

There is a collective faith. A trust of each one toward the other, and this must be watched . . . "that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble . . ." (Hebrews 12:15 NASB)

"That you will do what is right . . ." is Paul's big concern. (13:9) No one is perfect. We are sinners until the day we die. Our 'perfection' comes as we confess sin, walk in the light of God's truth and seek peace with each other.

"That I may not have to be harsh (when I come)." God gave Paul authority to build up, to help them, not to tear them down. Not to lord it over them, but persuade them that God's way is best.

Paul gave these last words:

- a) Aim to be perfect,
- b) Listen to my appeal,
- c) Live in peace "and the God of love and peace will be with you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (13:14)

Paul spoke a blessing for the church in Corinth and for Christians in every other place.

We will always be serving in churches where things are wrong. Our response will show how much like Christ we are becoming. If we see weakness, our call is to give strength. If we see sin, our call is to do right. If we see fear, we must give courage . . . We pray for the body to be built up in that area of need. – Francis Frangipane

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Books of the Bible

Second Book of CORINTHIANS

written in Easy English

by

Fred Morris

TO THE READER . . .

Read your Bible first, then study this book. Keep your Bible open as you study. All Bible verses are from the New International Version of the Bible. Verses taken from the Bible are shown as (Luke 7:6), chapter 7 and verse 6.

In the English-speaking world, there are many versions of the Bible. When verses are taken from other versions they are shown as: KJV– King James Version; NASB – New American Standard Bible; TLB – The Living Bible; NLT – New Living Translation.

INTRODUCTION

Paul, the apostle, wrote this letter to the Christians at Corinth. False teachers had come into their meetings. These teachers said that Paul was not a true apostle and that he did not keep his word. He had told the Christians that he would come to their city soon, but he did not come.

This would be Paul's third visit to their city. (12:14; 13:1) We don't know what happened on his second visit – he said it was 'painful' for him. (2:1)

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

☛ Now read 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

Paul wrote "to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout A-chai'a," the southern part of Greece. (1:1) He wrote from Mac-e-do'-ni-a, in northern Greece, about the year 55 AD. In Mac-e-do'-ni-a Paul had suffered many troubles. His troubles were over now, and his heart was full of praise to God. He rejoiced because he knew "the God of all comfort." (1:3) He "comforts us in all our troubles." (1:4)

Paul wrote, "I think you ought to know . . . about the hard time we went through in Asia . . . we feared we would not live through it." (1:8 TLB) "In our hearts we felt the sentence of death . . . but on Him (God) we set our hope."

Paul wanted to share this hope in God with others. All God gives us is to be shared. He gives us His love and comfort and hopes we will pass these on to others. Our comfort must overflow, Paul said. (1:5)

God's Spirit filled Paul's heart with joy and praise. He could not hold it in. Those around him saw God's love in Paul and how "the God of all comfort" lived in him and helped him in his troubles. (Psalms 34:6)

The Christians in Corinth also had troubles. The Holy Spirit was with them, also. "Our hope for you is firm," he said. He knew the Holy Spirit was giving them the same comfort. (1:7)

Paul's hope was in God. He found the Lord an "ever-present help in trouble." (Psalms 46:1) Paul said: a) He has delivered us (past), b) He will deliver us (future), c) He will continue to deliver us (present).

Hardships made Paul trust God more: "That we might not rely on ourselves . . ." he said. Paul was always afraid he might trust in his own strength, not in the power of God. It is so easy to depend on ourselves . . . for good health, for our work, even for the way we serve the Lord.

"As you help us by your prayers . . ." (1:11) Paul thanked them for their prayers. Praying for others is so important. No servant of

PAUL'S –

- Comfort (1:3–7)
- Prayer (1:8–11)
- Ministry (1:12–17)
- Glory (1:18–22)

The Powerhouse of Faith

- a vision from heaven (12:1–6)
- the power of God's grace (12:7–10)
- power to keep on going (12:11–18)
- power in interceding (12:19–21)

with the same attitude. We "follow the same course."

He did not ask anything for himself, and Titus did not, either. (12:17) "Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening." he said. (12:19)

Paul named sins that had divided them in the past. He feared that he would find the same sins again, that they were still their old selves. Sin in the Christian Church may be our greatest enemy, and Paul was not slow to say so. The ones who

truly obey God "put off" these things and "put on" the new self "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:24) Paul chose elders at Corinth and he would remove any who lived in sin.

Talk about

1. What did Paul hope to do when he visited Corinth?
2. Paul felt strong and well able to put things right in Corinth __True __False?
3. How can we 'live at peace' with our brother?
4. Does all sickness come from Satan?
5. Was Paul boasting about his 'thorn,' or about God's grace?
6. Why could Paul not speak of this vision (revelation) that he had?
7. Why didn't Paul ask four times for God to heal him instead of just three?

ARE YOU IN THE FAITH?

☛ Now Read — 2 Corinthians 13:1–14

"This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established . . ." (13:1) Paul did not want any finger pointing. He did not want everyone saying things about everyone else. When he got to Corinth, he wanted every charge set out in order. There must be two or three witnesses. This was the number needed to convict a man under the Law. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Paul would be "strong among them" and use his authority and God would show His power to all in the things that were done.

"By God's power we live . . . to serve you." (13:4) There are four parts to this verse:

- a) Christ was crucified in weakness.
- b) Now He lives as God in heaven.
- c) We, too, are weak in ourselves.
- d) We are strong in God's power.

Paul did not feel strong in himself, but he knew he was God's agent. God's power would be upon him as he ministered in Corinth.

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." (13:5) It is so necessary for every person to check up. To see if he is "in the faith." To be sure he is saved by the blood of Jesus, and to be "in the faith" of the group. Not a splinter. Not a gossip. Not jealous or proud. Not pulling against others, but "one in Christ." Not a law unto himself.

- b) An eye disease,
- c) The “illness.” (Galatians 4:13)

Someone said, “Human weakness and divine grace go hand in hand.” Paul knew this, but the thorn troubled him and he cried out to God. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me,” he said. (12:8)

After the third time, the Lord said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” (12:9) This condition in Paul’s body suited God’s purposes. It did what nothing else could do. It brought grace to Paul when he felt weakest. God turned this hard thing to good for Paul and got glory for Himself. (Isaiah 41:13–14; 46:10; Romans 8:28)

Grace is the favour and power of God. Sinful man does not deserve it. (Romans 5:8) We can do nothing to earn God’s grace. It is His free gift. (Romans 5:15; 6:23) Do you have this grace and power into your life? It comes with a price. Paul paid the price of being kept humble and ready for God to use.

