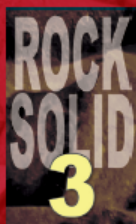


THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS



An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Ger de Koning



The Second Letter to the Corinthians

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Especially for You

Rock Solid #3

Ger de Koning

The original Dutch version is available at

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

Preface

Dear friend,

I'm glad I can offer you this volume of the 'Rock Solid series'. A lady who read the first volume (on the letter to the Romans), called me to ask when the next volume would be published. What impressed her was that the book was 'simple and close to the Bible'. A better compliment I cannot imagine, because that's exactly what I pray to the Lord as I write. I hope this book will give you the same impression. Then there will be thanksgiving to God in your heart.

I wrote this book especially for you. When I wrote it, I tried to put myself in your shoes. I thought of you as someone who has

- either just got to know the Lord Jesus,
- or has known Him longer,

but in either case, as someone who wants to become better acquainted with the Savior Who died and gave His life for us.

Until recently, you might not have been interested in getting to know Him better. I also once had this attitude, but a tremendous change occurred. This change pleased the Lord and He began to be more important to me than ever before. I started enjoying the rewarding experience. I believe you also will enjoy great blessings in your life, because the desire to know Him will help you discover the enormous riches you have in your hand, namely the Bible. The more you read it the more you will find your love for the Lord Jesus increases.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are – what matters is the attitude of your heart towards the Lord Jesus and what He has become to you. That is the reason why you now want to start reading the Bible. With this book I want to help you read and study the Bible. Here are a few practical tips that might help you:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New Translation by J.N. Darby (JND) and

the King James Version (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NASB, with permission granted by The Lockman Foundation on February 10, 2016 when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.

2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open with those verses so that you can easily see and read them.
3. Self-discipline is important. You must be willing to discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. I suggest that you read the Bible at a set time that's best for you.

To help you with this, I have divided this book into thirty-seven sections. You could read one section every day. If you read at a relaxed pace, you will need about twenty minutes for one section and the Bible verses. You spend time eating each day and certainly *spiritual food* is as important as physical food. If you can be self-disciplined in this, then after five weeks, you will have gained a little more insight into a splendid letter of the Bible. The whole Bible is a splendid book and it's my prayer that you'll get this impression in an increasing way.

I wish you God's blessing!

Middelburg, Netherlands, English edition 2016

The Second Letter to the Corinthians

Introduction

You can only really understand this letter well if you have read the first letter to the Corinthians. In that letter Paul had to write about many things that were wrong with the Corinthians. He is very excited to see how they received the first letter. Had they listened to what he had written to them in that letter or did they tear it off in anger? He did not know and therefore he was waiting anxiously for their response. Fortunately he received news that the letter was well received. All problems did not vanish immediately, but they had taken the letter to their heart and consented to cooperate with him in rectifying things.

When Paul heard this he was very happy. Therefore he again takes up the pen and writes to them in a way that touches hearts and feelings. Here he opens up his heart without any qualms. Sometimes it looks as if he would lose his train of thought because his heart is so full and he has to tell them so much. But although you will meet a lot of different themes in this letter one can see an impressive order.

What makes this letter so impressive is that it appears that it is written especially for you. You were certainly not in all the situations Paul was in and most probably you will not come into such situations. However one can learn much from Paul's example of how he conducted himself in these situations. This of course will be a great help to you. Anyone who wants to serve Christ in his life will have to face difficult situations. It will also be the same in your case if you want to serve Christ.

2 Corinthians 1

2Cor 1:1-5 | Introduction, Praise and Tribulation

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, 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.

This letter speaks about how someone who wants to be a servant of God has to deal with all sorts of difficulties and trials. But the difficulties and trials never have the last say. God wants to use them to show you that He is still in control. Sometimes the future looks bleak and you might even ponder giving up to live for the Lord. And at that critical moment the Lord comes to you and comforts you and encourages you. Surely you would not want to miss such moments not even for all the wealth the world can offer.

V1. Let us have a closer look at the first five verses. First Paul introduces himself again. He clearly presents himself as “an apostle”. He does this to impress and underline his apostolic authority. But he does not do this as the world around us does. Worldly men want to impress and win the admiration of people. Paul does this to impress that he was sent by Someone else.

The word apostle means ‘messenger’. Paul is not speaking for himself but on behalf of another. Who is the one who stands immediately behind him? It is Christ Jesus. Paul did not usurp this apostleship, but he is an apostle “by the will of God”.

Together with Timothy he addresses both the Corinthians and the other believers who live in the province of Achaia. And, as it is with the other letters, over their heads you too are addressed.

