italy**, where most experts believe history's best violins were made, **Andrea Mosconi** has the tall task of keeping the precious instruments in shape. For the past 30 years, six days a week, the old musician has gone to the museum in Cremona's city hall where the 300-year-old violins are stored in display cases. Each morning, before the museum opens to the public, Mosconi plays each violin for 6-7 minutes. He starts with basic music scales and then makes his way to **Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Bartok.**

Over the course of an hour, he plays three violins by the **Amatis**, two by the **Guarneris**, and four instruments by **Stradivari**. **Why does Mosconi do this day after day?** A violin needs to be played to perform at its best level. "The wood gets tired," explained Karl Roy, a German violin-maker and one of the field's top experts.

"It's the same as with a human being. If you just sit and rest in your comfortable chair, when you get up after a while, you will feel crazy." Christian brothers and sisters, God did not save you to sit around and do nothing. Put your *talents* and *abilities* to use for His glory, lest you lose those abilities and they waste away.

Let me ask, "Are you a servant of Christ that actively walks with God each day? Are you letting the Lord lead your life? When you make decisions, do you consider what God's Word says before you make your choices?"

If your choices are in conflict with the Scriptures, the Lord is not leading your life. He will never lead you to do something that contradicts His Word. When Christ is truly leading your life, His fragrance will be upon you. Others will notice the change in your life. They will note the difference in the way you *live* or *treat* others because they are watching your life.

2 Corinthians 3:2 (NASB)

² **You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;**

There is a perfume that my wife has worn that always reminds me of her whenever I smell it. I recognize it immediately whenever I happen to smell it in a store or I'm out in the public and someone is wearing it.

In the same manner, the fragrance of our life should point others to Jesus Christ too. Our lives should remind people of Him. Beloved, God will use you if you will be a servant to the Lord. He will use you to *manifest* or *spread* the knowledge of Christ everywhere like a delicate, sweet perfume that fills a room.

Listen to what **Pastor Carl B. McKenzie** has to say about a fragrance that attracts, "About 20 years ago, when I served in Texas, we had a problem with honeybees coming in the air vents of the girl's restroom. The bees had built a six foot hive in the attic of the church. They entered a hole about the size of a dime. The smell of the perfume that came from the exhaust vents of the girl's restroom attracted the bees. The fragrance was like a field of flowers to them."

Does the fragrance of your life attract people to Jesus Christ? It should. Paul said our lives are a sweet savor or a Christ-like fragrance rising up to the Lord.

Our *life* and *witness* is perceived differently by folks who know the Lord and those who are perishing without Christ. To the victorious general and his army, the fragrance from the censers in his parade would be the perfume of *joy* and *triumph*.

Those who were marching to their deaths would have a different perspective about the fragrance of the censers. It would be the *smell of death to them* for they were defeated and marching to their deaths. Their lives were about to end.

In the same manner, the gospel witness of believers is a fragrance from *life to life* for those who believe in the Lord. It is a message of life. The gospel is life-changing and gives hope of eternal life. Believers are the very fragrance of the Lord Jesus Christ when they are living for Him.

For those who reject the gospel, it is a message of death for the message speaks of man's sin, the eternal punishment for sin, and the need for a Savior.... a Savior they have rejected.

Our Lord is either *accepted* or *rejected*. There is no in-between. There is no neutrality with Jesus. The Christian *life* and *ministry* are matters of *life* and *death*. The way we *live* and *work* can mean *life* or *death* to a lost world around us.

John 3:36 (NASB)

³⁶ "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 3:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

People may sense the fragrance of the Lord in your life, but they may still reject Him.

The same **sun** that *softens the wax* will *harden the clay*. The same **rose** that brings *joy* from its *beauty* and *fragrance* may *cause an allergic reaction* in others.

Throughout the Bible, individuals responded differently to the fragrance of the Lord. When we look at the **sons of Abraham**, we find that **Isaac** became a believer, the son of promise, and **Ishmael** became a rebel. **Ruth** and **Orpah** both married Elimelech's sons and were exposed to the truth of Jehovah. **Ruth** went on to follow **Naomi** and her Lord while **Orpah** returned to her land of idolatry.

Let me ask, "Have you responded to the fragrance of Christ?" In other words, "Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you?" This is the only way you will be allowed to go to Heaven. You must be *in Christ*.

Let me illustrate: The Yorkshire veterinarian James Herriot told the story of a sheep that died while giving birth to a lamb. No other sheep would suckle this motherless lamb because it did not have the right fragrance upon it. On the same farm, another sheep gave birth but the baby lamb died at birth. So the farmer skinned the dead lamb and wrapped its coat of wool around the living lamb. This baby lamb was presented to the bereaved mother lamb. She smelled the fragrance of the wrapped lamb and accepted it because its fragrance was acceptable and familiar.

In the same manner, we are allowed to go to Heaven because we have the fragrance of the crucified Lamb of God on our life. We are accepted by God the Father because we are wrapped in Christ. His blood covers our sin, providing for us acceptance with God.

Ephesians 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Living, healthy flowers release a wonderful fragrance. **The rose garden of Tyler, Texas** is one of the most beautiful places in the state. The fragrance of the roses permeates your clothes. Even though you have left the gardens, the smell of roses is still upon you.

This brings us to another question. What releases the fragrance of flowers, perfume, or incense? There are several procedures.

Pressure and **crushing** are used to release the fragrance of flowers to manufacture perfume.

1. Incense is burned to release its aroma. In like manner, the sweet fragrance of Christ is released in our times of **suffering** and **pressure** when we are reliant upon Him. It is interesting to note that the rose gives off its greatest fragrance in the dark, right before the sun rises. It is in our **dark** and **difficult** times that we can greatly reveal the fragrance of Christ in our own life. When we go through our fiery trials, the Lord is glorified when we are yielded to Him and living our lives for the Savior.

1 Peter 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ **so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

2. Fragrances are also released when something dies. The fragrance of Christ is released in our own life when we die to our self and will. Again, another paradox is seen here. **Life is evident from death.**

John 12:24 (NASB)

²⁴ **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

1 Corinthians 15:31 (NASB)

³¹ **I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.**

Let me ask, “Is the fragrance of Jesus Christ in your life? How are you living at work, school, or at home? What are you doing or saying around those you rub shoulders with each day? Men, how do you treat your wife? Are you mean as a rattlesnake? Ladies, how do you treat your husband? Are you naggy, withdrawn, and cold toward him? Kids, do you treat your parents like garbage? Are you letting the Lord live His life through you? Do you spend time with Him?” **When you have a close walk with God, His fragrance will be in your life.**

Acts 4:13 (NASB)

¹³ **Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**

We have seen so far.....

- 1) *The Feelings of Paul's Distress*
- 2) *The Fragrance of Our Lives*
- 3) *Next, Fraudulent Living is Rejected*

III. FRAUDULENT LIVING IS REJECTED—[2 Corinthians 2:17](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:17 \(NASB\)](#)

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

The fragrance of truth was on Paul's life and should be on our lives too. He was not a fraud or a fake like others who corrupted the word of God. This word “**peddling**” is from the Greek word *kapeleuo* {*kap-ale-yoo'-o*} which means “**to peddle, to contaminate, to whittle down.**”

It is used only here. It is derived from the noun *kapēlos*. A *kapēlos* was a *huckster*, a *con artist* or *street hawker* who cleverly deceived unwary buyers into purchasing a cheap imitation of the real thing.

When they sold produce, they would put the best fruit on top of the basket to cover the rotten fruit below. Paul may have had in mind the description of Jerusalem's unscrupulous Israelites who used false weights in their business or “**diluted**” their wine with water to increase their profits, when he used this word.

[Isaiah 1:22 \(NASB\)](#)

²² Your silver has become dross, Your drink diluted with water.

[Hosea 12:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ A merchant, in whose hands are false balances, He loves to oppress.

Whom is Paul referring to when he speaks of many that corrupt the Word of God?

Paul had in mind especially the false teachers at Corinth, who peddled a corrupt **mixture** of *divine truth* and *Jewish legalism* to the Corinthians. They would mix other things with the gospel such as *personal philosophy*, *speculations*, or *religious fads*.

These false apostles *watered-down* or *adulterated* the Word of God for profit. They served themselves, not God whom Paul represented. They were “**greedy for money**,” an evidence of their falsehood. These false teachers were preaching without *understanding God's message* or *caring* about what happened to their listeners. These men weren't concerned about furthering God's kingdom at all for they just wanted money.

[1 Peter 5:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

[Matthew 22:29 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

² But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Brothers and sisters, greed will cause your life to.....

- 1) *stink* from selfishness,
- 2) *shrink* in service to others,
- 3) *sink* in spiritual growth,
- 4) *chink* your character,
- 5) *wink* at wrong and wretchedness, and
- 6) *pink* or pierce people with harsh words and ridicule.

When you give people the impression that you are more concerned about their money or yourself than them, you will hurt your testimony for Christ. **The fragrance of your life will go from Channel No. 5 to Skunk No. 7.**

If you want to have the fragrance of Christ on your life, then live and speak the Word of God with *sincerity*, *surety*, *clarity*, and *authority*, realizing that the Lord is watching you. Don't forget you must give an account to Him.

2 Corinthians 2:17 (NASB)

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

Paul spoke with sincerity when he preached God's Word. He was saying in essence that the fragrance of the Lord was in his life. This word "**sincerity**" comes from the Greek word *heilikrineia* {*i-lik-ree'-ni-ah*} and speaks of the character we should have and the way we should always live.

It is formed from two words. The first is *heile* {*hay-lee*} which means "**the rays of the sun**" and the word *krino* {*kree'-no*} which means "**to pick out, choose, to judge.**" So this word means "**to be found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun's light.**" Buyers of pottery would check for cracks by holding the pottery up to the sunlight. It means "**to be pure, sincere, unsullied.**"

This is the way Paul described his *life* and *preaching*. The fragrance of *purity*, *genuineness*, and *sincerity* was on his life and should be on our lives too.

Let me ask, "When people think of you, do they think of someone who is pure, sincere, and without hypocrisy? Do you have an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness? Are you using your abilities and blessings to serve the Lord? What is the fragrance of your life?"

The great missionary explorer, **David Livingstone**, served in **Africa** from **1840** until his death in **1873**. **Pastors Robert Lewis** and **Wayne Cordeiro** tell of an incident from Livingstone's life that illustrates why we need to be thankful in all things and use what God has given us for His glory.

“David Livingstone was eager to travel into the uncharted lands of Central Africa to preach the Gospel. On one occasion, the famous nineteenth-century missionary and explorer arrived at the edge of a large territory that was ruled by a tribal chieftain. According to tradition, the chief would come out to meet him there. Livingstone could go forward on the land only after an exchange of gifts was made. The chief would choose any item of Livingstone's personal property that caught his fancy and keep it for himself, while giving the missionary something of his own in return.

Livingstone had few possessions with him, but at their encounter, he obediently spread them all out on the ground including his clothes, his books, his watch, and even the goat that provided him with milk. Chronic stomach problems kept Livingstone from drinking the local water. To his dismay, the chief took this important, valuable goat. In return, the chief gave him a carved stick, shaped like a walking stick.

Livingstone was most disappointed. He began to gripe to God about what he viewed as a stupid walking cane. What could it do for him compared to the goat that kept him well? Then one of the local men explained, “That's not a walking cane Mr. Livingstone. It's the king's very own scepter, and with it you will find entrance to every single village in our country. The king has honored you greatly.”

The man was right. With that scepter, the fragrance of the king was on David Livingstone's life. The scepter showed he had been with the king and was *honored* and *approved* by him. God opened the door to Central Africa to Livingstone, and as successive evangelists followed him, wave after wave of people came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Lord took away what Livingstone treasured and replaced it with something that was more valuable, even though David did not realize it at first.

Beloved, as the fragrance of Christ is upon our life, the Lord will open doors to serve Him. **What we might consider a loss could actually become a blessing.** God will replace our losses with His blessings. He will powerfully provide for us the needs that we have in order to serve Him just like He provided Livingstone with the scepter of the king.

We must realize that the Bible is not just an ordinary book, it is the scepter of the king. It is the Word of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is more powerful than any scepter of any king, providing us with truth that will make us free and lead us to God's gift and blessings. May the fragrance of God's Word be on all of our lives.

Chapter 7. Living Letters

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 (NASB)

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

² You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

³ being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

⁶ who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

It is no fun when people try to destroy your life with their tongues. This, however, is what Paul faced with some in the Corinthian church. His reputation was being reproached; his **character** was being *criticized* and *castigated*; his **motives** were being maligned; and his **words** were being *warped* and *distorted* by those who were against him.

Paul's defense, as we will see, was not letters of recommendation, but living letters of the lives of the Corinthian Christians. This section *reveals* the *relevance* of the message of your life. You are a living letter to the world that is being read by others. What you are teaching with your lifestyle is *important, influential, interesting*, and impacts the hearts of those who watch in *silence* or *fellowship* with you in times of *fun, frustration, fretting*, or *fear*.

The purpose of this study is to cause you to examine the letter of your life.

What is your message? Notice verse one.

I. THE INQUIRY CONCERNING CREDENTIALS— 2 Corinthians 3:1

2 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)

¹Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

Peddlers of the Word of God, *hucksters*, or *false teachers* did not like Paul at all because he exposed them for what they really were and pointed out the distortions they would make to the Gospel. In turn, these deceivers undermined Paul by accusing him of being *proud*, *cocky*, and *arrogant*. They felt he *praised* or *exalted* himself above others and accused him of acting like he was better than everyone else.

In their attempt to discredit Paul, the false teachers claimed that he lacked the proper official letters of commendation. Where were his references?

Such letters were commonly used in the ancient world to introduce people to those who did not know them. Paul himself wrote these commendation letters for *Timothy*, *Titus*, *Phoebe*, and *Epaphroditus*. The *book of Philemon* is a letter of commendation for Philemon.

When the false apostles arrived in Corinth, they likely produced deceptive letters of commendation, possibly claiming to have come from the Jerusalem church. They used those letters to help them gain acceptance by the Corinthians.

These false apostles also sought letters from the Corinthians. Because they were *unregenerate* and *corrupt*, their true colors would end up showing. Therefore, they could not remain long in one location before being *unmasked* and *exposed*. Before they moved on to their next victims, they would seek letters of commendation from those whom they had deceived. They then used those letters to enhance their credibility with their next victims.

2 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)

¹Are we beginning to **commend** ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

Paul did not have any letters of recommendation and these deceivers made a big deal about it. He was not like these deceivers. He needed no letters of commendation to prove his credibility to the Corinthians. The apostle has already proved his metal. This is why he asked the question, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?”

The word “**commend**” is from the word *sunistano* {soon-is-tan'-o}. One of its meanings is “**to introduce.**” Paul was basically asking, “After all they had gone through together, did he really need to reintroduce himself to the Corinthians? Did they not know him well enough by now?”

He has already lived among them and ministered to them for eighteen months. Was it really necessary for Paul to start all over again and prove to them what kind of man he was? These folks already had firsthand knowledge of his *virtuous, godly, sincere life* and *powerful preaching*.

For the Corinthians to demand letters of commendation from Paul was absolute *stupidity, absurdity*, and *totally unnecessary*. He was not a stranger here. That they could be so *foolish* and *deceived* as to doubt what they knew was true about Paul was tragic. His *blameless life* and *effective ministry* were his “**letters of commendation.**” Some of the pages of his life have already been read and found to be *sincere, saintly, sterling, Spirit-filled*, and *steadfast*.

The Apostle Paul was not in the business of *promoting* or *exalting* himself. He sought no *glory* or *praise* from men. He was not trying to be a big shot or the focus of attention. This man was not in competition with other godly Christians to see who could be the number one Christian. This was not Paul and it should not characterize us either.

2 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB)

¹² **For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.**

Paul did not dare say that he was as wonderful as other men who claimed to be important. These men compared themselves with each other and used themselves as their standard for success. Paul says they are ignorant.

2 Corinthians 10:18 (NASB)

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

Beloved, if you go through life trying to *promote* or *exalt* yourself, you will find a boat load of frustration because you can't make people *praise* or *exalt* you. That comes from their heart which you can't control.

Most people really don't care what you have done or who you are. If they do, they don't care for long or soon forget. They are concerned about what is going on in their own lives and the problems they are facing.

If you try to be a big shot, you will miss the target or goals that God has for you. Paul did not claim that he had arrived at perfection. He was careful to not be distracted by his achievements in the past. Instead, he kept his focus on the target and goals that God had for him.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Apollo 11 landed on the surface of the moon on **Sunday, July 20, 1969**. Most of us are familiar with astronaut **Neil Armstrong**'s historic statement as he stepped onto the moon's surface: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." But few know about the first meal eaten on the moon.