He knew it was Christ’s power that he needed most, not freedom from pain. He gladly agreed with God: a) God’s grace is sufficient, b) It was seen at its best when Paul was at his worst, c) He could delight in the hard things in life, and he named some of them – “weaknesses, insults, hardships . . .”

“Therefore, I am well content with weakness . . .” he said. “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12:10 NASB)

YOU DROVE ME TO DO IT

“I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you.” (12:11) They should have jumped to Paul’s defense. They should have told the false teachers that Paul was God’s servant, marked by “Signs, wonders and miracles . . . done among you.” (12:12)

Paul pointed to three kinds of miracles, which God did among the Christians at Corinth:

1. Signs of God’s blessing. (Matthew 7:15–16).
2. Wonders or works of God that astonish. (Acts 2:22)
3. Miracles are the same as mighty works. (Hebrews 2:4)

“Now I am ready to visit you . . . and I will not be a burden to you . . .” (12:14) Paul is like their ‘father,’ but they will not have to support him. (6:13) “Children should not have to save up for their parents . . .”

“Titus did not exploit you, did he?” Paul asked. He acted as I did . . . in the same spirit,

FOOLISHNESS?

- Jealous of them (1–6)
- Serving freely (7–9)
- False teachers (10–15)
- Paul’s boasting (16–22)
- His sufferings (23–33)

Beware of False Prophets

1. The leader dominates the group
2. The leader does not give account
3. Members must submit to rules
4. Women are treated as inferior
5. Members must meet a budget
6. Those who do not ‘pay up’ are made to feel guilty
7. They do not tolerate other groups
8. They twist Bible truth to their view
9. They have a narrow outlook
10. “No one is good enough . . .”
11. They focus on side issues, and stress one doctrine more than others.
12. They confess sins ‘one to another’
13. They do things in secret.

God can stand strong without the prayers of other believers. God had answered their prayers for Paul and he gave thanks. They, too, gave thanks to God. (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

Talk about

1. How did preaching the gospel bring suffering to Paul?
2. Tell how God has comforted you in your troubles?
3. How did the Christians at Corinth help Paul?
4. Why did Paul want the Christians to know about his sufferings?

PAUL CHANGED HIS PLANS

Now Read: 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

Some said, ‘he changes his mind. You can’t trust him.’ But Paul said, “Our conscience is good, our conduct is steady; we have not changed.” (1:14) He wanted them to know that he was the same as he was when he was with them before. We have walked “in holiness and sincerity that are from God.” We have no mask. We have been honest with you. (1:12)

Paul did not make plans lightly. He waited on God before he did anything. “Do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say “Yes, yes” and also “No, no?” he asked. (1:17)

“As surely as God is faithful . . .” (1:18) There was no question in Paul’s mind – God’s promises are sure. Every promise God made He fulfilled in Christ, and we say “Amen” or “let it be so” to all of them. (1 :20; Acts 2:39)

Paul preached only Christ. Our message to you, Paul told them, was not a ‘Yes and No’ message; our message to you has been clear.

“Now it is God who made both us and you stand firm in Christ . . .”

- a) He anointed us with His grace. His grace came to us. (Ephesians 2:6–8)
- b) He put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit. (Ephesians 1:14)
- c) This deposit guarantees our future blessing. (1:22)
- d) He makes us stand firm in our faith. (1:21)

Christ was their master and Christ was Paul’s master. And Paul was a fellow-worker with them. “I can’t do much to help your faith,” he said, “for it is already strong. I want to . . . make you happy, not sad.” (1:24 TLB)

Paul loved these Christians. He was not above them. He did not want to be hard on them, or “lord it over them” in any way. And “it was in order to spare you (pain) that I did not return to Corinth,” he said. (1:23)

Talk about

1. How can we ‘walk in holiness’ in the world?
2. Why was Paul so careful in making his plans?
3. Who preached the gospel at Corinth? (1:19)
4. How might they think Paul was being ‘lord’ over them?

FORGIVE THE SINNER

☛ Now Read: 2 Corinthians 2:1–11

Someone in the meeting at Corinth had stood against Paul's teaching. He was a rebel. The majority ruled against him and put him out of their fellowship. (2:6) Now the person in the wrong had repented.

The punishment was enough, Paul said. "You ought to forgive and comfort him. Reaffirm your love for him" – tell him you love him in Christ. Or "he may become so bitter and discouraged that he won't . . . recover." (2:7 TLB)

Paul had visited Corinth once and it was painful for him . . . perhaps for them, too. "If I grieve you, who is there to make me glad?" he asked. (2:2)

"For I wrote you out of great distress and . . . with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you." (2:4) Paul wrote a stern letter to make himself clear. He wanted to do this before he went to visit them. His letter would prepare the way for what he had to say to them.

"If anyone (in Corinth) has caused grief . . . I am grieved . . ." All the believers in Corinth had been hurt and the Holy Spirit was grieved. (Ephesians 4:30) When we grieve another person, they usually go away. Fellowship with them is broken. The Holy Spirit, too, is a Person. He is God. When we grieve the Holy Spirit He withdraws from us.

When we repent before God, His Spirit returns and comforts our hearts. We are restored to fellowship with the Father. The Holy Spirit is called "the Comforter." (John 14:16) The parable of the Prodigal Son tells us how much the Father wants sinners to repent and return to Him. (Luke 15:11–32)

"I have forgiven . . . in order that Satan might not outwit us." (2:11) Satan might have used this situation in Corinth. He might have sowed seeds of bitterness in the one who had been disciplined. (Hebrews 12:15) Love, forgive and comfort the one who is hurting, Paul told them.

PAUL LOOKED FOR TITUS

☛ Now Read: 2 Corinthians 2:12–3:6 (Acts 2:22–35)

"When I went to Troas to preach the gospel . . . I found the Lord had opened a door for me. I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find Titus there. So I said good-bye and went right on to Macedonia to try to find him." (2:12–13 TLB)

Paul went to Troas, a port-city in northern Greece. He thought he would find Titus there, but Titus was not in Troas to meet him. (Acts 16:8–11)

Paul felt the Holy Spirit leading him. He was not going here and there on any plan of his own. Paul was marching with God, on God's orders.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." (2:14 NASB) Paul thought of the Christian life. It was like a victory march with Christ at the head of the procession. We share in His triumph over Satan!