V2. Paul wishes them grace and peace as he does in many of his other letters. Such words of blessings are not hollow phrases, nor meaningless expressions. On the contrary Paul puts his whole heart into it. It is great to approach someone in this way and draw attention to what happens further.

V3. As I said earlier, this letter speaks much about sufferings that one can meet while serving God and Christ. What is the benefit of suffering? Why does God allow it? Or even: Why does God bring sufferings over His children? It is quite remarkable that the Bible book that probably first was written, even before Moses wrote the book of Genesis, was the book of Job. It is further noteworthy that the theme of the book of Job is suffering! Suffering is part of human life since the fall into sin. There is no man born on earth who is not involved in some kind of suffering. I trust you agree with me.

Then the next question that arises is how to deal with suffering. Different kinds of answers are possible to this question. One can also pose another question. How does God see suffering? I think Paul has a beautiful answer to this question in the verses you are reading. Such an answer is not simply to be repeated in our speech but it must be experienced.

He begins with praising God. Think of it a little more deeply. He was in terrible distress, even close to death. But he praises God for that. When you read Acts 16:19-25 you will discover that they are not simply glossy words. You can never understand God better than when you are in the way of suffering.

Paul calls God "the Father of mercies". Here you see a Father putting His arms around His suffering child. He also calls God the "God of all comfort". Did you read well? It says: of *all* comfort, so not just a little bit of comfort and also without excluding certain circumstances.

V4. God gives this comfort "in all our tribulation". Again you must read it right. God does not take away our afflictions to comfort us, but He comes to us in our afflictions and carries us through them. It is very beautifully written in Isaiah 63: "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa 63:9). Do you understand? God comes to you in your affliction, puts His arms around you and speaks "gracious words, comforting words" (Zec 1:13). A

world full of sufferings needs comforting words. Do you ever speak such words?

V5. One of the reasons why God allows sufferings in our life is that we should experience His mercies and comfort. This will enable us to comfort others who are going through affliction. So it was with Paul and so it can be with us too.

One other thing. Sometimes it is possible that you feel a suffering is quite unbearable in the service of Christ, and you fear that you will perish. Remember, then, that comfort through Christ is always surpassing everything.

Now read 2 Corinthians 1:1-5 again.

Reflection: Verse 3 is similar to Eph 1:3 and 1Pet 1:3. What are the differences you are able to find in these two Scriptures?

2Cor 1:6-11 | Comfort for Others

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.

V6. Is it really true that the trials and afflictions of one person mean comfort to another? If you ask Paul he would answer with a loud 'yes'. Now you and I do not have anything to do with the kind of suffering Paul went through. But that is not the most important thing. You need not necessarily endure the same kind of suffering as Paul did in order to empathize with someone. The important thing is that your experience of suffering can be a comfort for another person who also is going through tough times, though his suffering is of a different kind.

'Shared pain is half pain' says a proverb. Is this not your experience too? When you encounter something sad you can be absorbed in your grief in a way that you think you are the only person with such a grief and that there is nobody who can understand you. When you think of others who also have a grief, it can do you good (cf. 1Pet 5:9). You can draw some comfort by that understanding. When a person knows that he is not alone in his grief, it gives him strength and courage to persevere, despite the troubles and worries. You can always share your experience of comfort with someone else.

V7. Paul's experience of sorrow has to do with his service to the Lord. He experienced much enmity and hatred through his service for the Lord. But he persevered. In each kind of suffering he had a fresh experience of

comfort. He was convinced that it was so with the Corinthians too. The golden rule is that the one who has a share in a suffering also has a share in the comfort. This applies to you also.

V8. Now that the situation in Corinth has improved and the errors were confessed, Paul can talk about himself and what he went through and how he felt. One shares his experiences only with those who have genuine interest. Personal difficult experiences are not shared with everyone but only with those in whom you have the confidence that they are sincerely interested in you and that they sympathize with you.

It means so much for the other person when you open yourself to him. He understands that you reckon on his sympathy. This gives one a sense of appreciation. Paul considers the Corinthians as his friends by telling them of his suffering and comfort.

The troubles he encountered in Asia were not insignificant. We do not know exactly what Paul refers to. Some believe it was the tumult at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-31). But then Paul was not terrified, nor was he desperate, but was rather courageous and determined. Whatever the trouble was we understand that it was a trying time for him.