Buzz Aldrin had brought aboard the spacecraft a tiny Communion kit provided by his church. **Aldrin** sent a radio broadcast to Earth asking listeners to contemplate the events of that day and give thanks. Then, in radio blackout for privacy **Buzz Aldrin** read, "I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Silently, he gave thanks to the Lord and partook. **He desired to honor the Lord for His blessings.**

Beloved, our responsibility is to do our best at whatever task is at hand so that God would be glorified. This may involve matters at *work, school, church, home*, etc. Do your best and the Lord will honor you for good work in due time.

When *character, consistency, carefulness*, and *concern* are written in the pages of your life, others will notice and commend you. Do your best for the Lord and He will take care of the rest.

We have seen *the inquiry concerning credentials* in verse one.

We will now examine *the impression of a Christ-centered life*. Notice verse two.

II. THE IMPRESSION OF A CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE—

2 Corinthians 3:2

2 Corinthians 3:2 (NASB)

² You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

False apostles relied on letters of commendation to gain acceptance. Paul, however, did not carry with him these types of letters. Instead, he carried living letters with him in his heart.

The Corinthian believers were his letter of recommendation. They were written permanently or engraved on his heart, so that they could not *slip away* or *be forgotten*.

God had used Paul to write that letter in the debauched, vile city of Corinth by preaching the Gospel. The evidence of the transformed lives of the believers by the power of the Gospel, and the ministry of Paul, made an impression on those that observed the change in them. A change from *corruption* and *carnality* to Christ-like behavior grabbed the attention of some of the people in the city and made an impression on men and women, especially those weary from their sin.

Written letters may easily mislead, but living letters of people's lives will reveal the truth. The letters written with *pen* and *ink* will be read only by a limited number of people, **but your life is read by all, even the illiterate.** Human words written in ink are silent; they just sit fading on a page. Anyone can write a dead letter with ink, but only Christ, through the supernatural power of the Spirit of the living God, can write a living letter.

The believers in Corinth were an open letter of Christ to the world and were a declaration of Christ's *power* and *love*. They were a living letter of Christ, because it is He alone who *saves* and *sanctifies* through the power of God in the preaching of His Word by faithful men like Paul.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (NASB)

⁴ **And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**
⁵ **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

1 Thessalonians 1:5 (NASB)

⁵ **For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.**

2 Corinthians 3:2 (NASB)

² **You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and **read** by all men;**

Beloved, you are an open letter for Jesus Christ. We are known and “**read.**” This word “**read**” is from the Greek word *anaginosko* {*an-ag-in-ocē'-ko*} which means “**to distinguish between, to recognize, to know accurately, to read.**”

Every Christian, whether he likes it or not, is an advertisement for Christianity. The honor of Christ is in the hands of those who follow the Lord.

A store is judged by the kind of goods that are sold. We judge a craftsman by the kind of articles he produces. In the same manner, we judge a church by the kind of men and women it creates.

In turn, men judge Christ by His followers. May the message of our lives point people to the Lord Jesus Christ. The way we live should distinguish us from other people.

1. *Our attitude should be admirable and agreeable.*
2. *Our work should be worthy of our best.*
3. *Our patience should be persistent and pleasant.*
4. *Our words should be wonderful and wise.*
5. *Our generosity should be genuine and gallant.*
6. *Our character should be consistent and Christ-like.*

Charles Spurgeon said, “A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots are withered. Carve your name on hearts, and not on marble.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

A young lady named Helen from Illinois shared this story that compliments the point we are making here: “As our pastor’s sermon stretched on, my daughter grew impatient and started to talk. “Shh,” I whispered. “I want to hear the sermon.” Later that week, we saw our pastor while shopping. We exchanged greetings, and as we walked away, I asked my daughter, “Do you know who that was?” “Sure,” she replied. “That was the Sermon.” This little girl was on target. The way we live preaches to others. Our life is a living letter that speaks volumes.

We have seen so far.....

1. *The Inquiry Concerning Credentials*
2. *The Impression of a Christ-centered Life*
3. *Next, the Inscription of the Christ*

III. THE INSCRIPTION OF THE CHRIST—[2 Corinthians 3:3](#)

2 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB)

³ **Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

Paul says to the Corinthians that they are clearly a letter of Christ. They show the result of his ministry among them. They are a letter not written with pen and ink, but by the Spirit of the living God. The paper is not on tablets of stones, but on human hearts.

Beloved, when you trusted Christ as your Savior, the Lord left His mark on your heart. Only the Author of Heaven can reach your heart and engrave *His truth* and *love* upon you. His inscription on your heart is not illegible and it does not fade. When the Lord leaves His mark in your life, it is *life-giving* and a *living influence*. It’s a *permanent, precious* mark that lasts forever.

The ministry of Jesus Christ was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel. God had promised Israel, centuries before, through the prophet Ezekiel that a time was coming when he would change the hearts of people.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,
²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Ezekiel 36:26 (NASB)

²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

When Christ leaves His mark on our heart, He changes it. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, He gives us a new heart.

Let me share with you a true story that I heard in a personal testimony shared in a pastor's conference in South Africa several years ago. **Dr. Christian Barnard**, the first surgeon ever to do a heart transplant, impulsively asked one of his patients, **Dr. Philip Blaiberg**, "Would you like to see your old heart?" At 8 p.m. on a subsequent evening, the men stood in a room of the **Groote Schuur Hospital** in **Johannesburg, South Africa**. **Dr. Barnard** went up to a cupboard, took down a glass container and handed it to **Dr. Blaiberg**. Inside that container was **Blaiberg's** old heart.

For a moment he stood there *stunned* into *silence*. He was the first man in history ever to hold his own heart in his hands. Finally he spoke and for ten minutes peppered **Dr. Barnard** with technical questions. Then he turned to take a final look at the contents of the glass container, and said, "So this is my old heart that caused me so much trouble." He handed it back, turned away and left it forever.

This is a picture of what Jesus Christ does for us. We remain the same people, but our hearts become radically new. True, we still battle with our flesh, but as members of Christ's Body, our spiritual inclinations are matched to God's laws. They are no longer external and foreign to us but internal. We have the nature of God living within us through the person of the Holy Spirit. Wow! Let that sink in for a minute!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he* is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

When Christ comes into your life, you become a living letter penned by the Spirit of God writing on your heart and soul. The script of the Savior is chiseled on the manuscript of your heart day by day.

He is penning *compassion* for others, *composure* of our self, *compunction* or remorse for sin, *concern* for others, *consistency* in Christ-likeness, and *compliance* to His Word upon our heart day by day.

Conflicts arise, however, when we try to *erase* or *ignore* what He has written or is trying to write upon our heart. Beloved, you need to be a living letter of what He is writing in your life.

IV. THE IMMUTABLE CONFIDENCE IN GOD—[2 Corinthians 3:4-5](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:4-5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴ Such **confidence** we have through Christ toward God.

⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

Paul was confident of the Lord's work in their hearts because of his great trust in God through Christ. His trust was God-ward which means he knew *he was serving* the Lord and *was living* his life before the *gaze* and *inspection* of God Himself. We all are living letters being read by men but also by the Lord too.

Paul was not *self-confident*, but *God-confident*. This is to be our attitude too. **God confidence** will give you the courage you need to face any difficulty in life. **God confidence** will help you to be devoted to the Lord and His will for your life. **God confidence** gave him self confidence to do what the Lord wanted him to do and it will do the same for you.

The Apostle Paul knew that his abilities came from the Lord and anything that was accomplished through him was on the account of the Lord's working in his life. He was a living letter of what the Lord had engraved on his heart.

[1 Corinthians 15:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

[Ephesians 3:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ Of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

2 Corinthians 3:5 (NASB)

⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our **adequacy** is from God,

The apostle made it very clear that his adequacy was of God. The word “**adequacy**” is from the Greek word *hikanotes* {*hik-an-ot'-ace*} which means “**ability, competency to do a thing, adequacy, qualifications.**” This word denotes the capability to perform a task that demands expertise.

Paul’s abilities and competence came from the Lord, not from his self assurance. He made no bones about it. The same truth holds for you too. No matter who you are, your abilities are from God.

Stuart Briscoe told this story about his kids: *“Many years ago when the children were small, we went for a little drive in the lovely English countryside, and there was some fresh snow. I saw a lovely field with not a single blemish on the virgin snow. I stopped the car, vaulted over the gate, and I ran around in a great big circle striding as wide as I could. Then I came back to the kids, and I said, Now, children, I want you to follow in my footsteps. So I want you to run around that circle in the snow, and I want you to put your feet where your father put his feet.”*

“Well, David tried and couldn’t quite make it. Judy, our overachiever, was certain she would make it, but she didn’t. Pete, the little kid, took a great run at it, put his foot in my first footprint and then strode out as far as he could and fell flat on his face. His mother picked him up as he cried.”

“She said to me, “What are you trying to do?” I said, “I’m trying to get a sermon illustration.” I said, “Pete, come here.” I picked up little Peter and put his left foot on my foot, and I put his right foot on my right foot. I said, “Okay, Pete, let’s go.” I began to stride one big stride at a time with my hands under his armpits and his feet lightly on mine.”

“Well, who was doing the walking now? In a sense, he was doing it because I was doing it. In a sense there was a commitment of the little boy to the big dad, and some of the properties of the big dad were working through the little boy. In exactly the same way, in our powerlessness we can’t stride as wide as we should. We don’t walk the way we should. We don’t hit the target the way we ought. It isn’t that at every point we are as bad as we could be. It’s just that at no point are we as good as we should be.”

Beloved, that story reminds us that if you are going to be a living letter, you need to be **God-confident** and **God-dependent**. We need to yield to Him and let Him live His life through us.

Paul was a man who was dependent upon the Lord. **Are you?** It is when *we cease* to be **God-dependent** people that we make foolish choices that get us into trouble.

We tend to run ahead of or away from the Lord. For this reason the Bible reminds us to be dependent upon the Lord for all of our needs.

Dependence Upon God

1. For our Problems' solutions

Genesis 41:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

2. For our Provisions

Luke 11:3 (NASB)

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

Philippians 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

3. For our Productiveness and Performance of Duties

Philippians 4:13 (NASB)

¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

John 3:27 (NASB)

²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

John 15:4-5 (NASB)

⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

1 Timothy 1:12 (NASB)

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

¹³ For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

4. For Power and Strength when we are Weak.

Hudson Taylor once noted that "God uses men who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him."

2 Corinthians 12:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Psalms 18:32 (NASB)

³² The God who girds me with strength And makes my way blameless?

Psalms 28:7 (NASB)

⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.

5. For Powerful accomplishments

[Acts 3:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² But when Peter saw *this*, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

It is the Lord that helps us to do a number of things that will help us to be living letters of His glory.

a. To Preach or speak to others about Him.

[2 Timothy 4:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

[Exodus 4:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

b. To know His Plan and Purpose for our lives.

[Psalms 32:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

c. To Pray

[Luke 11:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."

² And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.'

d. To Pardon or forgive others.

As living letters, the Lord helps us to forgive those who offend us.

[Matthew 6:14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[Matthew 5:44 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

e. To Provide or serve others

[Philippians 2:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

⁴ **do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Let me share another true story with you: After the death of her first husband, **Jim Elliot**, **Elisabeth Elliot** reached the **Auca tribe** for Jesus Christ. Years later she married **Addison Leitch**. Shortly after Elisabeth married **Addison Leitch**, Addison was diagnosed as having two entirely distinct, unique, unrelated, painful types of cancer. Day and night, literally, Elisabeth Elliot had to care for this godly man.

She said she used to pray that God would give her strength to get her through the week. Then it got so difficult that all she could pray for was that God would give her strength to get through the day.

Then she used to pray that somehow God would just give her the strength to get through the hour, because at 9 a.m. it was unbearable to think about praying somehow about getting strength for 10 a.m. God helped Elisabeth to have the *strength to serve* someone else. He will help you too.

f. To be Persistent and Unafraid.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ **For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.**

Isaiah 41:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ **'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'**

Beloved, any success that you may enjoy in *life*, in *school*, at *work*, or at *church* is to be traced to the Lord Jesus Christ. Your abilities are from Him. Our ability to just think or reason with *clarity*, *clearness*, *correctness*, and *calm* come from God.

Our health is so fragile. *Sickness* and *disease* can zap our *strength* and *abilities*. One little blood clot can bring on a stroke, not to mention all the *problems* and *distractions* that we face in our life that can *cloud our thinking* and *sift our strength*.

If you are not careful, *success* or *prosperity* can cloud your thinking of what it really means to be successful. *God's standard* of success is much different than *man's criteria* for success. The scales of God are weighted to much different values than men. Yet, if we don't use our head, we start basing our lives on the world's guidelines of success and accomplishment.

If we focus our energy on human accomplishment then we lose sight of God's *enablement* and *help*. If we emphasize self-confidence, then we can be entrapped by our own pride. We develop a "*I did it all*" mentality.

The world's view of Paul would have been one of success. If he wanted to *brag* or *boast*, he had a lot to brag about to others. He mentioned this to the church at Philippi. He told them, “**although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more (Philippians 3:4).**”

Notice his credentials.

1. Impressive Ancestry

Philippians 3:5a (NASB)

⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

2. Impeccable Orthodoxy

Philippians 3:5b (NASB)

⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

3. Incredible Activity

Philippians 3:6a (NASB)

⁶ As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

4. Immaculate Morality

Philippians 3:6b (NASB)

⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Paul however had adopted God standard of success in his life. All his *accolades* and *accomplishments* were nothing to him. His desire was to be a living letter of God's grace.

Philippians 3:7-9 (NASB)

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

So far in this section we have addressed four things about being living letters.

1. *The Inquiry Concerning Credentials.*
2. *The Impression of a Christ-centered life.*
3. *The Inscription of Christ*
4. *The Immutable Confidence in God*
5. *Last, we will look at the Impact of God's New Covenant*

V. THE IMPACT OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT—[2 Corinthians 3:6](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶ Who also made us adequate *as* servants of a **new** covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

This section of the passage deals with the contrast *between* the **old** and the **new** covenant. A covenant means an arrangement made between two people through which they enter into a certain relationship.

It is not an ordinary agreement, because the contracting parties enter into an ordinary agreement on equal terms. In the *biblical sense* of a covenant relationship, **it is God** who is the *prime mover* and *approaches man* to offer him a relationship upon conditions which man could neither *initiate* nor *alter*, but only *accept* or *reject*. The work of salvation is completely the work of God. Our responsibility is to either *accept* or *reject* His terms for salvation by trusting in His Son.

As living letters of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has made us able *ministers* or *servants* of this New Testament or covenant. We can do all things through the Lord Jesus Christ who strengthens us. The heart of the new covenant is the Cross of Jesus Christ. Christ spoke of this new covenant at the Last Supper.

[1 Corinthians 11:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

The word Paul uses for “**new**” when he speaks of the New Testament is the same as Jesus used and it is very significant. In Greek there are two words for “**new**.” *First*, there is *neos*, which means “**new in point of time and that alone**.” For example, a young person is *neos* because he is a newcomer into the world.

A *second* word for “**new**” is the Greek word *kainos* {*ki-nos*} which means “**not only new in point of time, but also new in quality**.” It is the word *kainos* that both Jesus and Paul use of the new covenant. The significance of this word is that the new covenant is not only new in point of time; it is quite different in kind from the old covenant. **It produces between man and God a new relationship of a totally different kind than the Old Testament.**

How are the old and new covenants different?

The difference is seen when they are contrasted side-by-side.

1. The **old covenant** was based on a *written document*. Moses took the book of the Law and read it to the people and they agreed to it. On the other hand the **new covenant** is based on the power of the *life-giving Spirit of God*.

A written document is always something that is external. The work of the Spirit of God, on the other hand, changes a man's heart. A man may **obey** written commands while all the time he wishes to *disobey* them. When the Spirit of God, however, comes into his heart and controls it, he does not even wish to break those commands because he is a changed man. He wants to obey the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:6 (NASB)

⁶ **Who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter **kills**, but the Spirit gives life.**

2. Paul said the old letter of the law of Moses “**kills.**” **What did it kill?**

1. **It killed hope.** There was never any hope that any man could keep it, human nature being what it is. It therefore could issue nothing but *frustration* and *fear*.
2. **It killed life.** Under it a man could earn nothing but *condemnation*, *guilt*, and *dread*. This condemnation meant death.
3. **It killed strength.** It was perfectly able to tell a man what to do, but it could not help him do it. The Law *identified* and *pointed* out man's problem of sinfulness. It did not provide the solution. It did not offer *pardon*, *relief*, *peace*, or *joy*. God used the Law to bring us to Christ and show us our need for Him.