Long before this, King David had a vision of God's eternal purpose. By faith he saw Jesus' enemies put down – "a footstool" for the Saviour's feet – and His

meet them often, puffed up and proud. They talk big. They have held hundreds of meetings and thousands have been saved! They are doing God's work for Him. They know all about the Bible. They have the right interpretation . . . the only answer!

Paul's boasting is foolish, but these false prophets, and the doubting Christians in Corinth, have driven him to it. (11:1,17)

"You even put up with anyone who enslaves you or . . . pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face." (11:20) Paul is disgusted with them. They are pushovers. The false prophets have walked in and taken over, and the Christians have let them do it.

Placed beside their rudeness. Paul's meekness looked weak. (11:21) So he asked the Christians these questions: "Are they Hebrews? Are they Israelites? Are they Abraham's descendants? Are they servants of Christ?" (11:23) Paul was all of these and he could prove it.

Again, Paul listed his sufferings for the gospel's sake. He did this because he was "jealous for you . . . I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him." (11:2)

Paul saw them as a bride, a virgin, about to be married to the Bridegroom, Christ. (Matthew 9:15; Ephesians 5:27) He could not bear the thought of them having any other lover in their lives. (Matthew 12:39; 6:4) He "suffered the loss of all things" . . . for the joy of having a perfect bride to present to Christ.

PAUL'S VISION AND SICKNESS

☛ Now Read — 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

When Paul was in Damascus, they looked for him to arrest him, but his friends put him in a basket and let him down from a window in the city wall. (11:33) Instead of receiving honour and respect in Damascus, he had to run from the city as fast as he could. He was a fugitive from the law, so he really had nothing to boast about.

Yet Paul did boast. God had revealed Himself to Paul and he would tell them of his "visions and revelations". (12:2)

The Lord gave Paul a special vision. We hear people speak of the revelations they have had. They talk of them as something they got for themselves, but no one has truth apart from God's word. His word is truth!

In Troas, fourteen years before, Paul had this spiritual experience: (Acts 11:25) He was not conscious of his body, so he did not know what happened to it.

"I know that this man (Paul speaks of himself) . . . was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak." (12:4 NASB)

Paul might have been proud of these revelations, so the Lord allowed "a messenger of Satan" to come against him. Paul called it "a thorn in my flesh." (12:7) This thorn came against him to buffet him. What was it?

a) A physical weakness,

Spirit Warfare

- Divine weapons (10:1–6)
- Divine authority (10:7–11)
- Divine task (10:12–18)
- Divine victory (Colossians 2:15)
- Divine reward (Revelations 3:21)

- c) Cut through the confusion. (11:4)
- d) Bring light into dark hearts and places.
- e) Take captive every evil thought and bring it to the cross to be put to death. (10:5)

Christian, take charge of your thoughts. Ask God to help you put away wrong thoughts and fears. Grab these thoughts before they grab you. Drag them to the cross. The moment an unjust, ugly, dirty thought comes, put it under the blood of Jesus. That is the only way to victory.

Sin is born in our hearts. Then it goes to the head and to the hand. We must fight sin at the source. It is too late if you have to fight the results. Attack sinful thoughts the moment they are born. (James 1:18)

Beware of self-praise! Let your Lord commend you.

“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (10:17) “For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” (10:18) This is a great, final truth.

Are you receiving a badge, a certificate, or great applause? It will mean little when you stand before your Lord. Let Him say, “Well done!”

TALK ABOUT

1. What were the “regions beyond” where Paul wanted to go?
2. How was Christ’s power shown in Paul’s actions?
3. Where is sin born? (Jas 1:18)
4. We should beware of the praises of men. TrueFalse?

PAUL AND THE FALSE TEACHERS

👉 Now Read — 2 Corinthians 11:1–15

The ‘super apostles’ in Corinth tried to tear down what Paul had done. They said he had no authority from God. They said: ‘His letters sound strong, but he is a weak person, and his words are hot air.’ (10:10)

Who were these “super apostles”?

- a) They were Jewish, but claimed to be Christians,
- b) They came from outside Corinth. (11:4)
- c) They carried letters to recommend them,
- d) They pushed themselves forward. (11:20)
- e) They took money from the believers. (11:12)
- f) They boasted of themselves.
- g) They tried to lord it over others,
- h) They threatened Paul. (11:26)

Such men are false prophets . . . wearing the mask of apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades, (pretends to be) an angel of light.” (11:13–14) Satan knows very well how to look and talk like a Christian!

Do you think false prophets are anything new? No, they have always been. We

“Many people wonder how the Church came to be so fabulously rich, when Christ and His apostles were so obviously poor. The sad truth is that for centuries Christians have preferred to put money into magnificent cathedrals, bishops’ palaces, estates, etc, rather than send missionaries to the heathen . . . ” – David C. Watson

followers marching in victory with Christ leading them. (Psalms 110:1; Ephesians 1:22–23)

This is God’s plan for our lives! Jesus was “handed over . . . and put to death” to defeat Satan (Colossians 2:15). By His death, we have the victory. Paul suffered, but God gave him the victory of Jesus in his life (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Order in Church Discipline

- the wrong-doer must be put out of their fellowship
- the party at fault must repent of his sin
- they must forgive and comfort him
- he must be restored to full fellowship
- the body must be one in discipline

THE GOSPEL IS SWEET TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE

Paul preached the gospel as he went from town to town. “Wherever we go,” Paul said, “He (God) uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the gospel like a sweet perfume.” (2:14 TLB) “For we are God’s aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

When he preached, Paul saw only two groups of people standing before him. The ones who would receive the message of God’s love in Christ. They “were being saved” by that gospel. The gospel was sweet to them, “the fragrance of life.” Life can be sweet, but there is nothing sweeter than eternal life!

The other group would not receive the gospel. To them it was “a smell of death.” The gospel always speaks judgment to those who reject Christ. (John 3:36) “And who is equal to such a task?” (2:17) Paul felt the burden of the gospel; Christ’s command to take the gospel into all the world. (Matthew 28:18–19)

Talk about

1. Who was Titus? (Titus 1:4)
2. What was Titus doing in Troas? (8:6)
3. Why did Paul ask, “Are we such strangers that we need to bring letters with us? You yourselves are our letter . . . ” ? (3:1–2)

Anyone who met a Christian from Corinth should be able to see Christ in that person’s life. (Matthew 12:34) They were like a letter from Paul – the result of his work there, or “a letter from Christ, written not with ink but written on by the Spirit of the living God.” (3:3)

These Christians gave Paul confidence:

- a) Others could ‘read’ the gospel of Christ in their lives,
- b) God was leading them in victory,
- c) They were becoming more like Jesus Christ. (3:18)

THE GLORY OF GOD IN A NEW COVENANT

👉 Now Read: 2 Corinthians 3:7–18

Paul thinks of God’s glory. (3:7,8,10,11,18) True glory rightly belongs only to God. God’s love and grace are glorious. Where God is, there is glory.