V9. In such circumstances, when there is no more hope, there remains nothing and no one else but God. Only He can then give relief. And that's what God does too! God allows situations in our lives in which we don't see a way out. He wants us to learn to trust in Him alone. Psalm 107 describes very pervasively how all the wisdom of man is of no use when storms erupt in life (Psa 107:23-32). All that remains is to cry to the Lord and trust in Him.

There is another beautiful verse in Psalm 68 which says: "God is to us a God of deliverances; and to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psa 68:20). Paul learnt this by experience and you can also.

V10. Paul did not lament the way God dealt with him and the troubles which came to him. He knew how to make an opportunity out of every difficulty to know God better each time. God will use all difficulties in our lives to deliver us from all attempts and efforts on our part to save ourselves or free ourselves from difficulties. God wants us to learn to han-

do over everything to Him and to trust that He is able to make a way out where we see no way out.

God wants us to learn Him better and better as the God of salvation and the God of resurrection and of life. Each experience by which we learn to know God in this way equips us to face future challenges in life. God can do one more time what He did before.

V11. If you come across someone with whom God is busy in this way you may pray that God achieves His purpose with him. Paul was happy that the Corinthian believers were praying for him. In his other letters we read how much he appreciates the prayers of believers. He calls it "helping through prayers". Perhaps you would not say so, but praying for someone is helping him. Prayer is doing work. It is even hard work. That is probably why it happens very little.

Paul believed that the prayers will be heard. He saw his life he once despaired of, as something he got back through the prayers of many persons. This is what made him say that his life was a gift of grace which he received from God. What is the result of such answered prayers? Thanksgiving. Many could give thanks to God, for Paul was still alive.

As you see Paul is not an individualist who goes his own way as though other believers meant nothing to him. No, all believers including the ones in Corinth were important to him. He knew he needed them. It's beautiful to see this attitude in this great servant of the Lord.

Now read 2 Corinthians 1:6-11 again.

Reflection: Did you ever experience the consolation of God? Did you ever share it with others?

2Cor 1:12-17 | Postponement of Paul's Visit

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. 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]?

After the apostle in the previous verses opened his heart to the believers and shared the great distress in which he has been, he must now clear a misunderstanding that has arisen. This misunderstanding arose because he changed his plan to visit to them. His original plan was to visit them and he even told them that he would do so. But later he changed this plan (cf. verse 23). Now this was the chance for the nitpickers to charge that Paul was unstable in his decisions. Therefore Paul takes up his defense.

It is not self-defense, but a defense of his ministry of which the Corinthian believers themselves are the fruit. It is a defense of Christ's work in the hearts of the Corinthians. This work would be at stake if he does not take a firm stand against the false accusations circulating among the believers. This is not uncommon even today and it is present in the churches and in the world. When the gossip mill is in full swing a warlike situation can arise in the shortest possible time. Peace can vanish. Here the good relationship between Paul and the Corinthians is at stake.

V12. Paul must neutralize the threat. He begins pointing to the testimony of his conscience. If he harbored anything in his conscience he could not be as simple and sincere as he is. God never would permit that kind of behavior. Someone who has insincere intentions falls through at some point. Paul did not resort to all sorts of clever gambits to get his message across the Corinthians. He didn't use unfair practices to win souls. He used no

fleshly wisdom, no political methods as in election time where much is promised and only very little made true.

He was conscious of the grace of God. That means that he thinks nothing of himself, does not hold his own name in high regard, but on the contrary wants to show what God worked in him. That's the way he behaved in the world and among the believers.

We must always be conscious of the fact that both the world and the believers are watching us. When it is evident in your life that you have understood something of the grace of God no one will be able to bring any valid accusations against you. Then you will not be known as the one who is well versed in the trick of the trade. You are an open book for everyone.

V13. Paul could point out that he wrote nothing else but what they already knew of him and what they saw in him. They moved closely with him and therefore they knew him as a straight forward man. He hoped that they did not give themselves up to people who sowed distrust and resorted to misguide them to doubt his sincere intentions.

Believers who watch or listen to each other with distrust will fall into a precipice that slides down to destruction. Each word and each act is misinterpreted and the relationship sours till they reach a point beyond rectification. If you come across such unsound tendency in your heart, you must nip it in the bud. When things are said about people and you are doubtful about the veracity of what is spoken of them pray about it and then talk to the person in question. You can easily think something evil of a person, but when you speak to the person in question you will see how much your assuming was wrong.

V14. Paul refers to the day of the Lord Jesus. On this day Paul and the Corinthians will stand together before the judgment seat of Christ. Then Paul will be able to boast of them and vice versa by pointing at them and saying to Christ: 'They have listened and obeyed all what I said to them on Your behalf.' All ambiguities and uncertainties have no place there.