Galatians 3:24 (NASB)

²⁴ **Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*, so that we may be justified by faith.**

D. M. Stearns was preaching in Philadelphia. At the close of the service a stranger came up to him and said, “I don't like the way you spoke about the cross. I think that instead of emphasizing the death of Christ, it would be far better to preach Jesus, the teacher and example.” **Stearns** replied, “If I presented Christ in that way, would you be willing to follow Him?” “I certainly would,” said the stranger without hesitation. “All right then,” said the preacher, “let's take the first step. He did no sin. Can you claim that for yourself?” The man looked confused and somewhat surprised. “Why, no,” he said. “I acknowledge that I do sin.” **Stearns** replied, “Then your greatest need is to have a Savior, not an example!

Beloved, the Law showed us we need a Savior. Do you know Him? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ?

2 Corinthians 3:6 (NASB)

⁶ **Who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the **Spirit gives life**.**

3. Paul went on to say that the “**spirit gives life.**” The spirit is a reference to the new covenant or new spiritual system of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Men are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

This New Testament offers the solution to man's need for *salvation* and *deliverance*. Its effect brings *love, joy, and peace* because it is a relationship of love. It came into being because God loved the world.

The impact of the new covenant is it changes a man's life, not by imposing a new code of laws on him, but by changing his heart. It therefore not only told a man what to do but gave him the strength to do it. With its commandments it brought power to obey the Lord and do what was right.

We are living letters of the Lord because He has enabled us and given us the power to be like Christ and live for Him. We have a purpose for living and that purpose is to bring *honor* and *glory* to our Heavenly Father.

John 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,**

People are reading your life. What is it saying to them? Remember, you are a living letter that is revealing what is written on the pages of your heart.

Annie Johnson Flint put it this way in a poem she wrote entitled, "*Hands and Feet for Him.*"

*We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
We are our Lord's last message, written in deed and word;
What if the type be crooked? What if the print be blurred?*

Chapter 8.

The Ministry of Your Life

2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 (NASB)

⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,

⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

¹⁰ For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*.

¹¹ For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.

¹² Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,

¹³ and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.

¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;

¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.

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

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (NASB)

¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,

² but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

We have addressed the issue of the importance of the fragrance of your life and the fact that you are a living letter of the Lord. Now we will dig into the issue of the ministry of your life.

The principles that are displayed on the table of Scripture apply to the individual and to the church. As the sands of the hourglass continue to flow through time and the heartbeats of your life day by day, these principles remain concrete. They have not changed, but remain the same for all believers as the second hand of your life continues its circular race.

In the last part of **chapter three of Second Corinthians**, beginning with [verse seven](#), Paul continues the *contrast between the old covenant of the law and the new covenant of grace*.

2 Corinthians 3:7 (NASB)

⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,

The Ten Commandments were referred to as the *ministry of death written in stones*. This way led to death because no one could keep them. Disobedience brought *condemnation* and *judgment*.

Yet, in the beginning it was glorious. When Moses received the Ten Commandments, his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was fading away. The Law is good, even though it condemns us because it pointed out the fact that we all have a problem. The problem is not with God's Law, it is with sinful man.

The Law is a mirror that shows all of us how dirty we are and the fact that we are sinners that need a Savior. The mirror cannot cleanse you. You cannot clean yourself up spiritually. Only the Lord can *cleanse* and *forgive* you of the bad you have done.

Galatians 2:21 (NASB)

²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Notice verses **eight** and **nine**.

2 Corinthians 3:8-9 (NASB)

**⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?
⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.**

Paul was saying in [verses eight](#) and [nine](#), if the Law which condemned us to death was glorious, how much more glorious is the New Testament which give us life through the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The *ministry of righteousness* ([v. 9](#)) is the righteousness that Christians have in Jesus Christ. His righteousness was imputed to us or put on our spiritual account when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

James 2:23 (NASB)

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

Now look at verses ten and eleven.

2 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it.

¹¹ For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.

[Verses ten](#) and [eleven](#) confirm the fact that the initial glory of the reception of the Ten Commandments was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of God's new covenant with us of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

For example, if the sun comes up in the morning, the brightness of the moon is no longer bright in comparison. The great brilliance of the sun obscures the lesser light of the moon. When the old covenant is compared with God's new covenant with us, there is no comparison.

The New Testament or covenant is much more wonderful and eternal. As the glory on the face of Moses was fading, the glory of the old covenant was also fading.

Notice verse twelve and thirteen.

2 Corinthians 3:12-13 (NASB)

¹² Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,

¹³ and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.

These two verses reveal the impact of God's new covenant of grace. We have *confidence, hope, plainness of speech, assurance*, or *boldness* to approach the Lord in prayer because of His *salvation* and *grace*. We are His children and have assurance that we belong to Him and have eternal life because of His promises. We have access to our Lord in prayer. In fact, we are urged to pray with *confidence, assurance*, and *boldness*.

Hebrews 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,
²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

Moses veiled his face to hide the fading radiance and glory of God upon it. [Verses 14 through 17](#) show us that unfortunately, the minds of the Jewish people are still veiled.

2 Corinthians 3:14-17 (NASB)

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.
¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;
¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.

Because of their hardness toward Jesus Christ, the Jews do not see that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness. They do not understand that He is the fulfillment of the entire Law. They are still spiritually blind. They cannot understand God's new covenant and truth because they have rejected the Truth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Faith in Christ is the key to understanding God's truth and removing the veil of *ignorance* and *darkness*. It is the Spirit of God that lifts the veil on our heart and helps us to see Christ as our Savior. Through Christ, we are delivered from the *bondage* and *shackles* of sin. [Chapter three of Second Corinthians](#) curtains with a great truth in [verse 18](#).

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)

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

We are not only *liberated* by the Holy Spirit, we are *transformed*. We become new creatures in Christ.

Nathaniel Hawthorne tells a story about a great stone face: A little lad lived in a village where there was a mountain with a rock formation which they called "the great stone face." The people had a legend that someday someone would come to the village who would look like the great stone face.

He would do wonderful things for the village and be a means of great blessing. That story really took hold of the lad. During his lifetime he would gaze at the great stone face at every opportunity that he had, and he would dream of the time when someone looking like the great stone face would come to the village. Years passed and as time went by, he became a young man, then an old man. He was tottering down the street one day when someone looked up and saw him coming and shouted, “He has come. The one who looks like the great stone face is here!” This man had looked at the great stone face for so long that now he bore its image.

Beloved, in the same manner, if you want to be like Jesus Christ, then spend time looking at Him. When you put your faith in Christ, the veil is removed from your *heart* and *spiritual eyes*. You can see and reflect the true glory of our Lord just as you would see yourself in a mirror.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)

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

If you want to behold the Lord today, you can see Him in the lives of godly Christians and in the Word of God. The Bible is the mirror of Jesus Christ. God uses His Word to *redeem* us and *change* our lives, making us more like His Son.

This word “transformed” in [verse 18](#) is from the Greek word *metamorphoo* {*met-am-or-fo'-o*} which forms our English word *metamorphosis*. **Metamorphosis** describes the process that changes an insect from a larva into a pupa and then into a mature insect.

The changes come from within. The Spirit of God through the Word of God changes us from within, which changes us outwardly by the way we behave. As God’s grace changes us, we become more like Christ and reflect His glory in our lives. One day, we will be like Him completely.

1 John 3:2 (NASB)

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

With verses seven through eighteen as a background, Paul opens this section in chapter four with the word “**Therefore.**”

2 Corinthians 4:1 (NASB)

¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,

When you see the word “**therefore**” find out what it is there for. Why is it here? Because we enjoy a more glorious new covenant with Christ, because we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus, because the Spirit of God has broken the shackles of sin and made us free, because the Lord is changing us and making us more like Him when we yield to Him, we therefore have a ministry.

What we have *taken in* and *received* from the Lord needs to be given out or shared with those who do not know Him. We are all to be “**ministers**” of Christ that are to use our lives to serve Christ and influence others to the Lord. Let’s find out what is involved in the ministry of our life.

I. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OUR MINISTRY TO OTHERS— 2 Corinthians 4:1

2 Corinthians 4:1 (NASB)

¹ Therefore, since we have this **ministry**, as we received mercy, we do not **lose heart**,

All Christians have the responsibility or ministry to share the Gospel with a lost and dying world. The word “**ministry**” is from the Greek word *diakonia* {*dee-ak-on-ee'-ah*} which means “**service, executing the command of others.**”

Because of the work of God’s *grace* and *mercy* in our own lives, we are to serve the Lord and obey His commands by doing His will. We are to tell others about Christ and how to be saved. This is our responsibility.

Because of God’s mercy, we do not have to faint. This word “**lose heart**” is from the word *egkakeo* {*eng-kak-eh'-o*}. When Paul uses this word “**lose heart**” he means “**to be utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted, to turn out a coward or lose one’s courage.**”

Beloved, we are not to be having *spiritual fainting-fits* or be a *bunch of quitters* when it comes to living for the Lord. We have at our disposal the *power* and *grace* we need to face *problems, persecutions, peevish or angry people, perplexity, and being pooped out*. Satan has a lot of weapons in his arsenal to try to get Christians to faint and lose heart.

Here are a few of his weapons and God’s solution.

Satan’s Arsenal to Get Christians to Quit

1. Fear

People fear men and fear to trust God at His Word.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Psalms 56:3 (NASB)

³ When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.

2. Fatigue

Isaiah 41:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ 'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

3. Frustration

A writer in his 50's had written a manuscript for a book, and had sent it to several publishers without success. He grew so discouraged that he threw the manuscript into the wastepaper basket. His wife tried to salvage the manuscript, but he told her sternly: "We've wasted enough time on it. I forbid you to remove it from the wastebasket!"

Undeterred, she decided to show the manuscript to at least one more publisher. When she arrived at that publisher's office, she pulled out the most unusual looking proposal that the publisher had ever received. Underneath a wrapping of brown paper was a wastepaper basket still holding the writer's manuscript. This way, she reasoned, she was not technically going against her husband's wishes. She did not remove the manuscript from the wastebasket. The publisher did it for her. And when he read it, he loved it. The writer in this story was a guy named **Norman Vincent Peale**; the manuscript was *The Power of Positive Thinking*. The book that Peale tossed in the trash can eventually sold 30 million copies.

Frustration can cause us to quit, when blessings are just around the corner. Don't quit. Wait for God's blessings.

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;*

The word "perplexed" is from the Greek word *aporeo* {*ap-or-eh-o*} which means "to be without resources, to be in straits, to be left wanting, to be embarrassed, to be in doubt, not to know which way to turn; to be at a loss with one's self; to not know how to decide or what to do, to be perplexed." Paul faced these emotions and circumstances, but was not in despair. God gives us the strength to face our frustrations.

4. Fleshly Fun and Fornication

The love for carnality can get a believer sidetracked. The desires of the flesh should never be underestimated. If you do not keep them in "check" then those desires can grip your entire life. Sexual sins have knocked many Christians out of service for the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ *For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.*

This word "deserted" is a very strong word. It is from the Greek word *egkateleipo* {*eng-kat-al-i'-po*} and means "to totally abandon or utterly forsake, to desert, leave in straits, leave helpless." This is what Demas did with Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NASB)

²⁷ **but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

The word “discipline” is from the word *doulagogeo* {*doo-lag-ogue-eh'-o*} which means “to lead away into slavery or to treat as a slave with severity, to subject to stern and rigid discipline.” This is what Paul did with his body. He made it a slave to his will, not his body’s will.

1 Corinthians 6:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ **Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.**

5. Fury

Many believers quit because of their anger and bitterness toward the Lord or other people.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ **Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**

³² **Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**

6. Focus upon Self

When we become selfish, then our focus is shifted from the Lord and people to ourselves. The premise for our decisions becomes our will instead of God’s will. When our comfort zone gets shaken, then the decision is made to quit serving the Lord in order to get the comfort back. People find out eventually that you lose comfort, peace, and joy when you turn your back on the Lord.

Isaiah 57:21 (NASB)

²¹ **"There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."**

Philippians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ **Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

³³ **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**

7. Finances

Greed and covetousness are effective weapons in getting people to quit serving God. The love for money or things, get people distracted from that which is really important.

1 Timothy 6:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Luke 6:38 (NASB)

³⁸ "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

8. The Feeling You are Wasting your Life or Time

Many have quit church or serving the Lord because they feel it is a waste of time to serve him. Dedication has been replaced with *doubt* or *discouragement*. The Lord assures us, however, that living for Him is not a waste.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NASB)

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

Our responsibility is to put our trust and faith in the Lord to help us in those times that are especially difficult. Trust the Lord.

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

II. THE RUDIMENTS OF OUR MINISTRY WITH OTHERS— 2 Corinthians 4:2

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

² But we have **renounced** the things hidden because of **shame**, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

What are the elements of ministering to other people? How are we to behave and what are we to do and not do?

Those answers are here.

A. The Renunciation of Dishonesty: “*But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame...*”

We are to “**renounce**” the hidden things of shame. What does Paul mean by this word “**renounce**?” It is derived from the word *apeipomen* {*ap-i-pom'-ane*} which means “**to speak out, to forbid, to refuse or deny, to give up or renounce.**” We are *to give up, forbid, disown* or *renounce* hidden things of shame.

We are to renounce “**shame.**” This word “**shame**” is from a word that means “**the confusion of one who is ashamed of anything, a sense of shame, disgrace, scandal, dishonor.**” These are the things we are to renounce.

The secret things that people do under concealment but would be *ashamed* or *disgraced* if exposed are to be *renounced* and *forsaken*. Underhanded dealings with others and deception are to be avoided like the plague. We are to live an *open* and *aboveboard* life, a life of honesty and integrity. This was a problem in Corinth as false teachers were deceiving the people and living shamefully.

Job 11:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents;

1 Peter 2:11 (NASB)

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

If we are going to have a ministry with others, then our life needs to be characterized by a *renunciation of shame and secondly, a rejection of deception.*

B. A Rejection of Deception: “...not walking in craftiness...”

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

² But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not **walking in craftiness** or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The Christian is not to “walking in craftiness.” This means he is not to be walking in “trickery, cunning, cleverness, shrewdness, or with evil design.” Craftiness has the idea of a man who will do anything and use any means to get what he wants. He believes the end justifies the means. We are not to behave this way. We are not to *use, misuse, or take advantage* of people.

These guys who tell you to send in \$25 to get a holy hanky, a bottle of holy water from the Jordan River, or will send you a splinter of the cross of Jesus are walking in craftiness. They should be ashamed. Sooner or later their trickery will be exposed and their credibility will be ruined. In our personal business dealings with people, we are to be open and aboveboard with people when we are selling something. Honesty develops trust.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-5 (NASB)

³ For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit;

⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—

C. The Refusal to Distort the Scripture's Message: “... or adulterating the word of God..”

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

² But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness **or adulterating the word of God**, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Christians are not to *tamper, falsify, corrupt, or water down* the message of God's Word. This is the idea behind the word “adulterating.” This word was used to describe the adding of ingredients to gold or wine in ancient Greece. We are to share with others exactly what it says and not be embarrassed or ashamed for what it says, even when it goes against our precious *traditions* or *opinions*.

If it speaks about the judgment of Hell, then tell the truth. If it warns against sin, then speak the truth about those sins. Don't get in the mold of worrying about offending people with Bible truths. Just tell them the truth, starting with the matter of salvation.

Scriptures are not to be taken out of context to prove something the Bible does not teach. Any verse taken out of context can be used to promote false teaching. The Bible should be studied in the context of its passage. This requires time, study, and hard work, but this is Paul's challenge to all Christians, not just preachers.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.**

The words “**accurately handling**” are from the Greek word *orthotomeo* {*or-thot-om-eh'-o*} which means “**to cut straight, to proceed on straight paths or hold a straight course, to doing right, to handle aright, to teach the truth directly and correctly.**” We are to study or do our very best to share the truth of the Bible without deviation. It is to be presented straight, and undiluted. We first of all are to get it straight and then give it straight to others.

If we are going to reach others, then our life needs to be characterized by a *renunciation of shame, a rejection of deception, the refusal to distort the Scripture's message*, and last of all, the *reach for the disposition and conscience of men*.

D. The Reach for the Disposition and Conscience of Men: “.....but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

² **But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.**

By the open statement of the truth we are to commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. We are to try to reach the *hearts* and *minds* of people.

Our conscience is that faculty of the mind which distinguishes between *right* and *wrong*, and which prompts us to *choose* what is right and *avoid* that which is wrong. We are to speak the truth so that every man's conscience shall approve the Bible as truth and know what we are saying is right.

This is why we are to flush any kind of dishonesty from our lives so as to not distract others from the truth by our inconsistencies.