Every time Moses spoke with God, he came away with some of God’s glory on

his face. As he left God's presence, that light and glory faded. So Moses put a veil over his face "that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away." (3:13 NASB)

Moses showed that the old covenant was:

- a) "Engraved in letters of stone."
- b) Veiled and closed to all but the priests, being 'locked up' in regulation and ceremony,
- c) Brought fear to men's hearts. (Romans 4:15)
- d) A set of rules which judged men for their sin.
- e) Faded when Christ came,
- f) Now without any glory of its own. (Hebrews 8:13)

Men of old saw God's glory and enjoyed His blessings, "but their minds were hardened." (3:14 NASB) Paul said a veil covered the hearts of the men of Israel. The veil came in the days of Moses, and it remains today. "For to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it (the veil) taken away." (3:14-16)

God wrote His Law on "tablets of stone." It was glorious also. (Exodus 31:18) Now He writes His moral law "on human hearts" that respond to Him. He does this by the power of the gospel! That is even more glorious. (3:3) The Holy Spirit puts God's moral law inside, and it shines out through those who live for Him. (Jeremiah 31:33) You can see it in the sparkle of their eyes! Moses was a minister of the old covenant. (3:7) Paul told the Corinthians. "We are servants (ministers) of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit . . ." We serve God under a new covenant of grace, not a code of law.

Christ's covenant does not offer law, but life. (3:9) So the new covenant has greater glory than the old covenant.

Paul showed how the new covenant worked in his life and how it has changed him. The new covenant is the reason for Paul's own openness. God's covenant kindness is the reason for his freedom. (3:17; Galatians 5:1)

"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold," Paul said. (3:12) The Law condemned men to death - "the letter (of the Law) kills" (3:6) - but faith in Christ brings life. This life comes to us by His Spirit. (John 6:63)

Every time Paul preached the gospel, men and women believed and received the Life of Christ. All true ministers of the gospel are offering life to men and women. What we have received, we must give to others. "Freely you have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

LIFE AND DEATH

- Life-giving Spirit (3:1-6)
- Death-giving Law (3:7-11)
- Covenant of glory (3:12-18)
- Victory in Jesus (3:18)

The New Covenant

- a) More glorious than the Old.
- b) The "letter of the law" killed
- c) The Spirit gave life (3:6)
- d) Brings "the righteousness of Christ" to men. (3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30)
- e) Its glory will last forever. (3:11)
- f) Gives us an open, bold faith.
- g) We come freely into God's presence. (Hebrews 4:16)
- h) In its glory, we reflect the Lord's glory and we are transformed into His likeness.

Those who receive your gift may be too poor to pay back, but their prayers will surround you. This is a beautiful picture of saints helping saints. They give and share in prayer, in giving and in praise to God.

Talk about

1. Who is cheated when we sow little? (Proverbs 11:24)
2. Have you ever thought, 'I can't give this time?'
3. How can we honour God with our money?
4. Can giving one tenth of our income be the same as giving our whole life to God?

PAUL DEFENDS HIS MINISTRY

Now Read — 2 Corinthians 10:1-17 (Ephesians 6:10-18)

The war is on! Do you hear the enemy howl? Do you hear his battle cry? Do you feel him shoot an arrow at you? Satan is the leader of a ruthless army and he fights for men souls. He will not give up one inch of ground.

Paul felt this battle in his own spirit. He felt the enemy's attack. He could hear Satan's threats in his ears, but he stood firm. Satan did not move him away from doing God's will.

Our weapons are greater than Satan's. Paul said: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world . . ." (10:4) We don't live like the world lives and we don't fight like they do. Paul used "we" to mean himself.

The world uses Satan's weapons to fight:

- a) Cunning and lies,
- b) Malice and hatred,
- c) Boasting and pride,
- d) Pointing the finger and curses.

Evil spirits spoke through the "super-apostles" and made the saints confused. (11:5,13) They came against God's truth. Paul stood against Satan and his prophets with "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." He stood under Christ's banner. He said, "we have divine power . . ." (10:4) We come against the devil's strongholds in men's hearts and in our neighbourhoods.

We also trust in the authority of Christ's name. (Matthew 28:18) We call on His mighty name in prayer. We bring God's word against the enemy. Our fighting is standing. (Ephesians 6:11,13) We stand in the victory already won at Calvary. As we stand fast, we see God undo the enemy. (Exodus 14:13)

In this way we:

- a) Tear down (demolish) places where Satan rules.
- b) Come against every argument used by false teachers.

Spiritual Gifts —

- a) All spiritual gifts are grace-gifts given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 14)
- b) Paul did not put pressure on people to give: "I am not commanding you.." (8:8)
- c) It is "in keeping with God's will." (8:5)
- d) Missions is work; they shared in this service. (8:4; 9:12)
- e) Giving is a law of the Spirit. (Matthew 10:19)
- f) They had Christ's example. (8:9) For Him, no cost was too great . . ." He became poor . . ." (8:9)

Because he had told the men from Macedonia how ready the Corinthians were to give, b) Because he did not want to press them to finish the collection after he arrived. This may cause them to give “grudgingly.” (9:5) c) Because winter was coming and it would be harder to travel then.

SOWING AND REAPING

Now Read — 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

“Remember: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly . . .” (9:6) This is the ‘law of giving.’ Giving is like sowing seeds. The person who only plants one or two seeds will get only a small crop.

Paul said:

- God tells us what to give; we know in our hearts,
- No one is forced to give. (9:7)
- All giving is to be with joy.

God is able to make all grace (grace-gifts) about . . .” giving you everything you need and more, so that there will not only be enough for your own needs, but plenty left over to give joyfully to others.” (9:8 TLB) “Thank God for His Son . . . His gift too wonderful for words.” (9:15 TLB)

Paul thinks of Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all. No one can give more than God gave, when He gave Jesus Christ, the Son. (John 3:16)

Under the old covenant, men gave tithes of everything they produced. (Deuteronomy 26:12) Under the new covenant we are free to give as our hearts tell us. If Jesus had commanded ‘a tithe,’ Paul would have said something about it here.