What is important is that you already live now in view of the judgment seat of Christ. Paul did that. That's why he could tell them without any qualms that he had plans to come to them. He did not have to excuse himself as if he had made a mistake.

V15. How he granted them this second blessing! The first blessing was that he was with them for the first time and preached the gospel to them. That blessing they had experienced. By his second visit he wanted to teach them further about this blessing. His heart yearned for them; they were his children in the faith.

V16. He further believed that they would give him what he needed so that he could continue his journey. This is not a self-seeking exercise. It is just beautiful to count on the support of brethren being conscious of the fact that we are connected with one another for the same Lord. Here the suspicion that he was only after his own advantage at the cost of the Corinthians is ruled out.

V17. He had already prepared his itinerary. From the way he invited them to listen to his plans it is clear that his plan was not made lightly nor planned haphazardly. He also had not sat down and planned on the basis of calculations that would support his own advantages the most. No, he was guided by God and by the love to Christ and His own.

As people falsely suggested he was not a capricious man. Indeed we know of people who make all kinds of promises, but of whom you know they are not keeping any of them. Such people are not trustworthy. It is unbecoming of a believer not to fulfill promises.

The Lord Jesus says that our yes must be yes and our no should mean really no (Mt 5:37; Jam 5:12). Do people know you so? Then it is also not necessary that you underscore your promises with all kinds of pious and solemn assurances. Put simply, you must be reliable.

If Paul were someone who said 'Yes' which meant 'No' then how could people trust him? How could he lead others? Such a person lacks authority. People cannot trust anyone who is wobbly. If people are not sure that someone is speaking the truth everything he says will be called into question.

Now read 2 Corinthians 1:12-17 again.

Reflection: Can people count on you? How do you react to a false accusation?

2Cor 1:18-24 | In Him It Is Yes

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.

V18. God is faithful! This is in contrast to all unfaithfulness and inconsistency Paul is accused of. He does not say: 'I am faithful.' He leaves that judgment to God. He knows that God is faithful in everything He has said. God does not say one thing today and another the next day. What He says is certain. He does not change His purposes. You can trust that He does what He says.

V19. Paul unambiguously underscores this assertion in his attitude, in his conduct and in his speeches. The gospel he shared with the Corinthians testifies to this. He had not declared to them a dubious message. He had presented a crystal clear gospel to them in a way that needed no clarification. The content of the gospel he preached was indeed "the Son of God, Christ Jesus".

Mentioning this Name he touches the kernel of the gospel and the center of all God's plans. For God all things revolve around the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is something you must be more and more aware of, just as Paul showed it in the way he conducted himself.

In the names of the Lord Jesus you see His glory. The name *Son of God* reveals His eternal Godhead. He is the eternal Son. The name *Jesus* determines us by His humiliation. He received this name when He came on the earth to accomplish the work of redemption. The name *Christ* means the *Anointed*. Here you must bear in mind that He will fulfill all the counsels of God.

When you have Him before your eyes in that way, you cannot be talking back and forth and making unsure plans. Then there is only one desire:

to show in your speech and action that nothing but Jesus Christ means everything to you. More and more uncertainties will disappear from your life. But this is a process and this does not happen overnight. Once you are sure of God's purposes for your life you will no longer be the person doubting God in any situation. Although you *know* that things in Christ are "Yes, and ... Amen" you do not *experience* this always. That is why you must deal with things that are firm and sure. This will lift you up. This is what is presented here.

V20. Regularly we see Paul handling practical issues and immediately he connects them with the Lord Jesus. For instance 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 speak about this. There we find that believers contribute money to others who are in need. Paul connects their act with the Lord Jesus Christ and with God (2Cor 8:9; 9:15). Each time he deals with the down to earth things he shows how they stand in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ and God. He shows whatever is done in the cause of the ministry of God is connected to the unchanging promises of God. He tells the believers that the content of his preaching is sure and certain because it is all about God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God will fulfill all His promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether it is Israel or the church He does not leave any promise unfulfilled. In the Old Testament you see many promises made to Israel. Today it looks as if these promises will never be fulfilled. Indeed, if those promises depended on those rebellious people they would never be fulfilled. Nevertheless the Lord Jesus Christ will make God's people inherit all His promises. He can and will do this because He died on the cross and took away the guilt of the repentant people.

When He returns He will first destroy all the wicked from among His people. That being done, the remnant, the believing Israel – the repentant ones who acknowledged their sins before God – will only be left. They are the people whose King will be the Lord Jesus Christ! During the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus these are the people who will receive all the promises God made to His people.