Men may not love God's truth, but they may see that it is true. Men are capable of seeing the truth, and even when they do not love it, they can perceive that it has demonstrated that it is from God by its prophecies that have already been fulfilled and its power to change men's lives. The world may hate the truths of Scripture, but people may see that the truths which condemn their practices are from Heaven.

If we are to share God's truth, then we must know it. This is why it is vital that we read and study God's Word.

1 Peter 2:2 (NASB)

² Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

We have seen so far our *responsibility for ministry and the rudiments of our ministry* with others in verses one and two. We will direct our attention now to the *restraint of Satan*.

III. THE RESTRAINT OF SATAN—[2 Corinthians 4:3-4](#)

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Every Christian needs to understand that Satan is opposing his ministry with others. He is in the concealment business. The Gospel is hid or veiled to those who are **“perishing.”** This word is from the Greek word *apollumi* {*ap-ol'-loo-mee*} which means **“destroyed, to put out of the way entirely, rendered useless, to be in the process of being ruined, corrupted, and put to death.”**

The perishing are in the process of being ruined and spiritually destroyed unless they turn to Christ. They are lost, perishing to *virtue*, to *piety*, to *happiness*, to *hope*, to God's salvation.

Men without Christ have turned away from God and are traveling in the opposite direction along the road that leads to perdition. Therefore the unsaved person cannot see God, nor the things of God. His face and eyes are not turned toward the Gospel, but toward the world that perishes.

This is not the fault of the Gospel. It is not the fault of the sun where men shut their eyes and will not see the light of day. It is not the fault of a running stream, or a bubbling fountain, if men will not drink of it, but rather choose to die of thirst. The Gospel does not obscure and conceal its own glory any more than the sun does.

It is in itself a clear and full revelation of God and His wonderful grace, and that glory is adapted to shed light upon the benighted minds of men.

Satan has spiritually blinded those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. The question is, "How does he do this? How does he blind the minds of men?"

How Does Satan Blind the Minds of Men?

1. The Focus Upon One's Own Beliefs

Some people will not turn to Christ because they have their own concepts about God and Heaven.

Romans 1:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.**

²² **Professing to be wise, they became fools,**

2. The Frivolity and Flaming Passion of the Flesh

Billy Sunday said, "This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book," referring to the Bible. Men are blinded by their love for their sin.

Mark 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ **But the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**

Psalms 52:3 (NASB)

³ **You love evil more than good, Falsehood more than speaking what is right. Selah.**

Jeremiah 14:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ **Thus says the LORD to this people, "Even so they have loved to wander; they have not kept their feet in check. Therefore the LORD does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and call their sins to account."**

3. Fables and Foolish Philosophies of the World

People are blinded by anti-God philosophies that are promoted through such teachings as Humanism and Evolution, which leave God out of the equation of creation and the need of His saving grace. God's authority for salvation is rejected because God is not even acknowledged.

2 Timothy 4:4 (NASB)

⁴ **And will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.**

1 Timothy 1:4 (NASB)

⁴ **Nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.**

4. False Worship of Idols and Pagan gods.

People are blinded by idolatry. They believe in a god, but not the true and only God. In their idolatry, they feel they have security, but in reality, they are left in obscurity to the truth and lack the purity that comes from Christ's forgiveness and cleansing.

Romans 1:23 (NASB)

²³ And exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Psalms 106:36 (NASB)

³⁶ And served their idols, Which became a snare to them.

5. The Flurries or Distractions of Daily Living

Folks are also blinded by the distractions of their lives. They are so busy and going so fast that they fail to see their need for the Lord or listen to what He has to say to them.

Matthew 13:22 (NASB)

²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

6. Finances

Men and women are spiritually blinded by their love for money and possessions. They feel they cannot have these things if they turn to Christ, which is not true. Money is a god to some individuals. Notice the middle portion of [Matthew 13:22](#) again.

Matthew 13:22 (NASB)

²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, **this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word**, and it becomes unfruitful.

1 Timothy 6:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ **For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith** and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Proverbs 1:32 (NASB)

³² For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

7. Friction toward God

Because of *trouble* or *traumatic* times, people vent their anger toward the Lord, blame Him for their pain, and will not give Him the time of day. Their bitterness toward God has become a barrier to learning the truth and accepting His love because their heart has become hardened.

Proverbs 28:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Hebrews 4:7 (NASB)

⁷ He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.**"

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

⁴ in whose case the **god** of **this world** has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan is the god of this age that blinds men's hearts. The name "god" here is given to him, not because he has any divine attributes, but because he actually has the homage of the men of this world as their god, as the being who is really worshiped, or who has the affections of their hearts in the same way as it is given to idols.

By "this world" is meant the wicked world or the mass of men. He has dominion over the world. They obey his will; they execute his plans; they further his purposes, and they are his obedient subjects.

We have seen so far our *responsibility for ministry and the rudiments of our ministry* with others in verses one and two. In [verses three](#) and [four](#) we examined the *restraint of Satan*.

Now we will focus on *the regard for the Lord*.

IV. THE REGARD FOR THE LORD—[2 Corinthians 4:5](#)

2 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

The focus of our life should be not ourselves but the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to be exalted in our lives. We are to have a servant attitude toward Him. When you lift up Christ, you are ministering to others. Some may not listen to what you are saying, but you are still serving Him.

In recent history there has been no church among the Kurds of Northern Iraq. However in the 1920's and 1930's there was intense missionary work, many seeds were sown, and a price was paid: a missionary and his daughter were killed by locals in Dohouk.

After the war with Iraq, when the Kurds were being pushed out by Saddam Hussein, Christian agencies offered them food and shelter. The Kurds were amazed that help came from Christians and not people from their own religion. None of this work or sacrifice has been in vain. There are now small groups of Kurdish Christians in northern Iraq. The church has been born in this region.

One convert was Mansour Hussein. He was born in Baghdad in 1954, into a Muslim Kurdish family. As a young man he became a Communist and rejected all belief in God.

In **January, 1996**, **Mansour** became a believer in Christ, mainly through the witness of another believer in Arbil. A few months later he began to work in a small Christian bookshop. **Mansour** was very active in teaching others the truth he had found in Christ. Not surprisingly, he and his Christian friend often received threats.

On the morning of **April 21, 1996**, his friend walked into the bookshop and saw **Mansour** lying on the floor. Blood was flowing from his head. On the floor beside the body was **Mansour's** personal pocket New Testament.

It appears that **Mansour** was cleaning the floor of the shop when someone came to return this book. As **Mansour** went to get the record of loaned books, the visitor shot him in the head with a pistol equipped with a silencer. The police realized he was killed by an extreme Moslem group. The impact of his life, however, continues to live on. He exalted Christ by his life and his death.

V. THE RADIANCE OF CHRIST IN OUR LIFE—[2 Corinthians 4:6](#)

[2 Corinthians 4:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The light of God's creation has made us new creations in Christ. The presence of Christ, the Light of the world, shines in our heart enabling us to understand and know Him. This was Paul's desire and should be ours too.

[Philippians 3:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

The more we know the Lord, the greater will be our fellowship with Him and ministry with others. Don't throw your life away. Make your life count for Christ!

Chapter 9. Treasure in Cracked Pots

[2 Corinthians 4:7-12 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

⁸ *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

¹² So death works in us, but life in you.

There are many people who go through life feeling *unimportant, unnecessary, unnoticed, unproductive, and unsuccessful*. They feel that their life has no meaning at all and may feel, "What is the purpose for living?" Can you relate to these folks or have you encountered them? Unfortunately, there are some Christians that have adopted these attitudes.

In this [section of 2 Corinthians](#), Paul reveals to us *phenomenal, powerful* truths. He clarifies the fact that Christians may be like clay pots that are *cracked* or *chipped*, but they have within them a valuable treasure that gives their life great *importance, necessity, productivity, and purpose*.

When God made you, beloved, He did not waste His time or the dust of the earth. If you have put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you have been entrusted with the Lord's treasure. That seems pretty important to me.

In this passage we will look at the treasure and how it affects our lives and our purpose for living. Paul will show us that no matter how *difficult, discouraging, or distressful* our lives may be, we do not have to be defeated or down in the dumps. We have a treasure entrusted to us.

I. THE CONTENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN VESSEL— 2 Corinthians 4:7

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NASB)

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

Here is a story that I read in the news sometime ago: Craig Randall drives a garbage truck in Peabody, Massachusetts. In a garbage container one day, he noticed a Wendy's soft drink cup bearing a contest sticker.

Having won a chicken sandwich the week before, Randall checked it, hoping for some french fries or a soft drink. Instead, he peeled a sticker worth **\$200,000** toward the construction of a new home, reports **U.S. News and World Report (11/6/95)**. What we get out of life depends a lot on what we are looking for or recognizing the treasures and blessings we have right under our nose.

Paul says here that we have a treasure. What treasure? It refers back to the previous verse.

Notice verse six.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB)

⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The treasure is the power of the Gospel and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may not recognize these things as valuable, but they are so *precious* and *powerful* that they changed the Roman Empire. When a person puts his faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells that individual. It is through the help of the Holy Spirit that we are able to know Christ and learn more about Him.

Romans 8:9 (NASB)

⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

John 14:26 (NASB)

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Paul compares us to earthen vessels. Earthen vessels or clay jars were the disposable containers of Bible days, so that their life spans were generally a few years at the most because they were so *fragile* and *broke* so easily. These clay jars were a part of everyday living as they were used for *cooking, eating, drinking,* and *storing* leftover food.

They were used to *store* and *transport water, olive oil, wine, grain, garbage*, and even *family treasures*.

These pots were called *ostraca {os-tra'-kos}*, which is from the Greek word for “**pottery**.” These vessels were made of shells which are very brittle or clay that was fired in a kiln. No one took note of clay jars any more than we would of a plastic container. They were simply there for convenience. They were, in a way, “*servants*” to the ones who used them. It was no great tragedy when such vessels were broken. These jars were cheap and easy to replace.

Paul compares us to these simple clay pots that were many times *chipped* and *cracked*. When they were used, the focus was not on the clay pots, it was upon the splendor of what was within them, especially if the contents of the earthen vessels were treasures or delicious foods.

The content of the vessel gives it its value. For example, when I microwave a bowl of stew or chili, I don't “**Ooh**” and “**Aah**” over the bowl, I am *looking* and *smelling* what is in it. God has entrusted the believer with the treasure of His truth about salvation. Our focus is not to be self glory, but on Him and what He has done for us on the cross. He has entrusted us with the treasure of the Gospel.

1 Timothy 1:11 (NASB)

¹¹ **According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.**

1 Timothy 6:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge".**

The picture of the believer as a vessel is common in the Bible. The Bible emphasizes to us that we are to be a vessel that the Lord can use. We are to be clean, empty, and available for service.

2 Timothy 2:21 (NASB)

²¹ **Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.**

1 Thessalonians 4:4 (NASB)

⁴ **That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,**

This is what I am looking for when I choose a bowl to cook my chili. Is it clean, empty, and in the cabinet even though it might have *flaws, nicks*, and *chips* in it? In fact, its imperfections show that it has most likely been used a lot. I'm not looking for Christmas china, I'm looking for a bowl that will get the job done for me. The Lord is looking for a useable vessel too.

Let me ask, “Are you empty of yourself and your will? Is your life clean before the Lord? Are matters right with Him? Are you available to the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Some Christians use the excuse that the Lord cannot use them. They claim they have nothing to offer. Beloved, realize that the Lord has made you the way you are in order to do His will. He has a plan or task for you that is different from others. Your responsibility is to find out from Him what He wants you to do with your life. Notice what the Lord stated to Ananias in [Acts 9](#).

Acts 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

No Christian should ever complain to God because of his lack of abilities, because of his limitations or handicaps. The creation of your life was in the hands of the Lord. God wants you to accept yourself and be yourself.

Psalms 139:13-16 (NASB)

¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

¹⁶ Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them.

Why did the Lord entrust His treasure with earthen vessels? He did it so that we might have the joy of being used by Him and that we might depend on God’s power and strength, and not our own.

Our suffering not only reveals our own weaknesses, but also the power, strength, and glory of God. God permits and controls our trials. The Lord uses our trials for His own glory. He uses us... *weak, cracked, clay pots*, so that He will get the glory for the great things that are done through us. He is teaching us that power is from Him and not from us. Missionary to China, **J. Hudson Taylor** used to say, “All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on Him being with them.”

Sometimes your medicine bottle has on it, “**Shake well before using.**” That is what God has to do with some of His people. He has to shake them well before they are ever useable.

He permits our clay pot to be knocked around by trouble so that some of the treasure within us will spill out and strengthen other people. Our Lord uses our trials to benefit the lives of people who are watching our life.

When we respond to *trouble* and *pain* with *calm*, *confidence*, and a *Christ-like* attitude, then others are touched by our life. The treasure of God's grace enables us to cope with our complications.

2 Corinthians 1:4 (NASB)

⁴Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NASB)

⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Because of God's grace working in our lives, we can have *calm* in our *conflicts*.

The Lord not only shakes us, sometimes He may break us. Like the expensive perfume that belonged to Mary, the fragrance of Christ inside of our heart cannot be experienced by others until it is poured out.

Many times, God's way of pouring is to *crack* or *break* the clay pot that holds His treasure. This is why He may allow *trials* and *heartaches* in our lives. Our "breaking process" draws us closer to Him. Christ's power flows through our weakness.

Notice verses eight and nine.

II. THE CALM IN OUR CONFLICTS—[2 Corinthians 4:8-9](#)

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (NASB)

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

Christians have problems just like everyone else. In fact, there are times that our lives may be like a war zone. Such was the case with Paul. In fact, the terminology he uses in these verses speak of combat or wrestling with each one seeming to increase in intensity.

Paul speaks of the conflicts we all face. We are *pressured*, *perplexed*, *persecuted*, and *plummeted*, yet we are still more than conquerors through Him who loved us. The supreme characteristic of the Christian is not that he does not fall, **but that every time he falls he rises again**. It is not that he is *never beaten*, **but** he is *never ultimately defeated*. He may lose a battle, but he knows that in the end he can never lose the war.

Let's look at each battle we face.

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ ***We are afflicted in every way***, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

A. We are Pressured: *Squeezed but not Squashed!*

Paul said, "*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.*" What does he mean, "We are afflicted?" The word "**afflicted**" is from the Greek word *thlibo* {*thlee'-bo*}. This word means "**to be squeezed, compressed, pressured.**"

It was used to describe the *crushing* or *pressing* of grapes or to *suffer tribulation*. It was also used to describe the pressing of a crowd or a wrestler that would press against his opponent. Paul was troubled on "**every way**" which means "**in every imaginable way, place, and occasion.**" He suffered from the pressure exerted by mean, caustic people.

Life is full of pressure that comes from *finances, family, frustrations, fear, furious* people, and *fighting*. Paul definitely had his fill of pressure.

2 Corinthians 7:5 (NASB)

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NASB)

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

There may be times that our trials pressure us to the point that we can't bear any more problems. We feel as if a heavy weight is crushing us, but then, God intervenes on our behalf and delivers us from our calamity. **His grace, His power, and His presence** sustain us.

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ ***We are afflicted in every way***, ***but not crushed***; perplexed, but not despairing;

This is what happened to Paul. In spite of being surrounded by *pressure* and *trouble*, Paul confidently says that he was not "**crushed.**" This word is derived from the Greek word *stenochoreo* {*sten-okh-o-reh'-o*} which means "**to be confined in a narrow, tight place with no way out, crushed, compressed, cramped, distressed or anguished.**"

There may be times we are *squeezed*, but not *squashed*. We might be *compressed*, but not *crushed*. There are all kinds of pressure on us, but we are never in so tight a corner that there is no way out. It is characteristic of the Christian that, even if his body be confined in some *difficult environment* or some *narrow circumstance*, there is always an escape route for his spirit to the spaciousness of God.

With Paul there was always the upward look. Even though he was *hard pressed* and *cramped*, he was not boxed in with no escape. He found *emotional* and *spiritual* freedom in Jesus Christ, even if he was imprisoned.

The nuclear submarine *Thresher* had heavy steel bulkheads and heavy steel armor, so it could dive deep and withstand the pressure of the ocean. Unfortunately, on a test run in **1963**, the *Thresher's* nuclear engine quit, and it could not get back to the surface. It sank deeper and deeper into the ocean. The pressure became immense. The heavy steel bulkheads buckled and the *Thresher* was crushed with 129 people inside.

The Navy searched for the *Thresher* with a research craft that was much stronger than submarines. It was shaped like a steel ball and was lowered into the ocean on a cable. They finally located the *Thresher* at a depth of **8,400 feet**: one and a half miles down. It was crushed like an egg shell. That was not a surprise, for the pressure at that depth is tremendous—**3,600 pounds per square inch**.