This is the ‘cheerful giving’ of the Christian Church. (Acts 2:45) Giving is a grace-gift of the Spirit. It is a ‘scattering abroad,’ not a hoarding at home. It is ‘to the poor,’ not to some rich organization. It is ‘in the righteousness’ of Christ that the believer gives out of his store. (Psalms 112:9)

The Father has a storehouse that never gets empty. He gives blessings to His children without holding back. The more we pass on, the more He gives. No one can outgive God.

The man “who fears the Lord” knows that “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” (9:10) “You will be made rich so that you can be generous on every occasion . . .”

“And when we take your gifts to those who need them they will break out in thanksgiving and praise to God for your help.” (9:11 TLB)

- You will be blessed in your own spirit,
- You will receive a harvest of righteousness,
- Your resources will be filled up.
- Others will thank God because of you. (9:12)
- They will pray for you. “And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.” (9:14)

Christian Giving

- Willing giving (8:1–9)
- Regular giving (8:10–15)
- Honest giving (8:16–24)
- Timely giving (9:1–5)
- Benefits of giving (9:6–10)
- Praise for giving (9:11–15)

HEARTS THAT REFUSE GOD BECOME HARD

God told Isaiah about this “hardness.” It came to Israel because they rejected His word: “Though you hear My words repeatedly, you won’t understand them. Though you watch and watch as I perform My miracles, still you won’t know what they mean,” God said. (Isaiah 6:9–10 TLB)

Jesus used these same words when He spoke to the Jewish rulers and Pharisees. (Mark 4:11–12)

They were not any different to the Israel of old, but there was hope: “Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away” from their hearts. (3:16) Don’t you love that verse? The scope of it is so great:

- “Whenever anyone turns . . .” to the new covenant. There is no place or time when men cannot “turn to the Lord.”
- “Anyone” – no one is shut out of God’s presence and glory. (John 6:37)
- Our faces can reflect His glory. Any sinner can be transformed into Christ’s likeness. (3:18)
- “Turns” – man is going the wrong way. He is going away from God. He must turn around. To turn means to repent of sin.
- “To the Lord” – not to doing good deeds, or to self-improvement. Men must turn to the Lord, only He can make them new.

When men repent, the Holy Spirit gives them light. It is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” in the face of Jesus Christ. (4:6) It dawns in the deepest part of their spirit and, from then on, it shines in their faces. Hard faces become bright; dark eyes shine.

The Lord’s glory in our hearts, transforms us – changes us – into the likeness of Christ. (3:18)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (3:17) This is a new freedom that comes to the Christian. It is not freedom to do as we like. It is freedom under the control of the Holy Spirit. As we give the Lord the Holy Spirit first place in our lives, He shows forth the glory of Christ in us. (Philippians 4:13) His power in us sets us free to live upright, moral lives that please God.

Talk about

- How could Paul be so sure of their faith?
- Where does our strength come from? (3:5 TLB)
- Why the veil over Moses’ face?

The Glorious Gospel

- Christ brought it from heaven
- God’s seal is on it (Romans 1:16)
- It does His work in hearts (4:6)
- It is eternal and with God (Isaiah 40:8)

OUR HOPE:

- “We are justified freely by His blood” (Romans 3:24)
- We are sealed ‘in Christ’ forever (Ephesians 1:13)
- We all reflect His glory in our lives (3:18)
- “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27)

TREASURE IN A JAR OF CLAY

☛ **Now Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1–18 (John 14:16–18; 16:7:14)**

“But this precious treasure – this light and power’ (eternal life) that now shines within us – is held . . . in our weak bodies.” (4:7 TLB) Before Adam sinned, he had the perfect “image of God.” This image is formed again in us as we follow Christ. We were born sinners, but we are ‘born again’ into the “likeness . . . which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made His light shine in our hearts . . .” God has shown Himself in three great ‘lights’: 1. the light of His creation. (Romans 1:20) 2. the light of man’s conscience. (Romans 2:15) 3. The light of the glory of Christ. (John 8:12)

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” (4:3) “They (the unbelievers) cannot see the light of the gospel . . .” Their unbelief is hiding Christ from their eyes. (Romans 10:13) They are perishing: “the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers . . .” (4:4)

Christ is the “Light that gives light to every man.” (John 1:9) He has to be Lord in our lives. We fix our eyes on Him and know “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (4:6; John 1:14)

The Holy Spirit was sent forth to:

- a) To take Christ’s place in the world. “I will not leave you orphans . . .” Jesus told His disciples. (John 14:18)
- b) To lift up and honour Christ in the world. (John 16:14)
- c) To teach the believer the truth. (John 16:13)
- d) To “remain in you” and fill you for service. (John 14:16–17; Romans 8:9)
- e) To convict the world of sin. (John 16:8)

Talk about

1. How is the word of God twisted in our day?
2. How could Paul preach the gospel and ‘hide’ it at the same time? (4:5)
3. Why was the Holy Spirit “sent forth” from God?

PRESSED ON EVERY SIDE

Paul (and his team) was:

- a) “Pressed on every side by troubles, but alive,
- b) Perplexed (we don’t know why things happen as they do), but not giving up . . .
- c) Hunted down, but not abandoned by God.
- d) Knocked down, but he got up again and went on.
- e) His body constantly faced death just as Jesus did, so that it was clear to all that only Christ living within keeps us safe. (4:7–12)

Jesus often faced death. His glory, also, was held in a “jar of clay” – a weak human body. He was often hungry and often tired. The glory of Jesus’ life on earth was His

THE LORD’S GLORY IN US

His perfect love (Matthew 5:48)
His purity and Tightness (Psalms 12:6)
His wisdom and power (Psalms 104:24)
His grace and truth (John 1:14)
His image restored (3:18)

YOU WERE THE FIRST TO GIVE

“Last year you were the first not only to give but to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work . . .” (8:10–11) Paul used four thoughts to encourage them:

- a) They were the first to give help,
- b) Their great example is Jesus. (8:9)
- c) Their giving was a good testimony,
- d) They blessed others. (8:14)

“If you are eager to give . . . it isn’t important how much you have to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you haven’t.” (8:12 TLB)

It is God’s will that we share what He has given us . . . “that there might be equality.” (8:13) This “equality” is not explained, but Paul took words from Israel’s time in the desert. There, God sent manna for the people to eat. They gathered what they needed. “When they poured it into a three-quart measure, there was just enough for everyone . . . those who gathered a lot had nothing left over and those who gathered little had no lack!” (Exodus 16:18 TLB)

No person in Israel went hungry. They shared the manna they gathered and each person had enough. The sick, the children, the handicapped, the aged, all ate and were filled. God gave the manna, so they shared it equally. (Psalm 123:2)

In God’s Kingdom:

- a) Some are more skilled at gathering,
- b) Some more skilled at measuring,
- c) Others are more loving in sharing,
- d) Still others are better planners and administrators. (Romans 12:6–8)

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Talk about

1. Why was money collected in the churches?
2. Is giving a spiritual gift? (Romans 12:8)
3. In what ways was Jesus poor?
4. What does Paul mean by “equality”?