There are also promises given by God to the church. God will fulfill these also through the Lord Jesus Christ. This will not take place on earth as with Israel, but in heaven.

Certainly and surely He will make the end all well. This is the “Amen” in verse 20. When God or Christ says Amen it means that it is so and it will be so. It emphasizes the absolute certainty of what is said or promised. The Lord Jesus always glorified God in His life and He will do so for all eternity.

The great wonder is that He will also glorify God “through us”, the once lost sinners. Isn’t it a great wonder that you and I are saved and are now members of the church? This has become possible by the work of the Lord Jesus. All that He did on earth and what He does in heaven always redounds to the glory of God. Also the results of His work glorify God.

V21. But God has done more for us. He has established us in Christ and that means He has firmly connected us with Christ. We are inseparably connected with Christ. When God sees Christ He sees us.

But He has done still more. He also has “anointed” us with the Holy Spirit as He did with the Lord Jesus. It happened to the Lord Jesus immediately at His baptism (Mt 3:16; Acts 10:38) – at the beginning of His public appearance – because He was perfect. It happened to us only after we repented and were redeemed from our sins. This anointing makes it clear that we have a special place in God’s heart.

In the Old Testament kings, priests and sometimes prophets were anointed with oil. By this anointing they were ordained for service. The anointing gave them a special place among the people of God which signified that they were chosen by God especially for this service. The act of anointing made them conscious of their calling. The same is true for you and for me. After you believed you are anointed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30). Thus God set us apart for Himself and for His ministry. The Holy Spirit always keeps you conscious of this.

V22. You are also sealed with the Holy Spirit. This means that you are His property. You belong to Him and He has His right on you. Here you have the assurance that the devil and his angels do not have any say on you anymore.

Finally the Holy Spirit Who has been given in our hearts is called “a pledge”. This conveys two things. First you are not in full possession of the thing, for it is a pledge. You are waiting for its fulfillment. Secondly this pledge is an advance on the fulfillment. You already can enjoy it now. In chapter 5 we are reading about the same pledge (2Cor 5:5). There it is about the desire that we have about the house God prepared for us in heaven. Here it is about the enjoyment of the promises God has given to us.

We can and should enjoy them in advance because the Holy Spirit has been given in our hearts. The heart is the center of life and experience. The things that you enjoy have an impact on your life and in all that you say or do. Don't they give the sheen to your everyday life?

V23. The real reason why Paul had not come to Corinth yet was love. All accusations for changing his itinerary were false and he rejected them resolutely. God was his Witness! If he had come to Corinth, he would have had to deal with them harshly as there were many pestering spiritual issues. He would have had to take hard decisions. He wanted to spare them this exercise. He waited till they were convinced from his first letter that things were not in order with them.

V24. The attitude he assumes in his relationship with the Corinthians might appear to be like that of a lord over their faith. But in reality it is not so. No apostle, not even Paul, ever wanted to come between a believer and God. Never should a man however great he may be stand between you and God.

If you are still young in the faith beware that you do not hold any great Christian luminary whom you love as a pattern for your faith life. Nothing can go wrong as long as you take care to remain in good relationship with the Lord Jesus. The danger lies in making anyone other than the Lord Jesus as your model. Lot was someone who solely hung on Abraham for his faith life. It is true Abraham was a great believer but he was not the perfect model. There is no man who can be a perfect example.

Let no one dominate your spiritual life and take care that you do not rule over someone's spiritual life either. Paul did not want to lord over the Corinthians but he wanted to work with them so that they would be happy

again. Sin in the church does not make anyone happy. Only when sin is removed there is joy again. That's why Paul wrote to them and not to rule over them. By the way, they are standing firm in their "faith". That means they are focused on God and not on men.

Now read 2 Corinthians 1:18-24 again.

Reflection: Thank God for all the certainties that you have received in Him and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Call these certainties by name.

2 Corinthians 2

2Cor 2:1-11 | Sorrow, Joy, Forgiveness

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.

V1-3. Paul wanted to go to Corinth but without sorrow. Sorrow was the undertone of his first letter. He had saddened them by that letter. But he was glad about it because it convinced them that things were not good with them. Now joy could return to them because the fornicator about whom he mentions in chapter 5 of his first letter was removed from among them and has now repented (1Cor 5:13). That man was the most saddened. His repentance about his sin pleased Paul. His first letter produced the desired result and he was also glad that it pleased the Corinthians as well.