What was surprising to the searchers was the fact that they saw fish at that great depth, and these fish did not have inches of steel to protect them. They appeared to have normal skin, a fraction of an inch thick. How can these fish survive under all that pressure? Why are they not crushed by the weight of the water? They have a secret. **Their secret is that they have the same pressure inside themselves as they have on the outside.**

Beloved the same principle applies to the Christian. **The treasure of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His grace within us, enables us to cope with life and not be squashed when we are squeezed.**

1 John 4:4 (NASB)

⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

When we are truly God-dependent, He will make a way for us in our wilderness. That is His promise to us. What a blessing! What a treasure!

Psalms 32:8 (NASB)

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

Isaiah 48:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to **profit**, Who leads you in the way you should go. {The word "profit" can also be translated "to benefit or set forward."}

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;**

B. We are Perplexed: *Confused but not Confounded*

Paul continues to describe the conflicts we all face and says, "*We are perplexed, but not in despair.*" What is he saying to us here? This word "**perplexed**" is from the Greek word *aporeo* {*ap-or-eh'-o*} which means "**to be without resources; to be left wanting; to be embarrassed; to not know which way to turn or what to do; to hesitate or to be in doubt.**"

Paul admitted he faced these circumstances. There were evidently times he did not know what to do. He faced circumstances of great *embarrassment, want, perplexity*, and *pressure* by foes. We all have been in that boat!

We may be at our *wit's end* sometimes, but never at our *hope's end*. There are times when the Christian does not know what is to be done, but even then, he never doubts that something can be done.

There are times when he cannot well see where life is going, but he never doubts that it is going somewhere. A man may be at his *wit's end* but he can never be at his *hope's end* while he has the presence of Christ. This is what Paul confirmed for us.

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;**

Paul said there were times when he was *perplexed* and *bewildered*, but he was not *befuddled*. He was not in despair. The word "**despair**" is from the Greek word *exaporeomai* {*ex-ap-or-eh'-om-ahee*} which means "**to be utterly at loss; to be utterly destitute of measures or resources, to renounce all hope, to be in despair.**"

Paul was *at a loss* but not at *a total loss*. He was at his *wit's end*, but there was still a way out; he was at the *brink of defeat* but *not defeated*. The apostle *was destitute*, but not *utterly destitute*. The wants of Paul were provided for; his *embarrassments* were removed; his *grounds of perplexity* were taken away; and unexpected strength and resources were imparted to him.

He faced extreme difficulties, but was not without *hope, confidence, and security* because he found these strengths in the Lord who never failed him.

If you are full of doubt, hopeless, and insecure, then place your trust in the Lord and put your life in His caring hands. If you will let Him, He will never allow you to be overwhelmed by despair. This is why Paul was able to keep going forward for Christ in the face of overwhelming obstacles. He was left for dead outside the city of Lystra after being stoned, but the next day he went right back into the city again.

Acts 14:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

²⁰ But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Paul was perplexed at times, but not in despair. He kept his head and served the Lord as a good soldier of Christ.

2 Timothy 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This word “sober” is from the word *nepho* {*nay'-fo*} which means “to be calm and collected in spirit; to be sober and self controlled.” We are to endure *afflictions, hardships, trouble* and *fulfill the ministry* the Lord has for us. We are to be *cool* and *calm* and place our hope in Him.

Many years ago, **King George VI of England** addressed the British commonwealth on New Year’s Eve at a moment in history when the whole world stood on the brink of uncertainty. *Despondency* and *uncertainty* filled the air.

You could say it was a time of perplexity. The king’s own body was racked by cancer. Before that year was over, his life ended. Unaware of his own physical maladies, he uttered these memorable words: “I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light, and better than the known.’” Beloved, put your life in God’s hands.

2 Corinthians 4:9 (NASB)

⁹ **persecuted**, but not **forsaken**; struck down, but not destroyed;

C. We are Persecuted: *Harassed but not Helpless*

Paul addresses a third conflict that we may face, “*We are persecuted, but not forsaken.*” This word “**persecuted**” comes from the word *dioko* {dee-o'-ko} which means “**to make to run or put to flight; to pursue in a hostile manner; to harass, mistreat, or persecute.**” Paul was no stranger to people who were trying to harm him.

Acts 9:23-24 (NASB)

²³ **When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,**

²⁴ **but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;**

You may face the same problems of people harassing you or trying to destroy you with their tongues or hands. Hostilities today take many forms including *derision, defamation, denigration, denunciation, condemnation, confrontation, humiliation, inattention, incarceration, intimidation, isolation, imposition, and persecution.* In spite of the pain of persecution, Paul made it clear he was not “**forsaken.**” He was not *abandoned, deserted, left behind* or *helpless.*

One of the most notable things about martyrs is that it was amidst their sorest times that they had their sweetest times with Christ. As **Joan of Arc** said when she was abandoned by those who should have stood by her, “It is better to be alone with God. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength, I will dare and dare and dare until I die.”

God promises to never abandon us. God’s companionship and presence are always with the believer. Even during the dreadful agonies of death, He sustains the Christian with His comfort and grace.

Hebrews 13:5 (NASB)

⁵ **Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"**

Psalms 27:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ **For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the LORD will take me up.**

Psalms 23:4 (NASB)

⁴ **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

What a treasure we have in the fact that as Christians, we are never alone or abandoned. Our Lord is ever with us. **Aberra Wata** worked with Christian youth in the southern part of Ethiopia during the time of Communist rule (1974-1991). He reported the following story to fellow missionary **John Cumbers**, who served in Ethiopia during the Communist years. Here is what **Aberra** reported:

“Word came from the commandant that the Party leaders had studied my report about the work among the Christian young people. The authorities decided I had to be executed because of my “treasonous” words. “The only way you can overturn this sentence,” said the commandant, “is for you to deny that you are one of the believers.” What could I say? I told the commandant, “If they execute me, I will be immediately with the Lord.” The commandant replied, “That’s what I expected you to say.”

As I awaited execution in prison, my Savior gave me songs to sing I had never heard before. He turned me into a composer. [My fellow prisoners and I] reveled in the joys of praise to our God. The guards kept trying to silence us, but with the threat of execution hanging over us, why should we keep quiet? Seven men had come to Christ in that prison, and we all sang together. One particular guard took delight in mocking us, yelling at us, and insulting us. He would put filthy words to the tunes we sang. One night he patted his revolver and promised, “Tomorrow morning at this time you won’t be in the land of the living.”

Just after midnight that evening a tremendous storm burst on the town and the prison. Huge hailstones fell, wrecking several roofs, including the one where the insulting guard was sleeping. He became terrified, pulled out his revolver, and shot at random into the darkness, using up all the bullets he had promised would finish us off the next day.

One by one the roofs were taken off the commandant’s house and the offices of the chief judge, the administrator, and his deputy. The prisoners in cells three, four, and five got a soaking from the rain too. We were in cell one and were kept dry. There were a lot of wet and unhappy people in Yavello that night.

At nine o’clock the next morning, while expecting the cruel guard to fulfill his promise to shoot us, we observed a remarkable sight. That same guard was pushed into our cell, without his uniform, by the commandant, who was whipping him with his belt. Other people in the background were yelling, “We told this man to leave the believers alone, but he refused, and so God has sent this terrible punishment on the town and prison. He deserves to be given some of his own medicine.”

After some time the guard was released and given back his uniform. He told us, “I know that the Lord was with you. I know the way I should have treated you, but Satan persuaded me otherwise. Please forgive me.” We did, and several more men trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior in the prison. Beloved, God cares for us in His own way. He will not abandon us, even in death.”

At this point, we have examined three forms of conflicts that Christians may face.

1. *We are Pressured: Squeezed but not Squashed!*
2. *We are Perplexed: Confused but not Confounded!*
3. *We are Persecuted: Harassed but not Helpless!*
4. *Next, we are Plummeted: Knocked down but not Knocked Out!*

2 Corinthians 4:9 (NASB)

⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

D. We are Plummeted: Knocked Down but Not Knocked Out!

Paul said, “*struck down, but not destroyed.*” The words “**struck down**” were used to describe the activities of gladiators or wrestlers. It is from the word *kataballo* {*kat-ab-al'-lo*} which means “**to cast down or throw to the ground.**”

The allusion is to combat or wrestling. Paul was not only persecuted or pursued by his enemies, but actually overtaken by them. He was cast to the ground, but not killed or destroyed. He was knocked down over and over again, but not knocked out.

When his enemies seemed to have him in their power, God delivered Paul and strengthened him to get back up. This occurred so often, and in cases so extreme, as to make it obvious that the power of God was exerted on his behalf.

No man from his own resources could have endured or escaped so much. Even though he was imprisoned in Jerusalem, Philippi, Caesarea, or Rome, he learned to be content. When he was beaten, he sang and praised God. When imprisoned, he won prisoners and guards to Christ. When he was driven out of town, he entered another one. He may have been knocked down, but this guy was not knocked out!

Paul has painted a picture of a wrestler who is first, hard pressed, then hemmed in, then pursued, then actually thrown down. This did not happen just once in a while. Instead, his life was like that of the Lord's, an uninterrupted succession of indignities and suffering. In spite of the weaknesses he faced, God strengthened Paul.

We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. The God of the man is glorified, not the man of God. It wasn't that Paul in each case reached down into his soul, sucked it up, and became Super Christian. It was never his strength. It was God's.

The apostle's weakness was the occasion and opportunity for God's power to be given and demonstrated. Paul remained a cracked, earthen vessel, but his crumbling flesh allowed the power of God to shine through him.

You may be *knocked down* right now, but you are not *knocked out*. Get back up! You have the energy of the Creator of the universe to *energize, encourage, and excite* you. Don't make excuses looking for reasons why you cannot obey the Lord or do His will. Instead, look for a way to fulfill the purpose of your life and God's plan for you.

I think of the woman who emigrated from Mexico to the United States with her husband and children. On their way to "paradise," at the border in El Paso, Texas, her husband deserted her, leaving her stranded with the children. A divorcee, twenty-two years of age with two kids, she was poverty-stricken.

She was knocked down but not knocked out. With the few dollars in her pocket, she bought bus tickets to California. There she was sure she could find work. She did find a job -- an awful job, working from midnight until six o'clock in the morning, making tacos. She earned only a few dollars, but she ate meagerly and saved a dime from every dollar she earned.

Why did she save? She saved because she was visualizing a dream She wanted to own a taco shop. One day she took the few dollars she'd managed to save, went to a banker, and said, "There's a little place I'd like to buy. If you'd loan me a few thousand dollars, I can have my own taco shop."

The banker, impressed by her, decided to take a chance and loaned her the money. She was twenty-five years old and the owner of a little taco shop. She worked hard at it, and eventually, she expanded and expanded until, fifteen years later, she had the largest wholesale business of Mexican products in America. She went on to become the treasurer of the United States.

Her name is *Ramona Banuelos*. Beloved, God wants us to have the same kind of persistence and determination when it comes to living for Him. Make up your mind to live for Christ and watch what He will do for you. You are a cracked pot entrusted with a great treasure. You have a purpose and reason for living.

Romans 8:36-37 (NASB)

³⁶ **Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."**

³⁷ **But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.**

Things were pretty rough for Paul, but he does not make excuses. Notice his positive attitude, "*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*"

We have seen so far.....

1. *The Contents in Christian Vessels* ([vs. 7](#))
2. *The Calm in our Conflicts* ([vss. 8-9](#))
3. *Next, the Clarity of Christ in our Sufferings* ([vss. 10-11](#))

III. THE CLARITY OF CHRIST IN OUR SUFFERINGS— 2 Corinthians 4:10-11

2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ Always **carrying about** in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul continues to remind us of the fragileness of our earthen vessel. He was constantly in danger of dying in the same violent way Jesus was put to death. He said he was “**caring about**” in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. These words are from the Greek word *periphero* {*per-ee-fer'-o*}. This word occurs in two other verses in the New Testament.

Mark 6:55 (NASB)

⁵⁵ And ran about that whole country and began to **carry here and there** on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was.

Ephesians 4:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and **carried about** by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Periphero means “**to carry around.**” It does not mean that Paul was a pallbearer who carried the body of Jesus to the tomb. No, he meant that he always, in season and out of season, proclaimed Jesus’ death. The *sacrifice* and *suffering* of Christ were ever with him. He did not forget what the Lord did for him. At the same time, Paul demonstrates his willingness to suffer physically for his Lord. The apostle’s scars were convincing proof of his suffering.

2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ Always **carrying about** in the body the **dying** of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

The word “**dying**” is not the usual word that Paul used for “**death**” which was the word *thanatos*. *Thanatos* speaks of death as a fact or an event. Paul uses a different word here. It is the word *nekrosis* {*nek'-ro-sis*} which describes the “**process of dying.**”

Paul constantly faced death, which led him to write, “**I die daily**” (1 Corinthians 15:31).

1 Corinthians 15:31 (NASB)

³¹ I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, **I die daily.**

He knew well what it was to deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow the Lord. To be what the Lord wanted him to be and do what He wanted him to do, Paul had to come to a point where he died to **“self and was willing to lay down his life for the Savior.”** The scars on his beaten body attested to the fact of his willingness and obedience.

Galatians 6:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

The Bible challenges us over and again to die to self.

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Luke 9:24 (NASB)

²⁴ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

Romans 6:11 (NASB)

¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 5:24 (NASB)

²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Philippians 3:8 (NASB)

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

The suffering we encounter for Christ and dying to our self is for the purpose of others being able to see the life of Jesus Christ in us. Christ is to be *manifested* and *magnified* in our body. Paul could go through *suffering* and *trials* because he knew that they were not a waste or futile drain on his life. He knew that his pain was for the purpose of bringing others to Christ. When a man has the conviction that what is happening to him is happening literally for Christ's sake he can face just about anything.

Colossians 1:24 (NASB)

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR CONFLICTS— 2 Corinthians 4:12

2 Corinthians 4:12 (NASB)

¹² So death works in us, but life in you.

We are exposed to death just as Paul. The preaching of the Gospel exposes us to trials which may be regarded as death working in us. Paul lived in the face of death so that those he tried to reach for Christ would have eternal life by trusting in Christ.

Jesus did the same thing for us. He died that we might live. Our Lord gave His life for ours. Those who are used most to spread the good news of Christ embrace death as the operational principle of ministry. When **George Muller**, pastor and provider for thousands of children, was asked his secret, he hung his head and said, “There was a day when I died.” Then he hung it lower and said, “Died to George Mueller.” Mueller understood the concept of [John 12](#).

John 12:24-26 (NASB)

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

²⁵ He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

Paul said, “**So death works in us, but life in you.**” Those who were saved “**lived**” because Paul was constantly exposed to death. Others reaped the advantage of his suffering and trials. His dying to self was for the good of others.

2 Corinthians 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

The same truth applies to us. The sacrifices you make for Christ, the suffering you may endure for Christ’s sake, are for the benefit of reaching others for Him. They are benefitted by being saved and by growing in spiritual maturity and their knowledge of Jesus Christ.

As fragile, cracked pots, the Lord can take the treasure of eternal life and the Gospel that He has entrusted to us and use us to change the lives of people who do not know Him. Clay pots that know they are fragile and are dependent upon God’s power, will be used by the Lord and He will be glorified by what is accomplished. Beloved, any power that you have in your life is not from your pursuit of power, it is from yielding to Him. Are you yielded to Christ? Do you realize that you are just a cracked pot that has a wonderful treasure entrusted to you?

Chapter 10. Seeing Him Who Is Invisible

2 Corinthians 4:13-18 (NASB)

¹³ But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak,

¹⁴ knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The first dozen verses of the fourth chapter reveal to us that we have treasure that has been entrusted to us, even though we are earthen vessels or cracked pots. Though *knocked down*, we are not *knocked out*. Though *pressed*, we are *not pinned*.

In spite of our suffering, Christ is manifested in our life for the purpose of reaching others with the Gospel. This is the ultimate purpose of the life of the Christian. It's not to be *number one*, not to be *the greatest*, not to be *the richest*, not to be the *most popular*, not to be the *most beautiful* or *the strongest*, it is to glorify God and point others to the Altogether Lovely One, the Lord Jesus Christ so they might put their faith in Him.

If we are going through trials, how do we keep our sanity and serenity when we are suffering?

How did Paul do this? The answer is by seeing Him who is invisible. It is by having eyes of *faith* that are *firmly focused* on our *fantastic* Savior.

We are confronted with invisible things every day. The *wind, air, smell, bacteria, sound, atoms, or thoughts* are all invisible to the naked eye, yet we see the impact they have on us and others. Though invisible, the things that God has made point to His power and glory.

Romans 1:20 (NASB)

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

We cannot see the Lord right now, but we see the impact He is making in our own life and in the lives of other Christians.