TITUS WENT TO CORINTH

☛ **Now Read — 2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5**

‘I thank God who put it into the heart of Titus . . . who is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.’ (8:16–17) Titus cared about them as much as Paul did. He wanted them to honour God in this collection. This work of God had to be watched over “to avoid any criticism . . .” (8:20)

“In addition, we are sending with them our brother . . .” Who did Paul speak of here? Brother Luke, or another brother? Or was Paul speaking of Titus? “He is my partner and fellow worker . . .” Paul said. (8:23)

The gift from Corinth would be in coins, in many bags, and these men would risk their lives to take it to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:10–12; 24:17)

Paul wanted the elders to have the money ready when the men arrived: a)

that Christ has changed us. Giving is a grace-gift and Paul looked for this gift in the lives of the saints at Corinth. It showed their true love for Christ. (8:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; 6:17–19)

Paul's Troubles

1. Troubles, hardships, distresses
2. Beatings, imprisonments, riots
3. Hard work, sleepless nights, hunger
4. Lies and false accusations

JESUS GAVE EVERYTHING

Jesus is God. He was God in eternity, but He set aside His glory and came to earth. He was rich in glory, honour and power of heaven. Jesus was rich:

- a) In His character.
- b) In authority: He could have called “ten thousand angels” to His side. (Matthew 26:53)
- c) In His reign. He had all majesty and power.
- d) In His love and grace. (John 1:14)

Yet He loved us enough to lay aside His riches. He stooped low to save us. He came down to be a baby. He came in human form, to mortal pain and suffering, to weakness and poverty. (Luke 9:12) He came into this wicked world to live like we do.

As a man, Jesus was poor in the things of this world, but not in His spirit. He was masterful in His spirit. He was not poor in His character. He was without sin. He was not ‘poor’ in His obedience. He did always the will of the Father. (Hebrews 10:7,9) That will of the Father led Him to the “obedience of the cross.”

He was not poor in love. He gave Himself up in love for the Church. (Ephesians 5:25) In ‘becoming man . . .’ He set aside His royal robes and crown. He gave up His deity and became poor. He did not grasp for or hold on to the honour and glory that was His in heaven, but came to “dwell among men” on this sin-cursed earth. (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5–9)

On earth Jesus had no fame, no home. He used the homes of others. He had no rights. They reviled Him, but He reviled not again. (1 Peter 2:23)

Why did Jesus live such a life of poverty? That we might be rich! We are the inheritors. God has made Christ our righteousness, our wisdom, our power. (1 Corinthians 1:30) That is a Christian’s true riches! We enjoy these blessings now, and later we will enjoy the glories of His kingly home.

Paul ‘pressed forward’ to grasp this blessed truth. (Philippians 3:13–14) He reached out to Christ’s poverty and suffering. He longed to share his Saviour’s sufferings. In serving Christ fully, he would gain even more ‘riches in glory in Christ Jesus.’

Paul said these riches were ‘unsearchable.’ (Ephesians 3:8) We can view these riches in many ways. They are the riches of:

- a) His eternal love for us.
- b) His word,
- c) His Spirit,
- d) His righteousness. (5:9)

dying to Himself. Every day He gave up His own wishes to do the Father’s will.

Paul ‘died’ to his own wishes. He offered his body as a sacrifice to God every day. (Romans 12:1) He gave up his own ambitions and comfort. He did it “for Jesus’ sake, so that Christ’s life may be revealed” and not Paul’s. Paul tried to lift up Christ and hide his own. For Paul, death to self was not one final act of submitting to God. It was not a once-and-for-all thing. It was little deaths every day. Every day Paul put his self-life on the cross. He stepped aside so that Christ’s resurrection life would show out of his “mortal body.” (Philippians 3:10)

Paul said:

- “We have renounced secret and shameful ways
- we do not use deceit
- we do not twist God’s word
- we ask men to see us as we are
- we have no worth in ourselves
- we are your servants

WE LIFT UP CHRIST

We also lift up Christ in our testimony. We cannot lift Christ up before men by: a) Putting up ornate buildings, b) Our social position or class, c) The many things we own. Christ is not ‘set forth’ in any of these ways. He is shown in a humble and contrite heart and selfless service. (Psalms 51:17; Micah 6:8)

“So then, death is at work in us . . .” Paul’s mortal body was being swallowed up by Christ’s life. (5:4) It was an exchange – giving up his life for Christ’s life. While Paul’s “earthen vessel” (KJV) was wasting away (dying), the gospel he preached was bringing life to others. When the old seed dies, Jesus said, it brings forth a new plant which bears many seeds. (John 12:24) God finds in a broken spirit something He can use to bless others.

David thanked God for saving him from death. He had this same faith “I believed; therefore have I spoken,” he said. (Psalm 116:10) Paul feels a kindred spirit. He has been close to death, but he speaks boldly, “because we know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in His presence.” (4:13–14)

“All this is for your benefit . . .” It is all for your sake, so that more might be saved and more glory come to the Father. “The more of you who are won to Christ, the more there are to thank Him for His great kindness..” (4:15 TLB)

PAUL WOULD NOT GIVE UP

What kept Paul going? The Spirit of God gave him new strength each day. The Holy Spirit poured Christ’s life into him and made him strong. (Romans 8:11) It was this renewing, by the Spirit of God, that kept him going. By the Spirit, Christ’s immortal life filled Paul’s wasting body (empty jar).

“Our light and momentary troubles . . .” That is how Paul saw life’s blows. These “are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (4:17) “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (4:18)

There is a great valley between the world we see and the world of man’s spirit. At death, we cross over. (John 5:24) When we die, our spirit crosses over . . . we cannot come back. (Ecclesiastes 12:7) So use the time you have wisely. Trust in Jesus

Christ. "In Him was life (real life in the Spirit) and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

All life is dying; all material is decaying. Everything around us is changing, but the things of God go on forever. So fix your eyes on God and His word. (Hebrews 12:1)

People want to live forever; those of the Hindu religion by reincarnation (living on the earth again in a different body). Followers of Christian Science want to live on in the memory of their friends. Some want to leave a monument and live on in that, others in their writings.