V4. He provides them with a glimpse into his heart to show what was going on in his heart when he wrote that first letter. To some, that letter could have made a cold, detached impression, like: there he is again, the gloom-and-doom guy. Now he shows what really inspired him to write

that letter. His heart is full of fear, his eyes are full of tears, and love was his only motive. When one knows the background of his rebuke then that melts one's heart. This also helps one to accept the admonition and correct oneself. It would be nice if we treated each other this way.

V5. Yet there was something missing with the Corinthians. They should also show love to the repentant brother. They should forgive him from the heart. The erring brother caused sorrow with Paul and also with all in the church.

V6. Earlier the church was tolerant of sin and they did not even realize that sin was present in their midst and that didn't make them sad (1Cor 5:2). Paul's first letter made them realize their mistake and made them sad about the sin in their midst. Now they have removed the wicked man from among them and unanimously executed the necessary punishment. Subsequently the sinner was led to repentance. This should be the ultimate aim of every act of discipline in the church.

V7. Through his repentance the brother in question is restored in his relationship with his Lord. But it must not stop with this. Something more must happen, namely, the church must forgive the repentant brother. The church removed him because of his living in sin; but now as the sinner has repented he must again be accepted by the church.

It is a joy to take such a person back into the church. It is deplorable to see a church reluctant to forgive and comfort a repentant person. Before the church was too lethargic to detect sin and exercise discipline and now it is reluctant to forgive.

If you know yourself a little bit, you will recognize this. Real forgiveness is sometimes quite difficult. It could be that others did much harm to you; they cheated you; they robbed you; they talked bad about you; they mistreated you or perhaps they even abused you, sometimes even for a long time. And maybe they never asked for your forgiveness. There could be a strong reluctance in your heart to forgive the offender. God wants to help you. I am also sure that there are believers in the church who might be able to help you in this regard. Find them and discuss it with him or her. It will give you relief.

V8. A genuine repentance was present in the Corinthian offender. If he thought about it, he could be desperate. What damages he had inflicted on the other believers! Paul encourages the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for him. It would give him peace in his heart. The storm would be stilled. He would always think back with shame on what he did. Who, by the way, hasn't done or said things on which he thinks back with shame (Rom 6:21)?

V9-11. By forgiving him they would show obedience in all things. Paul connects himself with them in forgiving the penitent transgressor. First the Corinthians must forgive the offender and only after that Paul connects himself to them and also forgives him. You see that he acknowledges the authority of the church and doesn't place himself above it. He forgives because it is the mind of Christ and thus Christ is glorified.

The great adversary, satan, will do his utmost to sow seeds of discord. His schemes are not unknown to us, but abundantly clear. What great advantages he would take if there are differences between the church and the apostle in their handling of issues. He waits to see if we fall into one or the other extreme. In matters regarding discipline he sees to it that we are not scrupulous. If he doesn't succeed in that, he sees to it that we are not ready to forgive. What should we do then? Look to the Lord Jesus. When you have Him in your mind you will know what to do.

Now read 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 again.

Reflection: What is your experience of forgiveness? How much have you been forgiven? Do you still have to forgive anyone?

2Cor 2:12-17 | A Sweet Aroma of Christ

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.

V12. Paul is not the self-confident apostle, one who easily tells how things must be. Some sections of his letters might give this kind of impression. The problem however does not lie with Paul but with the reader.

The fact that the Corinthians could not ignore an inspired letter Paul wrote to them doesn't lessen the fact that he was a normal person with feelings and emotions like you and me. He was anxiously waiting for a report from Corinth, but it still didn't come. Each passing day created more inner pressure and anxiety. Out of a heart full of love he wrote to them stern admonitions. That was necessary. But how did they receive that letter? If only Titus had come soon with his report from Corinth it could have eased his relentless anguish.

At a time when such feelings were tormenting him Paul was in Troas. But he was not simply sitting; he was working. A large field was open before him. The Lord had opened a door for him there and that gave him many opportunities to preach the gospel. Many evangelists should be very grateful for such a field. They would reap a great harvest. Paul's heart was out to preach the gospel. He can indulge himself, as it were, and preach Christ fully. He is not in doubt whether he is in the right place, because the Lord confirms him in his work.

Yet he was restless. For him there was something which went beyond the salvation of sinners and that was the glorification of Christ which is the sole goal in the life of every believer. In this regard there is still something lacking in the Corinthians and hence this letter to them. If only they had

listened to his letter Christ would be glorified. Otherwise Christ would be dishonored even more.

V13. Being preoccupied with this concern Paul leaves his working field and seeks to know from Titus. He must somehow know how it stood with the Corinthians. Have they accepted his letter as the voice of God? Have they gained insight?