Colossians 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

1 Timothy 1:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Moses endured the severe trials he faced by having eyes of faith, by seeing Him who is invisible.

Hebrews 11:27 (NASB)

²⁷ **By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.**

This is the theme of this [section of 2 Corinthians](#). Paul's message is a challenge for us to endure our *troubles, trials, testings, tribulations*, and *trauma* by seeing Him who is invisible. This is what faith is all about.

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

¹ **Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

⁶ **And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.**

We will address several thoughts in this portion of [2 Corinthians](#) that deal with the issue of "Seeing Him who is Invisible."

1. *The Reason for Steadfastness... [v. 13](#)*
2. *The Resurrection in Sight.... [v. 14](#)*
3. *The Reason for Suffering.... [v. 15](#)*
4. *The Rejection of Stopping or Quitting... [v. 16a](#)*
5. *The Revival or Renewal of our Strength.... [v. 16b](#)*
6. *The Results or Ramifications of our Sufferings.... [v. 17](#)*
7. *The Regard for Spiritual, Eternal Matters.... [v. 18](#)*

I. THE REASON FOR STEADFASTNESS—[2 Corinthians 4:13](#)

[2 Corinthians 4:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³ **But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak,**

A biography of **Thomas Edison** was written by his son. What an amazing man he was! Thanks to the genius of Thomas Edison, we enjoy the microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent light, the storage battery, talking movies and more than a thousand other inventions. But beyond all that, Edison was a man who refused to be discouraged or overwhelmed by his circumstances. His contagious optimism affected all those around him.

His son recalled a freezing, **December** night in **1914**. Unfruitful experiments on the nickel-iron-alkaline storage battery, a 10-year project, had put Edison on a financial tightrope. He was still solvent only because of profits from movie and record productions.

On that December evening, the cry "Fire!" echoed through the plant. Spontaneous combustion had broken out in the film room. Within minutes, all the packing compounds, celluloid for records and film, and other flammable goods were burning. Fire companies from eight surrounding towns arrived, but the heat was so intense, and the water pressure was so low, that attempts to douse the flames were futile. Everything was being destroyed.

When he couldn't find his father, the son became concerned. Was he safe? With all his assets being destroyed, would his spirit be broken? Soon he saw his father in the plant yard running toward him. "Where's Mom?" shouted the inventor. "Go get her, son! Tell her to hurry up and bring her friends! They'll never see a fire like this again!"

Early the next morning, long before dawn, with the fire barely under control, Edison called his employees together and made an incredible announcement. "We're rebuilding!" He told one man to lease all the machine shops in the area. He told another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Oh, by the way, does anybody know where we can get some money?"

Later, he explained, "We can always make capital out of a disaster. We've just cleared out a bunch of old rubbish. We'll build bigger and better on the ruins." Shortly after that, he yawned, rolled up his coat for a pillow, curled up on a table and immediately fell asleep.

This story illustrates the same kind of *resolve* and **confidence** that the Apostle Paul had in the Lord and the type of fortitude we are to have in our own life. In spite of his *troubles, trials, and tribulations*, Paul continued to preach the Word because he had the same kind of faith that the psalmist had.

Just as the psalmist, Paul believed in God and he spoke up about it. He could not keep his mouth shut about the Lord. Paul remained true to his convictions and boldly preached what he knew to be true. The fire of God's Word burned in his soul, just like the heart of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 20:9 (NASB)

⁹But if I say, "I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name," Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding *it* in, And I cannot endure *it*.

Your *faith* and *trust* in the Lord will help you to see Him who is invisible and remain steadfast when you are *struggling* or *stressed* to the limit. *Faith* sees God's hand of blessing when others are blinded by the smoke from the flames of their trials.

Faith in the Lord finds comfort in the midst of conflict and overwhelming circumstances. *Faith* in Christ defies the muzzle that society wants to put on the mouth of the believer.

This wicked world endeavors to suppress the Scriptures, restrain righteousness, censor the very name of Christ, and fetter faith in the Son of God. Seeing Him who is invisible strengthens the Christian to confidently overcome the intimidation of the indecent, and unashamedly share with others the wonders of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

Romans 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

1 Corinthians 9:16 (NASB)

¹⁶For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

True belief impels *strong, consistent, unwavering* testimony to the truth. On trial for his faith in Christ before the **Diet of Worms**, it was **Martin Luther** who defiantly declared, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning, then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against my conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen."

Do you believe in the Lord? Then have you spoken? Have you openly and unashamedly declared to others your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, why not? The challenge of the Scriptures is to speak up!

Psalms 25:2 (NASB)

² O my God, in You I trust, Do not let me be ashamed; Do not let my enemies exult over me.

Romans 10:11 (NASB)

¹¹ For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

1 Peter 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ But if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

1 John 2:28 (NASB)

²⁸ Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Have you been muzzled by the intimidation of society?

II. THE RESURRECTION IN SIGHT—[2 Corinthians 4:14](#)

2 Corinthians 4:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

Paul knew that God the Father raised up Jesus and He will also raise us up too. The fact of the resurrection keeps us *going* and *gives* us hope. When we physically die, we will be resurrected in Christ.

The resurrection is the backbone of the Christian faith. It is the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence of Christianity. It is our Rock of Gibraltar and the Waterloo of Infidelity, Liberalism, and Atheism.

The sign of Christianity is not the Cross, but the empty tomb. From [Genesis](#) to [Revelation](#), the death knell sounds. **You and I have an appointment with death.** Because of the resurrection, the sting has been taken out of death.

1 Corinthians 15:55 (NASB)

⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

1 Corinthians 15:57 (NASB)

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians have the only living originator of faith. **Buddha** is dead; **Brahma** (Hinduism) is dead; **Mohammed** (Islam) is dead; **Marx** (Communism) is dead. **They are all DEAD!** We serve a living Savior and this gives us hope. It is our hope and reason for peace and joy. The resurrection removes the mystery of death and what is beyond.

It flushes the fear of the unknown because the resurrection enables us to see Him who is invisible. The Lord has given us a small glimpse of what is beyond our earthly shore.

A few hours before **Dwight L. Moody** died, he caught a glimpse of the glory awaiting him. Awakening from a sleep, he said, “Earth recedes, heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go!”

His son who was standing by his bedside said, “No, no father, you are dreaming.” “No,” said Mr. Moody, “I am not dreaming; I have been within the gates; I have seen the children’s faces.”

A short time elapsed and then what seemed to the family to be the death struggle, Moody spoke again: “This is my triumph; this my coronation day! It is glorious!” Moody rejoiced and was at peace at the Hour of his death because he saw Him who was invisible. The whole fabric of Christianity rests upon Christ’s resurrection.

The Resurrection of Christ
It is the foundation to faith in Christ.

Romans 10:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ **That if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;**
¹⁰ **for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

Romans 4:25 (NASB)

²⁵ **He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

Justification deals with our standing before God. It means “**JUST—AS-IF-I**” never sinned. Christ paid for the sins of the world with His death on the cross. With the sin debt paid, it freed God to forgive those who sought God’s forgiveness by faith and trust in the provision of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection shows God the Father’s acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice. Because Christ lives, God can credit the provided righteousness of Christ to the spiritual account of every person who responds by faith to that offer. Justification is by faith in Christ, not our works.

It is the Focal point of the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NASB)

³ **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**
⁴ **and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

It is the Fountain of our joy and hope of future reunion with Christ and saved loved ones.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.**

¹⁴ **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.**

Winston Churchill chose to believe in the Lord. Churchill arranged his own funeral. There were stately hymns in St. Paul's Cathedral and an impressive liturgy. But at the end of the service, Churchill had an unusual event planned. When they said the benediction, a bugler high in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral on one side played Taps, the universal signal that the day is over. There was a long pause. Then a bugler on the other side played Reveille, the military wake-up call.

It was Churchill's way of communicating that, while we say "Good night" here, it's "Good morning" up there. Now why could he do that? The answer is, "He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who said 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me though he were dead, yet shall he live.'"

1 John 3:2 (NASB)

² **Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.**

It is the Force for holy living.

Romans 6:4-6 (NASB)

⁴ **Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

⁵ **For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,**

⁶ **knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;**

It is the Footing of our assurance and security in Christ.

Romans 8:33-34 (NASB)

³³ **Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;**

³⁴ **who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.**

IF the Resurrection is not true, the martyrs who died singing to lions that crushed them with their teeth, and the missionaries who gave their lives in the jungles of Ecuador or the Congo were poor, deluded fools.

Notice what Paul said in the first letter to the Corinthians. They threw away their lives.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NASB)

¹² **Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**

¹³ **But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;**

¹⁴ **and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.**

¹⁵ **Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.**

¹⁶ **For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;**

¹⁷ **and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**

¹⁸ **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**

¹⁹ **If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.**

Paul made it clear that if there were no resurrection, then Jesus is dead, and our faith and preaching are useless. We would be liars and still guilty in our sins. Those who have died believing in the Lord have perished forever. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are to be pitied more than anyone else in the world.

There is no reason for us to be pitied, however, for we serve a **LIVING** savior. The resurrection enables us to see Him who is invisible. The hope and truth of the resurrection gave peace to **John and Betty Stam**. As **John and Betty Stam**, early missionaries to China, were led to certain execution by their communist captors, someone asked, "Where are you going?" His reply was, "I don't know where the guards are going, but we are going to Heaven." Shortly thereafter, the communist soldiers beheaded John and Betty in the streets of the city. They saw Him who was invisible and now are in His presence.

Beloved, we will be physically resurrected after we die. We are resurrected another way figuratively speaking. When you die to yourself and invest your life in others, helping and loving them, you will be resurrected in their lives. As your life touches the lives of others, in a way you are resurrected in them.

The life of a teacher is resurrected in his or her students. The life of a pastor is resurrected in his church family. The lives of parents are resurrected in their children. Invest your life into the lives of others. Find *passion* and a *purpose* for living by seeing Him who is invisible.

III. THE REASON FOR THE ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING— 2 Corinthians 4:15

2 Corinthians 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

Paul *reveals* the *reason* he endured the suffering he encountered. There were **two things** he mentioned here.

A. The Reception of Grace for Believers: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks.....”*

Paul endured suffering so that the lost might be saved by God’s wonderful grace and that these believers would grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

2 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Those who came to Christ would bring glory and praise to God. This is the second reason for the endurance of suffering.

2 Corinthians 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

B. The Reception of Glory for God: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”*

Paul saw Him who was invisible. It was his desire that the Lord Jesus be glorified by his life and the lives of other believers. This was a key reason why he endured the suffering he encountered.

He desired that people be grateful to the Lord and that thanksgiving would **“abound”** to God’s glory. This word **“abound”** is from the Greek word *perisseuo* {*per-is-syoo’-o*} which means **“to exceed a fixed number of measure, to be left over and above a certain number; to overflow.”** It was used to describe a flower that went from a bud to full bloom. It was the same word that was used to describe the leftovers of the little boy’s lunch after Jesus fed the multitudes.

Matthew 14:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **And they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets.**

Paul's challenge to us was to bring glory to the Lord and not be cheap with our praise. It was his desire that God be abundantly glorified.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB)

³¹ **Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

Philippians 2:11 (NASB)

¹¹ **And that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

We have seen so far.....

1. *The Reason for Steadfastness... [vs. 13](#)*
2. *The Resurrection in Sight.... [vs. 14](#)*
3. *The Reason for Suffering.... [vs. 15](#)*
4. *Next, the Rejection of Stopping or Quitting.... [vs. 16a](#)*

IV. THE REJECTION OF STOPPING OR QUITTING—

[2 Corinthians 4:16a](#)

2 Corinthians 4:16a (NASB)

¹⁶ **Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.**

In his old age, **Pierre Auguste Renoir**, the great French painter, suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis, which twisted and cramped his hand. **Henri Matisse**, his friend who was also an artist, watched sadly while Renoir, grasping a brush with only his fingertips, continued to paint, even though each movement caused stabbing, excruciating pain. One day, Matisse asked Renoir why he persisted in painting at the expense of such torture and suffering. Renoir replied, "The pain passes, but the beauty remains."

Such was the case with Paul. The pain of suffering passed but the beauty of the salvation of the lost and their praise for God motivated Paul to be steadfast in his service for Christ. This is the "**therefore**" he is referring to in this passage.

Paul said, "**we do not lose heart.**" We are not utterly spiritless. We are not in *despair* and are *not giving up*. To the Galatian Christians he said, "**Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.**" ([Galatians 6:9](#))

Beloved, being faithful not only involves starting well, but also ending well. We are to cross our finish line for Christ going full speed. This is what Paul did with his life. He did not fade in the final stretch of his life.

2 Timothy 4:7 (NASB)

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

Suffering, strain, and stress, tend to bring people to the end of their rope and bring them to a point of *quitting* or *throwing* in the towel. Perhaps, you have been there. Such was not the case with Paul. Paul saw Him who was invisible and it kept him from quitting. His eyes were on the Lord and ought to be where we focus our eyes too.

Hebrews 12:2a (NASB)

² Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The word “**looking**” is an interesting word. It is from the Greek word *aphorao* {*af-or-ah'-o*} which means “**to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something.**”

The idea here is we are not to be distracted from keeping our focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what is taking place in our life. We are citizens of Heaven and are to be looking for His return.

Philippians 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Margaret Sangster Phippen wrote that in the **mid 1950's**, her father, **British minister W. E. Sangster**, began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. When he went to the doctor, he found that he had an incurable disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. His muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, his throat would soon become unable to swallow.

Sangster threw himself into his work in British home missions, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. “Let me stay in the struggle Lord,” he pleaded. “I don’t mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead.” He wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer cells throughout England. “I’m only in the kindergarten of suffering,” he told people who pitied him.

Gradually Sangster’s legs became useless. His voice went completely, but he could still hold a pen, shakily. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he said, “It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!' -- but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout.”

Beloved, let me ask, “Do you have a voice, but have lost the desire to shout and praise the Lord?” **Don’t** be in despair. **Don’t** let fatigue, pain, or criticism force you off the job. Renew your commitment to serving Christ. **Don’t** forsake your eternal reward because of the intensity of today’s pain. **Don’t** quit and give up on God. Your very weakness allows the resurrection power of Christ to strengthen you moment by moment. See Him who is invisible just like this missionary.

V. THE REVIVAL OR RENEWAL OF OUR STRENGTH— 2 Corinthians 4:16b

2 Corinthians 4:16b (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, **but though our outer man is decaying**, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

Our “**outer man**” or our body is slowly consumed by everyday life. The *trials, afflictions, disappointments, defeats, setbacks, pressure* and *persecution* take their toll on us physically. They are like sandpaper that wear us down.

They cause us to “**decay.**” This word is from the Greek word *diaptheiro* {*dee-af-thi'-ro*} which means “**to change for the worse, to ruin, to destroy, to consume bodily strength.**”

It was the same word that was used to describe a moth that consumes clothing. Physically we may be wearing down, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Our *soul*, our *inward man*, that which cannot be felt or seen by others, is *renewed* and *revived* by the Lord, so that we grow more holy, more happy, and more like Christ each day as we yield to Him. The Spirit of God is in the reviving business. The strength that we receive from the Holy Spirit enables us to see Him who is invisible.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NASB)

²² The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Isaiah 40:31 (NASB)

³¹ Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

How are we *revived* or *renewed*? The Bible provides some answers.

Elements of Renewal

1. The Removal of Sin

Psalms 51:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Ezekiel 18:31 (NASB)

³¹ Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?

2. The Reception of the Savior

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Titus 3:5 (NASB)

⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

3. The Response of Submission

1 Peter 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,

We are not to slip back into the old, sinful lifestyle to satisfy our carnal cravings. Instead, we are to be obedient to the Lord.

4. The Renovation of the Spirit of Your Mind

There is a need for a change in *attitude* and *thinking*. It is the Lord that helps us in this area.

Ephesians 4:23 (NASB)

²³ And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

Romans 12:2 (NASB)

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

5. The Reconstruction of the Spirit of God in our Life.

The Spirit of God changes a man when he puts his faith in the Lord.

Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

¹³ For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 1:6 (NASB)

⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

1 Samuel 10:6 (NASB)

⁶ Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man.

VI. The Results and Ramifications of Our Suffering—

2 Corinthians 4:17

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ For momentary, **light affliction** is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Paul refers to his trials as “**light afflictions.**” This word “**affliction**” is from the word *thlipsis* {*thlip'-sis*} which means “**a pressing together, pressure, oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress.**” He considered his *distress* and *tribulations* as light. He adds that they are for a moment. They pass quickly and leave little impression.

Earlier, when Paul began this letter, he stated that the “**affliction**” he had experienced in Asia had left him “**burdened excessively, beyond our strength**” (2 Corinthians 1:8).