THIS LIFE	NEXT LIFE
short time	forever (eternal)
light affliction	glory and happiness
seen by the eye	unseen

Talk about

1. What are you doing that will live on after you die?
2. What does your spirit still need the Holy Spirit to do to make you ready for heaven?
3. How could life's blows gain glory for Paul?
4. Why did Paul not give up and rest?
5. How are we like pots made of clay?
6. What does Paul says we have to look forward to?

OUR HOUSE IN HEAVEN

👉 Now Read: 2 Corinthians 5:1–21

God has promised every Christian a new body. Paul knew he would get a resurrection body. At death, his spirit would go to Jesus in heaven. (1 Thessalonians 4:17) He longed to be set free from his mortal body – not to be a 'naked' spirit, but to get a new body, fitted to live in heaven forever. (Philippians 1:23)

Paul made tents, so he thought of his body as a tent. His true person was spirit and lived inside this earthly tent. It groaned because it was held in a dying body. His spirit wanted to do so much more than his body could do. His spirit wanted to be much closer to Christ; so much more like Jesus. So his spirit "longed to be clothed with the heavenly dwelling" – our resurrection body! (5:2,4)

"If this tent we live in is destroyed, we have . . ."

- a) A building from God (a resurrection body),
- b) An eternal house in heaven,
- c) A dwelling not built by human hands (men make poor houses at best).

We fear to die and leave this mortal body, but it won't last long anyway. It is already wasting away. Our hope must be for a "glorious body" – one that will last forever.

"So . . . what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (5:4) And if God makes this new body for us, it will fit perfectly.

We fear because we don't understand this new body. But God has promised, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9) We need not fear!

Titus." (7:5) Titus brought Paul good news from Corinth.

"I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while . . . because your sorrow led you to repentance." (7:8–9) At first Paul was sorry he wrote a hard letter to them. Now he was glad because God used it. They accepted what he wrote; they repented and separated from the sin in their assembly.

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." There is a sorrow for sin that leads us to repent. (7:10) When we repent we receive God's grace and go on in faith. The world's sorrow leads only to self-pity. Self-pity lives on and on. It knows no end except death.

Their godly sorrow had produced:

- a) An eagerness to clear themselves of any wrong.
- b) Alarm and anger against the sin in their assembly.
- c) A readiness to see justice done.
- d) A longing to see Paul again. All this made Paul very happy. "We were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed . . ." (7:13)

TALK ABOUT

1. What did Paul fear on the inside? (7:5)
2. What news did Titus bring?
3. What had Paul's harsh letter done?
4. What does self-pity do to us?

Paul's Joy —

- joy in trouble (7:1–7)
- – joy in sorrow (7:8–13)
- – joy in fear (7:13–16)

GIVING IN THE CHURCHES

👉 Now Read — 2 Corinthians 8:1–15

"Now I want to tell you what God in His grace has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they have been going through so much trouble and hard times, they have mixed their . . . Joy with deep poverty . . . an overflow of giving to others." (8:1–2 TLB)

Paul helped the churches collect money. It was for the "poor saints" in Jerusalem. The church in Macedonia (Northern Greece) "gave as much as they were able." (8:4) "They gave themselves first to the Lord . . ." Then they gave what they had. Their love of Christ moved them to give freely.

Christians at Corinth began collecting their gift a year before, but they did not finish. (8:10) Paul urged them to go ahead and finish their part.

"So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion . . ." (8:6) Paul asked Titus to go to Corinth. He had been there at the beginning, now he would go back to help them finish collecting this freewill offering.

Love and faith work together. They are action words. Our love for others shows

A Day of God's Favour

- a) The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:9–28)
- b) God brought them out of Egypt.
- c) He led them to the promised land.
- d) He restored them after the exile in Babylon. (Joel 2:25)
- e) He restored man to fellowship with Himself (Acts 1:6)

others. It is selfish, and Paul had just said, "You should not live to yourselves." (5:15)

Paul called on the Christians in Corinth to separate from all false worship. He

used Isaiah's words. The prophet called Israel to leave their idols. They were bound to them by oaths and the things they did, just as many are bound today. They were mixed up with the sins of their heathen neighbours. Separate yourselves from their sins, God said. (Isaiah 52:11) And He promised: "I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (6:17-18)

"Don't be teamed with those who do not love the Lord . . ." (6:14 TLB) The Christians were tempted to be members of heathen guilds and secret societies. It was 'good for business' and gave them a place of honour among men.

Paul warned: Don't be yoked to an unbeliever, in marriage or in business. There will be no agreement, he said. (1 Corinthians 7:12) "For what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God." (6:16) Our bodies are God's temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16)

God hates the "hidden things" that keep men bound in darkness. We can renounce "the hidden things." We can break the oaths we have made to Satan. We do this in Christ's name. It is Satan's lie that these oaths cannot be broken.

"Since we have these promises (of God) let us turn away from everything wrong, whether in body or spirit, and purify ourselves . . ." (7:1 TLB)

The promises are ours. God gave them to Israel, but now He gives them to us. (Acts 2:39) "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life." (1 Thessalonians 4:7)

We flee from sin; we turn away from it. We cut it off from our lives. (Matthew 5:29-30) We "put off the old ways." (Ephesians 4:22-27) We ask God to wash us "by the washing of His word." (Ephesians 5:26) And we separate from the sin of the world around us. Many people take God's promises for themselves, but live in sin. The Lord does not walk with them. He cannot. (1 Corinthians 6:16)

Talk about

1. How can we "purify ourselves"?
2. How do we withhold our love from others?
3. How can we break with secret societies we have joined?

TITUS' GOOD REPORT

➡ Now Read — 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

"When we came into Mac-e-do'-ni-a, (2:14; Acts 20:1) this body of ours had no rest . . . conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God . . . comforted us by the coming of

"Come out from among them and be separate," saith the Lord.

"Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters," saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

OPPOSITES . . .

- a) truth and error (John 14:6)
- b) the righteous and the wicked
- c) light and darkness (John 8:12)
- d) Christ and Belial (Satan) (Deuteronomy 13:13)
- e) believer and non-Christian

"Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose . . ." As a guarantee (of this new body) God has given us His Spirit. (5:5; Ephesians 1:13)

WE WALK BY FAITH

Here, on earth, we walk by faith. (5:6-8) In heaven, our faith will give place to sight . . . "we shall know as we are known." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Paul would rather go to heaven and be with his Lord. (5:8) That choice was not his to make, but he did have a choice to make: "So we make it our goal to please Him . . ." We all make this choice, to please our Lord.