After taking leave of the believers in Troas he goes on to Macedonia. I suppose he said good bye to the people who were newly led to the Lord by him. He must have given them the necessary instructions for their newly begun Christian life. It is possible that they tried to persuade him to stay for a little more time with them. But that was impossible. I wonder if he was torn apart in his feelings. Should he leave or should he stay? At last the Lord has given him an open door in Troas. Can he go away? But there was also his passionate desire to see the Corinthians whom he calls, despite their short comings, "my beloved children" (1Cor 4:14). He yields to his love for them.

V14. Then he lifts up his heart and head and gives thanks to God. It is impressive to see what he thanks God for. He thanks God for leading him in triumph in Christ and for manifesting through him the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. Is this not a picture that shows the right perspective in the life of a servant of God?

Is this not applicable to your life and ministry also? Your life is wholly given over to Him that He may be all in all in your life. Sometimes you are at the crossroads and you do not know how to decide with regard to your education, job, house etcetera. But God wants to guide you in making your choices. Before you take a decision it is important that you check your motives. You might have decided in all sincerity, but you can still get the feeling that you made a wrong choice.

Paul's words here can give great peace of mind in such cases. God always leads us in triumph in Christ through the world. Here Paul uses a figure of speech. In the ancient times the commander of a victorious army returned to his country to conduct a triumphal procession. Everyone cheered him and all the soldiers who took part in the procession exulted in sharing the honor. In the same way Paul views himself in connection with Christ, the

great Victor. He showed Christ everywhere he went. He knew that Christ directed his life and therefore he was in control of every situation with Christ.. Is not Christ the Victor?

V15. If your heart's desire is to magnify Christ in your life then that will be perceptible everywhere around you. People will 'smell' Christ. They will be confronted by Christ. They are compelled to take a decision: either for or against Him. Your life touches them and the way you live cannot leave them cold. From your life the fragrance of Christ ascends to God.

Imagine how it should please God to see people on earth who remind Him how His Son lived on earth. The whole life of the Lord Jesus was a fragrance to His Father. Every encounter with Him made people choose between the options. The aroma He spread convicted people. Nobody indeed lived for the honor of God. Christ did. We can also.

The same applies today. God desires that Christ is visible in our life, in our words and in our deeds. This will either provoke people to turn against us and against Christ or inspire them to turn to God and to accept the Lord Jesus in faith. The aroma of Christ thus compels people to make a decision either to be saved or to be lost.

V16. For everyone who turns away from this fragrance, so to speak turns up his nose at it, the aroma is a smell to death. For everyone who takes a deep breath of this fragrance into his nostrils it becomes a smell to life. How important is your Christian life! It places people before a choice with eternal consequences.

Are you confronted with your inability to live a life with such big responsibilities? I hope so, for these are not light things. Paul feels the weight of this responsibility and exclaims: "And who is adequate for these things?"

V17. But Paul didn't adjust his life to his own standards – or the standard others would set. He was not peddling the Word nor falsified it and he did not commercialize with its interpretations as if he could do with it what he wanted to do and could explain it to suit his own advantage. He wanted to be sincere in all his conduct. He spoke "as from God", not as from himself. His source was God and he drew from Him.

He was fully conscious of the fact that he lived “in the sight of God” and that God was watching him in all his acts. At the same time his eyes were fixed on Christ. This is the way you may see your life. This delivers from the unfounded fear of human opinions and the fear of failure in life.

Now read 2 Corinthians 2:12-17 again.

Reflection: How can you be the aroma of Christ?

2 Corinthians 3

2Cor 3:1-5 | A Letter of Christ

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,

V1. The last verse of the previous chapter might give the impression that once again Paul was trying to prove himself to the Corinthians. But that of course was not the case. Did he need to commend himself to them as though he was not known to them? Did they not know who he was? Should anyone else recommend him to them? Did they not know that he really was the man who dedicated his life to the service of God?

Yes, there were others who came with letters of commendation; but they were unknown people. Yes, there were people brought who did come into the church in Corinth with a letter of commendation because they were unknown people. Such a letter was a safeguard to prevent the infiltration of false brethren into the church. A letter of commendation was a testimony given by others about the bearer of the letter. Such a letter guarantees that the church is dealing with reliable persons.

In Acts 9 we come across a spoken testimony (Acts 9:26-27). The recently converted Saul wants to join the company of disciples. The believers suspect that it is a trick of the persecutor of Christians. But the testimony of Barnabas whom the believers trusted is a great relief, for he testifies to the genuineness of Saul's conversion.