2 Corinthians 1:8 (NASB)

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were **burdened excessively**, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ For momentary, **light affliction** is producing for us an eternal **weight of glory** far beyond all comparison,

The weight of his affliction was real and, in fact, almost killed him. However, here in this verse, Paul minimizes the deadly weight of affliction he had experienced in Asia. Instead of the **weight of affliction or burden of excessiveness**, there is now the “**weight of glory.**” For Paul, the affliction which once felt like a lethal weight around his neck now seems weightless in comparison to his eternal load of glory. The apostle had a positive outlook about his afflictions because he saw Him who is invisible.

Beloved, our troubles *should not* diminish our *faith* or *disillusion us*. We should realize that there is a purpose in our suffering. Paul said that our trials and troubles work for us. They produce eternal glory beyond comparison and maturity in our life.

James 1:3-4 (NASB)

³ **Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.**

⁴ **And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

How does this happen? How do our trials produce eternal glory and maturity for us?

How do Our Trials Produce Glory and Maturity?

1. By preventing pride from gripping our heart. Problems have a humiliating effect on people.

2. By purifying our heart, enabling us to break off from the sins for which God afflicts us.

Isaiah 48:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ **Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.**

3. By proving our faith to other people. The trial is a test for us and an opportunity for others to view what we will do and how we will respond to it. For some people, they will not listen to what you have to say until you are or have been in the fire of adversity. King Nebuchadnezzar did not listen to the three Hebrews until they came out of the fiery furnace.

4. By pointing to the power of God which is demonstrated in our ordeal. Our troubles are God's opportunity to show Himself strong.

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NASB)

⁹ **"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars."**

5. By our panting and dependence upon the Lord for strength and help. Dependence upon the Lord develops trust and intimacy with Him.

Psalms 56:3 (NASB)

³ **When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.**

Psalms 56:11 (NASB)

¹¹ **In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?**

6. By our pining for Heaven and the Prince of Peace. Trials change our focus from earthly matters to eternal matters. They remind us of the sufferings of Christ and develop a desire to go home to be with the Lord.

Philippians 1:23 (NASB)

²³ **But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;**

7. By the promises of God to reward His people in Heaven as the result of their bearing trials in this life.

1 Peter 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ **So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

James 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.**

We have seen so far in this section.....

1. *The Reason for Steadfastness ...*[v. 13](#)
2. *The Resurrection in Sight....* [v. 14](#)
3. *The Reason for Suffering....* [v. 15](#)
4. *The Rejection of Stopping or Quitting....* [v. 16a](#)
5. *The Revival or Renewal of our Strength....* [v. 16b](#)
6. *The Results or Ramifications of our Sufferings....* [v. 17](#)
7. *Next, The Regard for Spiritual, Eternal Matters....* [v. 18](#)

VII. THE REGARD FOR SPIRITUAL, ETERNAL MATTERS—

2 Corinthians 4:18

2 Corinthians 4:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ **While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

I like the story about what happened on a balmy **October afternoon in 1982**. **Badger Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin**, was packed. More than **60,000** die-hard **University of Wisconsin** supporters were watching their football team take on the **Michigan State Spartans**. It soon became obvious that Michigan State had the better football team.

What seemed odd, however, as the score became more lopsided, were the bursts of *applause* and *shouts* of joy from the Wisconsin fans. How could they cheer when their team was getting clobbered?

It turns out that seventy miles away, the **Milwaukee Brewers** baseball team was beating the **St. Louis Cardinals** in game three of the **1982 World Series**. Many of the fans in the stands were listening to the baseball game on portable radios, and were responding with joy to something other than their immediate circumstances.

Their focus was upon the delights of that which was *unseen*, instead of their *difficult, discouraging* circumstances that were seen. This is what Paul did.

The focus of Paul's life was not on that which is seen, but on that which is not seen. He lived his life with eternity in view. The apostle saw Him who was invisible.

The things that are seen refer to his suffering. They also include the idols of mankind: *wealth, pleasure, fame, and power*. These will all fade away into oblivion one day. That which you might think is so important now will turn to dust or be enjoyed by another while you rest in the grave. Thank God, the same holds true for our *pain, sorrows, and tears*. All that we suffer here will soon *vanish* and *disappear*.

On the other hand, that which is done for Christ is eternal and cannot be destroyed. Your service to Christ, the souls that are won to Him, will count for eternity. That which you give to the Lord will not rot or be stolen. This is why the Lord challenged us to lay up our treasures in Heaven.

Matthew 6:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;**

Let me ask, "Are you investing your life in eternal matters? Do you live your life with eternity in view? Do you see Him who is invisible?"

If not, change the focus of your life. See Him who is invisible. Spend time in the Word and call upon Him in prayer and you will see Him who is invisible.

John 5:39 (NASB)

³⁹ **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;**

Jeremiah 33:3 (NASB)

³ **'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'**

Chapter 11.

Living with One Eye on Eternity

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (NASB)

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

² For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,

³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight—

⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

For many centuries the men and women in Europe looked out upon the western sea, what we call the Atlantic Ocean, and they saw the sun coruscating upon the glittering surface of the waters and they wondered. They wondered if there was anything beyond.

Scholars said that you could sail off the edge of the world—there was nothing out there at all. In fact, when the country of Spain had extended her conquests to the ends of the then-known world, and controlled both sides of the Mediterranean Sea at the Straits of Gibraltar, which were known as the fabled Pillars of Hercules, her coins proudly pictured these Pillars framing a scroll inscribed with the Latin words *Ne Plus Ultra* — “**No More Beyond.**” The Pillars were considered to be the gates of the end of the earth.

This kind of thinking changed, however, in **1492**, from the adventures of a guy named Christopher Columbus who discovered the New World. Columbus went westward on the shiny waters of the Atlantic Ocean. He sailed off into the sunset as people waited expectantly, and finally after a long time, the sails reappeared and the crowds went crazy.

They shouted with joy, and Columbus announced that there was a land beyond the sea that was rich beyond their dreams. It was a glorious paradise. The king of Spain changed the motto of that land. Spain admitted her ignorance and struck the word *Ne* “**No**” from her coinage, leaving the words *Plus Ultra* which mean “**More Beyond.**”

This change in philosophy to “**There is More Beyond**” affected a revolution in world *culture, global economy, and geopolitics*. The change also serves as a handy example of what is needed in the spiritual geography of modern men and women, because so many live in the stifling delusion that there is no more beyond the grave.

Unfortunately, some Christians act like there is no more beyond. When it comes to the matter of living for Christ they are *indifferent, inaccessible, inaccurate, inactive, inadequate, inappropriate, inattentive, incomplete, inconsistent, incorrect, indecisive, inflexible, insecure, insensitive, and in trouble*.

These words *Plus Ultra*, “**More Beyond**,” perfectly describe the **focus of this portion of [2 Corinthians](#)**.

Paul shares with us the hope of our heavenly body that we will receive from the Lord. The anticipation of Heaven and all that it entails kept Paul going for Christ and helped him to not give up or quit. Because there is “**More Beyond**” we are to live our lives in such a way with one eye on eternity.

How do we do this? What is involved in living with one eye on eternity? This portion provides some answers.

I. IT INVOLVES THE PROMISE OF A NEW BODY— [2 Corinthians 5:1](#)

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NASB)

¹ **For** we know that if the earthly tent which is our **house** is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul closed chapter four speaking about looking at those things that are not seen that are eternal. He continues this train of thought in this portion as indicated by the first word “**For**.” What he shares with us he “**knows**.” This is for certain. He lives with one eye on eternity by finding comfort in the promise of a new heavenly body.

He describes our earthly bodies or house as a “**house**.” The word “**house**” is from the Greek word *skenos* {*skay'-nos*} which means “**a tent or tabernacle**.” This word conveys the idea that our body is like a tent, set up for a temporary purpose and is easily taken down for the purpose of traveling from one place to another. It refers here to the body as the frail and temporary abode of the soul.

Tents are a fun place to sleep in when camping, but they are not home. They don't have the comforts of our home. They get cold, hot, and wet when they leak. They eventually wear out as they fray, tear, and rot. Our bodies wear out too. A tent is not a permanent dwelling or a fixed habitation, but is liable to be taken down at any moment.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NASB)

¹ For we know that if the earthly **tent** which is our house is **torn down**, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

This is the idea behind the word “**torn down.**” It means “**to tear down, to set loose.**” Our tent is taken down at the time of our death. This could happen to us at any moment. The body goes into the grave, whereas the spirit and soul of the believer go to be with the Lord. The term “**tent**” also reminds us that we are pilgrims in this life, just passing through this world. This is what Peter tried to get across to us.

1 Peter 2:11 (NASB)

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

*This world is not my home, I am just a passin' through,
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue,
The angels beckon me from Heaven's golden shore,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.*

Author Unknown

When it comes to the issue of death, people often use words like “**I believe.... I hope... I think.**” The Christian, however, can use the words “**I know.**” We know what is in store for us after we die. Death is a reality of life. There is no escaping it. The door of the hearse is never closed it seems.

The shadow of death hovers over the *president*, the *prostitute*, the *police officer*, the *preacher*, the *parent*, and *precious children*. The hearse awaits the arrival of every one of us. In time, the strongest body throws up the white flag of surrender to war, killers, executioners, disease, decay, old age, or accidents. The grave calls out to us to fill its void.

Solomon told us that the grave is never satisfied ([Proverbs 30:15-16](#)).

Proverbs 30:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough":

¹⁶ Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, And fire that never says, "Enough."

Don't be fooled by the foolish fables that float around the world today. Death does not move you to a temporary place called “**Purgatory**” where others can pray for you and free you from this place. It does not exist. When you die, you are not recycled and enter into another body to live another life on earth. The Bible says we die once.

Hebrews 9:27 (NASB)

²⁷ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Don't be *duped* by the *deception* that says, "When you die, that's it. There is nothing else beyond the grave." You will be in for a rude awakening if you do for there is a Heaven and there is a Hell where those who die without trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior will be tormented for eternity in the Lake of Fire.

The reality of our *death*, the *frailty* and *brevity* of our lives should motivate us to keep one eye on eternity.

James challenged us to do this.

James 4:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

Paul also had one eye on eternity because we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It's not a tent, indicating something that is temporary. It is a building, indicating something more permanent and enduring.

The building is a reference to our new body that we receive from the Lord. It is not made with hands or is not of this creation. It will be a body that is designed for life in Heaven and for eternity for it is eternal in the heavens. It is a body that will no longer be subject to *disease*, *decay*, and *death*, but one that will endure forever in our heavenly home.

God's promise of a glorified body gives *hope* and *peace* to the believer. It gives the Christian hope in the sense that his home is not here, it is in Heaven.

For many centuries innumerable people stood beside the dark hole that we call a grave and watched the remains of their loved ones lowered into the earth, and they wondered: Beyond the dark waters of death, is there anything beyond or is this it? **Is life *Ne Plus Ultra*....."No More Beyond?"**

Then one day, a young explorer went westward into the setting sun and descended into the blackness of the pit of death. People waited expectantly to see if he would keep his promise and come back. On the third day, as the sun arose in the East, the Son of God stepped forth from a grave and declared, ***Plus Ultra***, "There is something more beyond. There is a paradise beyond your greatest expectations. And there awaits a heavenly Father, waiting with outstretched arms to wipe away every tear from your cheek." This truth helps us to keep one eye on eternity.

Eric Barker, a missionary from Great Britain, spent over **50 years in Portugal** preaching the Gospel, often under adverse conditions. During **World War II**, the situation became so critical that he was advised to send his wife and eight children to England for safety. His sister and her three children were also evacuated on the same ship. Although his beloved relatives were forced to leave, he remained behind to carry on the work.

On the Lord's Day following their departure, Pastor Barker stood before his congregation and said, "I've just received word that all my family has arrived safely home!" He then proceeded with the service as usual. Later, the full meaning of his words became known to his people. He had been handed a wire just before the church service informing him that a submarine had torpedoed the ship and everyone on board had drowned. He knew that because all were believers they had reached a more **"desired home."**

Although overwhelmed with grief, he managed by the grace of God to live above his circumstances and to stay on the firing line for Jesus Christ. The knowledge that his family was enjoying the bliss of Heaven comforted his heart and helped him to keep one eye on eternity.

Keeping one eye on eternity involves the promise of a new body. Secondly, it involves pining for our new body.

Notice verses two through four.

II. IT INVOLVES THE PINING FOR OUR NEW BODY— [2 Corinthians 5:2-4](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:2-4 \(NASB\)](#)

² **For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,**

³ **inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.**

⁴ **For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.**

What is Paul saying here? This section is a very difficult one to understand and there are a variety of opinions about it.

[2 Corinthians 5:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² **For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,**

Here is my opinion. The promise of a heavenly body caused Paul and other believers to groan for it. What an appropriate description.....**"groan."** Doctors today make their living listening to groaning tents.

A dermatologist tries to keep the canvass of our tent in good shape. The family doctor spends his life *patching* up and *stitching* up this tent of ours. The orthopedic doctor tries to keep our tent legs from pulling loose.

Someone once asked **John Quincy Adams** how he was personally doing. Adams replied, "I am very well, thank you. However, the house in which John Adams lives, is growing old. The thatch is wearing thin, and it trembles in every gale. I think John Quincy Adams will have to soon move out, but he himself is very well, sir."

We groan, especially as we get older. Why do we groan? We groan today, as they did back then, because we feel the pains associated with mortality, namely our physical *limitations, sickness, heartaches*, and the *increasing disabilities* that accompany advancing age.

We groan also because of the *stress, mess, tests, unrest, and distress* of this life. How many times in frustration or great stress have we said or felt, "Lord, just go ahead and take me home! Lord, please come today and get me out of here!"

The Christian does not groan in his or her present body because he or she wants to get rid of it. We really are not going around *hoping, begging, or longing* to die today! We groan because we long to receive the immortal heavenly bodies that God has promised us. God's promises of something better make us dissatisfied with what we have now. We are *yearning* and *pining* for what we don't have right now, but what we will have someday.

Paul said he was "**longing to be clothed with**" his glorified body. He longed or pined for it. Having put on our heavenly bodies, we will not be naked. In other words, we will not be spirits without bodies. In this body that we have, we groan because we are burdened, weighed down or pressed by the pressures of this life.

We groan, not because we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us now. We groan because we want to put on our new glorified body so that our earthly decaying body will be swallowed up by life eternal in Heaven. Not only the promise of a glorified body, but pining for it and the blessings of Heaven will help us to keep one eye on eternity.

III. THE PLEDGE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT—[2 Corinthians 5:5](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ Now He who **prepared** us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

It is the Holy Spirit that helps us to keep one eye on eternity. The focus of this verse is the Lord. Paul describes two things the Lord has done for us. He has “**prepared**” us.

What does this mean? This word is from the Greek word *katergazomai* {*kat-er-gad'-zom-ah-ee*} which means “**to perform, accomplish, achieve, to prepare or fashion one fit for a thing.**”

God prepared Paul for missionary service by giving him an *education, a conversion experience, faith in Christ, and numerous hardships and trials*. He does the same for you. God has prepared you throughout your life to serve Him in one way or another. The experiences you have had and the people you have encountered can be used by the Lord to serve Him. There are so many different ways to serve Jesus Christ and reach the lost.

God’s purpose for preparing us and working in our life is that we will be covered with a resurrected body and with the future glory that God already has prepared for us. We are His bride and He is looking forward to the time when we will all be with Him in glory, worshipping and praising Him.

The Lord has in store for us an existence of which the pristine life of Adam and Eve in paradise is a reflection. This existence is what God had originally designed before sin entered the world and now has planned for us. We are going to be changed and be like Him.

[1 John 3:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

[2 Corinthians 5:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a **pledge**.

The Lord has guaranteed that we will be changed and have a new body. The Holy Spirit is His guarantee. God calls it the “**pledge**” of the Spirit. This word is from the word *arrhabon* {*ar-hrab-ohn*} which means “**money which is used in purchases and is given as a pledge or down-payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid.**” It has also been translated “**engagement ring**” which is a pledge or promise to a woman, that you will marry her. The Holy Spirit is our engagement ring from the Lord.

God has given us the Holy Spirit as a *pledge* concerning matters that will be revealed in the future. The Spirit is a *down payment* of our future inheritance in Christ. Now we are receiving a foretaste of the Spirit. The *love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and faith* that the Holy Spirit gives to us are partial payments of His blessings. They point to the best which is yet to come. If the Holy Spirit is just the down payment, just imagine what the full payment will be.

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NASB)

⁹but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

In his book *Dare to Believe*, Dan Baumann illustrates the unique experience of knowing that something is ours, yet longing to enjoy it more fully. He explained that at Christmas time he would always do a lot of snooping, trying to find the gift-wrapped presents, and figure out what was in them. One year he discovered a package with his name on it that was easy to identify. There was no way to disguise the golf clubs inside.