Holy men of old brought holy offerings that pleased God. God accepted Abel's offering because it pleased Him; Noah's, too! (Genesis 4:4;8:21) Now God wants us to be holy in our living and to offer clean lives to Him. (Romans 12:1-2) Only holy lives please God. (1 Peter 1:15)

CHRIST WILL BRING REWARDS WITH HIM

"Since . . . we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." (5:11) May the Holy Spirit teach us what it means to "fear the Lord." May He hold us open, honest, accountable to God only, and guide us as we walk by faith. Though our spirits groan, may He keep us joyful, quiet and not fretting.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . ." (5:10) The word is "bema", a raised platform where prizes were given out.

Christians will not be judged for their sins; Christ took their punishment when He died on the cross. Christ's rewards have nothing to do with being saved or lost. The Christian is saved by grace through faith alone. (Ephesians 8:9) But He will reward His faithful servants "for things done while in the body."

What will He say to you: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant?" (Matthew 25:23) Or "You did not win first prize"? (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 9:27; Acts 10:42; Ephesians 6:8; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

I am not preaching the gospel to benefit myself, Paul said, but for you, "for Christ's love compels us . . ." (5:14) The love of Jesus, who gave up everything for us, drove Paul on. Some thought, 'Are you crazy, Paul? Are you out of your mind?'

IF ANYONE IS "IN CHRIST"

Paul said that "One (Christ) died for all, therefore all died." (5:14) All who are "in Christ" died to themselves when they joined in His death. (Romans 6:11) Joined to Christ, they are dead to their old way of life – to all their self-interest and pride.

And for what purpose is their death to self? To give others the gospel clearly and fully. In Christ, there is no room for self-serving. No Christian can please himself and share the gospel at the same time. (Mark 8:34)

Before Paul knew Christ as Saviour, he thought of Jesus only as a man. (5:16)

Do Not Lose Courage (4:1.16)

- a) outwardly our bodies are wasting away and ready to die
- b) inside we are being made new in our spirits and fit for heaven
- c) being made new inside, we overcome the sense of outward decay
- d) this prepares our spirits for eternity

Now Paul has a new way of looking at everything, he knows Christ was and is God.

It does not matter how a person looks on the outside. Stop giving Christians points, Paul told them, 'because you see only the outside.' (1 Samuel 16:7) You cannot see into the other person's heart as God can.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!" (5:17) The Christian has entered a new life. "All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ . . ." (5:18)

From the beginning to the end, this is God working in us. "The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (Mark 12:11) Man cannot bring about this new creation.

"We are . . . Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us." (5:20) An ambassador represents another country. We Christians are speaking for God, Paul said. We are making this appeal to you for Him. We – Silas, Timothy, Peter – come to you as God's ambassadors. Paul was: a) Called by God and chosen to serve Christ, b) Representing the Kingdom of God. c) Sent to the church in Corinth, d) Presenting God's word.

"We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (5:20 NASB)

God has made the way open for men to come to Him. He has left nothing to stand in the way, so make your peace with God now. Be saved from your sins and take your place in His family. (Romans 5:8 TLB)

Make peace with God first, then make peace with your brother. Only when you are at peace with God, can . . . you have peace with your fellow man. (Matthew 18:15–20)

"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us . . ." (5:21) God took the first step toward sinful man. He gave His own Son, Jesus Christ, who had no sin. Jesus was the sacrifice – the sin offering – for our sin. God put our sins on Jesus. (Leviticus 4:24; John 10:8; Hebrews 9:26) He carried them to the cross.

Only by faith in Christ's death for us, can we be "the righteousness of God." To be 'God's rightness,' living on this earth, is the greatest favour He could give to men.

PAUL'S HARDSHIPS AND THE GRACE OF GOD

Now Read: 2 Corinthians 6:1 –18

"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain . . ." (6:1) The Christians in Corinth were self-seeking – just as if God's grace had not worked in their hearts. The 'day of salvation' and the 'time of God's favour' came to Corinth, but they did not take the grace and peace God offered them. (Isaiah 49:8) Or they began well in grace, but now they were not putting God's grace to good use in their lives.

In this gospel age, God is near, "a very present help in time of trouble." (Psalm 46:1) But He wants our full faith and trust to be in Him.

Paul told them:

- Put Christ first, fix your eyes on Him.
- Run the race of faith, keep going. (5:15)
- God's grace is there for you, all the way. You can depend on it.
- Trust Him in your trials and draw on His grace.

The "time of God's favour" for them (and us) is now. Don't let anything stand between you and God. Don't let any sin stand between you and God. Confess your sin to God and receive His pardon and peace right away.

If you have received the grace of God, use it to the full. Go to your father, your mother, your brother and make peace with them.

God blessed these believers again and again. He favoured them. They did not deserve God's favour, but His nature is to love and to give . . . to fallen man. He must do this or He would not be God. (John 3:16)

Talk about

- Do people think you are 'crazy' because you love Jesus?
- We can't choose when we will die, but we do have a choice to make. What is it?
- What is the message of reconciliation?
- How was Christ's death "for us"?
- What did Paul say to those who are running the race of faith?
- How could the Christians receive God's grace 'in vain'?

"In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God." (6:4 TLB; 2:14) Paul has been honest with them:

- His life is open for all to see.
- His wisdom is a gift from God.
- His patience, kindness and love for them. (Galatians 5:23)
- He had spoken only the truth.

All these are "weapons of righteousness." And Paul used them against the enemies of the gospel. His weapons destroy false arguments and break down Satan's lies.

SATAN, FATHER OF LIES

Satan is the father of lies. (John 8:44) He put lies in Paul's path. They were like land mines, but God's weapons destroyed them. Satan used:

- Good and bad reports,
- They said Paul was not an apostle,
- They said he was hiding his real purpose,
- Satan caused Paul physical suffering.

Paul felt he was repaid for all his suffering. He had everything "in Christ." Because of this, he was able to make many rich in God's grace. And he had victory over Satan. He was an overcomer in Christ. (Revelations 12:11)

"We have spoken freely . . . and opened wide our hearts to you," he said. (6:11) This is something those who stood against Paul did not do. Paul was sad because these Christians held back their affection from him. It was not a fair exchange of love between these Christians and Paul.

"Play fair" children say. Paul would say the same to the Corinthians: "Play fair and return my love". (6:13)

If the Holy Spirit is not at work, no love will be shown. Natural love has no love for

Paul's Life of –

- Hope (5:1-5)
- Faith (5:6-10)
- Love (5:11-15)
- Service (5:16-21)