Baumann then made this observation: "When Mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package, shake it, and pretend that I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasures of a future event; namely, the unveiling. It had my name on it. I knew what it was, but only Christmas would reveal it in its fullness."

Beloved, Heaven will reveal the fullness that God has for us, but we can now begin to enjoy and be excited about what we will receive in glory.

The glories that await the Christian defy our comprehension. What we can grasp about them, however, fills us with great anticipation. We look longingly to that day when we shall enjoy Heaven in all its fullness. When we get to Heaven, we will receive the full allotment that God has in store for us.

We have the assurance that the Spirit, who is with us, will lead us safely into God's presence at the time of our death. The Spirit of God is Himself a guarantee that what God has already given to us in part, will one day be ours in full. Peter spoke about our inheritance in Christ.

1 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

⁴To *obtain* an inheritance *which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,*

The Holy Spirit also generates our longing to be with the Lord Jesus. He, who lives within us, helps us to live with one eye on eternity. Paul spoke of his longing to be released from *sin* and *suffering* even though the Holy Spirit lived within him and us too. He longed for the day when the Lord would give him his full rights as His adopted child which included his new body.

Romans 8:23 (NASB)

²³ **And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.**

Living with one eye on eternity involves several principles. We have seen three so far.

1. *It involves the promise of a new body.*
2. *It involves pining for our new body.*
3. *It involves the pledge of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *Next, it involves the pace or plodding by faith.*

**IV. It Involves the Persuasion & Plodding By Faith—
2 Corinthians 5:6-7**

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ **Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord**
⁷ **for we walk by faith, not by sight**

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (KJV)

⁶ **Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:**
⁷ **(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)**

When you see the word “**therefore**” find out what it is there for. Because the Holy Spirit is the down-payment of all that God has promised to us, we are “**always of good courage.**” This word “**good courage**” is from the word *tharrheo* {*thar-hreh'-o*} which means “**to be of good courage, be of good cheer; to be bold.**” The Spirit of God gives us courage, boldness, and joy to live for Christ. He gives us joy from the promises that God has made to us and boldness to believe those promises. The Spirit of God gives us courage to trust God and His Word and walk by faith.

The confidence that we have in the Lord and His promises enable us to live with one eye on eternity. We can look forward to Heaven because we believe what the Lord has said about Heaven and how to go there.

We believe His promise of eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. Thank God we are “**always**” confident of this truth. I believe this on Sunday, but also on **Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.** We are always confident in God’s Word because it is His Word. He never **lies, fudges, or back-tracks** on His promises.

While we are here in this body, we are absent from the Lord. We know we are going to be with Him one day because we trust the Lord by faith. We cannot see the Lord now, yet, we believe He is real and very much alive.

By faith, we know that we will be with Him one day and be re-united with loved ones who knew Christ as their Savior. Our confidence in Christ and living by faith help us to live with one eye on eternity.

Jim Hill put it this way in the song that he wrote.

*What a day that will be, when my Jesus I will see
When I look upon His face, the one who saved me by His grace.
When He takes me by the hand, and leads me through
the Promised Land,
What a day, glorious day, that will be.*

V. IT INVOLVES THE PREFERENCE FOR BEING WITH THE LORD—[2 Corinthians 5:8](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ **We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.**

Paul was not only confident of God's promise of a glorified body, he was confident and even willing to be absent from his body and be at home with the Lord.

[Philippians 1:23-24 \(NASB\)](#)

²³ **But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;**
²⁴ **yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.**

Remember that the soul does not die. The soul never dies; the soul goes to be with Christ. It is the body that is put to rest. It is the body that must be changed. Because of the Rapture, there will be a generation that will not go through death, but their bodies will be changed by the Lord.

[1 Corinthians 15:51 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵¹ **Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,**

[1 Corinthians 15:53 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵³ **For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

The willingness to depart this world and to be at home with the Lord will help you to live with one eye on eternity. This world is not our final home. We are citizens of Heaven.

Philippians 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;**

Edith Schaeffer, the wife of **Francis Schaeffer**, chose to have her husband brought home from the hospital for the final days of his life. She said, “I believe when my husband leaves his body, he will be with the Lord. I don’t want him to leave me until he’s with the Lord. Therefore, I am sure he would want to go to the house he asked me to buy and be there for the time he has left.”

The doctors agreed with her and told her they wished more people would do things the same way. Francis Schaeffer was taken home, and Edith surrounded his bed with the things he loved, and had music playing in his room. She said, “One after another, we played his favorite records: Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, and Handel. Ten days later, on **May 15, 1984**, with the music of Handel’s Messiah still in the air, Francis Schaeffer breathed his last breath and entered the gates of Heaven.”

The Spirit of God and the Word of God gave Edith Schaeffer *confidence, calm, and comfort* of the destiny of her husband. He does the same for us too. Our preference for wanting to be with the Lord motivates us to live with one eye on eternity. This involves several principles.

We have examined five of them.

1. *It involves the promise of a new body.*
2. *It involves pining for our new body.*
3. *It involves the pledge of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *It involves the pace or plodding by faith.*
5. *It involves the presence for being with the Lord.*
6. *Next, it involves the purpose of pleasing the Lord.*

VI. IT INVOLVES THE PURPOSE OF PLEASING THE LORD— 2 Corinthians 5:9

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NASB)

⁹ **Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.**

Paul’s love for the Lord motivated him to labor for Christ. This word “**ambition**” is from the Greek word *philotimeomai* {fil-ot-im-eh'-om-ah-ee} which means “**to be motivated and fond of honor; to be ambitious; to strive earnestly; to make something your goal.**”

Paul is not expressing the ambition to be somebody who is great or famous. He esteemed it an honor and made it the goal of his life to be well-pleasing or accepted of the Lord. He was not seeking ambition to glorify himself. Jeremiah warned us about doing this.

Jeremiah 45:5a (NASB)

⁵ But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek *them*; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,' declares the LORD, 'but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.'"

Romans 12:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

We are to live in harmony with others and are not to be so proud that we cannot enjoy the fellowship of ordinary, simple people. We are not to think we know it all and have an inflated opinion about ourselves.

God wants us to have the attitude of glorifying and pleasing Him. It should be our desire to hear His **“Well Done!”** He has not called us to be successful or number one, He has called us to be faithful servants to Him.

The desire to please the Lord Jesus Christ will help you to live with one eye on eternity for you know that one day you will see Him. This brings us to an important question, “How do you please the Lord? What is involved in pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Pleasing the Lord with Your Life

1. DO not entangle yourself in worldly affairs.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NASB)

³ Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

⁴ No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

2. It DEMANDS we have faith in the Lord.

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

3. It involves DOING what is good and DISTRIBUTING or sharing with others.

Hebrews 13:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

4. A DAILY walk with the Lord is very important.

Hebrews 11:5 (NASB)

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Genesis 5:24 (NASB)

²⁴ Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

5. It is the DUTY of all Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 (NASB)

¹ Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

6. It should be the DESIRE of all servants of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

7. DEFERENCE and DOCILITY to parents pleases the Lord.

Colossians 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

8. The DUMBNESS of preaching pleases God. (Dumbness to the world)

1 Corinthians 1:21 (NASB)

²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

9. The DEVELOPMENT of a broken, contrite heart pleases Him.

Psalms 51:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

10. DECLARING praise to the Lord pleases our king.

Psalms 69:30-31 (NASB)

³⁰ I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving.

³¹ And it will please the LORD better than an ox *Or* a young bull with horns and hoofs.

11. DISCERNING and DOING the will of God and DEEDS that are fruitful please God.

Colossians 1:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

12. DECENCY or purity in our lives pleases God.

Malachi 3:3-4 (NASB)

³ "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

⁴ "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

13. The DESIRE for God's Wisdom pleases Him.

1 Kings 3:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ "So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

¹⁰ It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.

God is willing and ready to give us His wisdom if we will seek it from Him.

James 1:5a (NASB)

⁵ **But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God**, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

14. The DELIGHT, DISPASSION, and prosperity of those that serve the Lord delights Him.

Psalms 35:27 (NASB)

²⁷ Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant."

15. DEVOTION to the Lord and DEPENDENCY upon His mercy brings pleasure to Him.

Psalms 147:11 (NASB)

¹¹ The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

16. DIVINE answers to prayer are the result.

1 John 3:22 (NASB)

²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

17. It DEVELOPS peace with enemies.

Proverbs 16:7 (NASB)

⁷ When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Do you please the Lord with your life? I hope so. The goal and passion for pleasing Him will help you to live with one eye on eternity. You will look forward and not dread the day when you meet Him face to face.

Dear Master for this coming year

Just one request I bring:

I do not pray for happiness

Or any earthly thing --

I do not ask to understand

The way Thou ledest me,

But this I ask: Teach me to do

the thing that pleaseth Thee.

I want to know Thy guiding voice,

To walk with thee each day.

Dear Master make me swift to hear

And ready to obey.

And thus the year I now begin

A happy year will be --

If I am seeking just to do

the thing that pleaseth Thee.

Author Unknown

VII. IT INVOLVES PLANNING FOR THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST—[2 Corinthians 5:10](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The sobering fact that we will give an accounting of our life to the Lord and stand before Him in judgment is a huge catalyst for us to live our life with one eye on eternity. Paul addresses our appointment with the Lord in this verse.

The Christian faces several types of judgments in his life.

1. We are to judge our own selves frequently.

[1 Corinthians 11:31 \(NASB\)](#)

³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

[2 Corinthians 13:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

2. We are chastened by the Lord. We are taken to God's woodshed when we are disobedient or wayward.

[Hebrews 12:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.

3. Our works will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the purpose of rewards, not salvation.

The Judgment Seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder.

However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To over-do the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make Heaven like Hell. To under-do the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.

It is one thing to appear in a doctor's office and quite another thing to be X-rayed by him there. The judgment seat of Christ will reveal our lives of service for Christ exactly as they have been.

Not only the *amount* of our service, but also its *quality*, and even the very *motives* that prompted it will be brought into review. Let's look at this verse and squeeze the goodies out of it.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For we must all **appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

A. “For We Must All Appear”

It is an appointment we must keep. There is no getting out of this judgment or delaying it. We will be face to face with Christ. There will be no concealment or hiding; no pretending or excuses; no spin or attorneys. The look in His eyes will say it all. This word “**appear**” means “**made manifest, turned inside out.**” We will be under the scrutiny of Jesus Christ. He will see us as we really are and deal with issues that need to be dealt with in our lives.

B. “Before the Judgment Seat of Christ”

The word “**seat**” is the word *bema*. Every three years the Corinthians had contests in the stadium outside Corinth known as the **Isthmian Games**. They lasted for weeks. The contestants were professional athletes. Upon entry, they had to certify they had been in training twelve months and had followed rigid rules and guidelines. The contestants were under the supervision of many judges.

If a person appeared to be the victor in an event, he was not declared victorious until the judges met and agreed that no rules had been broken. If they agreed, the judge led the athlete to the middle of the city square of Corinth.

In the center of the square was a stone platform that was 40 feet long, 20 feet wide, and about 8 feet above the ground. This stone was called the “*Bema*.” Athletes were awarded with laurel wreaths called the “**victor’s crown.**” The *Bema* did not conjure up ideas of guilt and punishment, but insisted on victory, reward, and honor.

C. “That Everyone May Receive the Things Done in His Body, according to what He hath done, whether it be Good or Bad”

The terms “**good or bad**” do not mean righteous or sinful. Our sins were dealt with at the cross and are under the blood. “**Good or bad**” means “**acceptable or worthless**” (**unacceptable**).

Our goal is that our service for Christ is acceptable to Him. Every one of us has the opportunity for the “**Well Done**” of Jesus Christ. Christ will examine our motive of service and our faithfulness.

That which is done with the wrong motives such as glorifying self instead of Christ, unfaithfulness, neglect of duty or opportunities, will be considered unacceptable, worthless, labor and *un-rewardable*.

The loss of reward, the loss of His “**Well Done,**” the loss of crowns and opportunities to rule in His kingdom will be a painful reprimand to us that will last for eternity. The sting from our lack of an answer will be very painful if the Lord should ask, “Why did you not serve me?”

Little rewards or a lack of any rewards will be a shameful rebuke to how we lived our life. Having nothing to show for how we lived our lives will reveal our character and the quality of our faithfulness.

Could we feel *shame* and *sadness* at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Yes! Many will feel shame because they wasted their lives on themselves. There will be tears at this judgment, but the Lord will wipe them away.

1 John 2:28 (NASB)

²⁸ Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Revelation 21:4 (NASB)

⁴ And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

The rewards, or lack of them, will tell all about our lives, our service, our faithfulness or unfaithfulness. They will honor us or rebuke us.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

If there have been any false accusations brought against us, they will be brought to light. All wrongs and injustices against us will be made right. Misunderstandings will be cleared up. If we need vindication, the Lord will take care of it.

Romans 12:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

Earl Radmacher said, “The person I am becoming today is preparing me for the person I shall be for all eternity.”

The person you are today will determine the rewards and responsibilities of tomorrow. Your life now will impact your responsibilities in eternity. I have had a number of Christians tell me, “I don’t care about eternal rewards.” *That is a bunch of hog wash!* (The only words that I can come up with.)

Those same people are killing themselves trying to accumulate great rewards now! They profess they will be content with a shack in Heaven, but want a big home here on earth. If **reward, recognition, or position** is important now, it will be in eternity too, but it will be too late. Your chance to serve the King of kings is now! The Judgment Seat of Christ will help us to live with one eye on eternity.

What is the Lord looking for at this judgment? What is God going to scrutinize and reward? The Bible provides some answers.

Checklist for the Judgment Seat of Christ

1. Joyful acceptance of injustice.

Bearing the insults of the world for the sake of Christ will be rewarded. Being harassed for taking a stand for what is right or refusing dishonesty will be rewarded. God is looking for this joyful acceptance.

Matthew 5:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹ **"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**

¹² **"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

2. Your financial generosity will be examined.

God will look at what you do with what you have.

Matthew 6:3-4 (NASB)

³ **"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**

⁴ **so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**

Matthew 6:19-21 (NASB)

¹⁹ **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.**

²⁰ **"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;**

²¹ **for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

3. Your hospitality to others will be examined.

Do you welcome people into your life or shut them out.

Matthew 10:40-41 (NASB)

⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

⁴¹ "He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

4. Secret prayer will be looked at by the Lord.

Matthew 6:6 (NASB)

⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

5. He will inspect our faithfulness in our vocation.

Colossians 3:23-24 (NASB)

²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

6. Loving the unlovable will be rewarded.

Luke 6:27-28 (NASB)

²⁷ But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Luke 6:35 (NASB)

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

7. Investing our lives into people with the gifts and the abilities that God has given us will be examined.

1 Corinthians 3:6-8 (NASB)

⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

8. Watching for Christ's return will be rewarded.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

9. Our acceptance of suffering and trials will be rewarded.

1 Peter 1:7 (NASB)

⁷ So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

10. Obeying God's Word will be rewarded.

Psalms 19:9-11 (NASB)

⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

Proverbs 13:13 (NASB)

¹³ The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.

11. Preaching the Gospel willingly will yield God's approval.

1 Corinthians 9:16-17 (NASB)

¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

¹⁷ For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

12. Our words will be judged.

Matthew 12:36 (NASB)

³⁶ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

13. Our motives will be scrutinized.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

⁵Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

What are the rewards for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ? The Bible tells us that God will reward His children with crowns.

The Crowns for Believers

A. A Crown for Self-control

1 Corinthians 9:25 (NASB)

²⁵Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

B. A Crown for Soul-winning

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?
²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

C. A Crown for loving the Second Coming

2 Timothy 4:8 (NASB)

⁸In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

D. A Crown for Serving the Lord as Shepherds or Pastors

1 Peter 5:2-4 (NASB)

²Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;
³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.
⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

E. A Crown for Suffering Persecution or being Martyred for Christ

James 1:12 (NASB)

¹² **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.**

Will you have any crowns when you stand before the Lord? Will you be ashamed after realizing what you might have done for God if only you had been obedient to His will? Will you stand before Him empty handed?

*When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And He shows me His plan for me.
The plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way, and I see.*

*How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will --
Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes,
Grief, though He loves me still?*

*He would have me rich, and I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing
Down the paths I cannot retrace.*

*Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
With the tears that I cannot shed;
I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
I shall bow my uncrowned head...*

*Lord of the years that are left to me,
I give them to Thy hand;
Take me and break me, mold me to
The pattern Thou hast planned!*

Author Unknown

Beloved, may we all live our lives with one eye on eternity and make each day count for Christ. May we be faithful so that we will look forward to His return and not be ashamed at His coming.