In the days of confusion in which we live such credentials are necessary. This guarantees the fact that we are dealing with a genuine believer who is also known to others. We cannot rely on self-attested testimonies. Even in

social life credentials are inevitable requirements. It always is a testimony given by others about a certain person.

It is important that the local churches demand authorized credentials for unknown people. In the absence of such credentials any irresponsible person can enter the church and create havoc misleading the believers.

V2. But should Paul also be treated on the same line by the Corinthians? Did he require a letter of commendation? The Corinthian church itself was Paul's letter of commendation in person. The believers were known to all as the result of Paul's labor among them. They were letters written in the apostle's heart. He always carried them with himself. He could show them any moment to any one as his credentials. If Paul were asked about the manner in which he served the Lord he would point to them. People recognized the Corinthian believers as those Paul preached Christ to. They believed in Christ and for Him they wanted to live.

V3. They were Paul's letter of commendation. What was written in that letter was Christ. They were a letter of Christ. Christ was seen in their life. Through the preaching of Paul the Holy Spirit had written Christ in their hearts.

All believers in Corinth together constituted this letter. It is also beautiful to keep in mind that every believer in a local church is necessary to read 'the letter' in its entirety. Each believer is unique in a sense that each one reveals a different aspect of Christ. So we need each other to reproduce the content of the letter that is Christ.

This, of course, does not change the fact that your personal life also is a letter. Your life is read by other people. What do they read in your life? But as it is said here it is about the believers together.

The work of writing this letter is entirely the work of "the Spirit of the living God". He alone is able to work that in us. We are the living materials with which and upon which He works. He has written in our hearts Who Christ is so that He can be seen in our lives. Haven't you accepted Christ in your heart? Out of the heart flow "the springs of life" (Pro 4:23). Everything you do in your whole life has its origin in your heart. Now Christ is written in your heart. You can show Him in all your activities now.

It is impossible to do so for the law that was written on the tablets of stone. Although Christ and the law are not the same they do not contradict each other. The Lord Jesus longed to fulfill the law and He also did it. All of God has become visible in Christ so that He is able to say: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). But in the law of God not all but only something of God became visible. The law of God presented before men only the just demands of God. However no one could keep the law and therefore nothing of the testimony of God became visible to people in this world. Rather the opposite is true, as you will see later in this chapter. The law brings judgment, curse and death on man.

V4-5. Now it is possible to present Christ to the world, but not through your own efforts. For this you may have "confidence ... through Christ toward God". Through Christ you can receive from Him all that is necessary to make you a readable letter. You are unable to do it yourself because you do not have the necessary strength. It is possible only through the power of God. But you may count on that completely. Paul is aware of his inadequacy to fulfill the task entrusted to him, but he knows that his adequacy is "from God". God is the source of strength for his ministry.

Read again 2 Corinthians 3:1-5 again.

Reflection: How can you be a readable letter of Christ?

2Cor 3:6-18 | The Old Covenant and the New Covenant

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. 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.

V6. Paul realizes that he has no adequacy in himself, but that all adequacy comes from God. That thought motivates him to say something about a “new covenant”. Of that he was a servant and not of the old covenant as his opponents obviously were. It is important to understand the difference between these two covenants.

I will say something general about it. The old covenant was made between two parties: God and His earthly people Israel. Both parties took upon themselves certain obligations. Israel vowed to be obedient to the law and God in His turn should bless them if they were obedient. Israel trampled upon this old covenant in every respect. By their disobedience and rebellion against God they forfeited their right to all God’s blessings. Therefore God rather had to punish them than bless them. But what would become of all the blessings God had promised. Will they all lapse?

God therefore established a new covenant, again with Israel, but this time in a special way. The specialty of this way is that God demands nothing anymore from His people as He will fulfill all the conditions Himself. The people therefore are no longer a party from whom something is expected. *God* does all that is necessary. He comes forward to fulfill, as His obligations, all that actually the people must do, and He does it on His own terms.

The new covenant is a covenant God will make with His earthly people Israel whereby the conditions are different from the old covenant. As already said in relation to the old covenant, people on their part accepted certain obligations. This happened at Mount Sinai. There they said thrice: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7). Then God stipulated the conditions as laid down in the law.

However in the new covenant God takes all obligations upon Himself. Hebrews 8 beautifully describes how this new covenant works (Heb 8:8-13). Here it is clear that also the new covenant is made with Israel and Judah – that means the ten and the two tribes, so the people of Israel as a whole.

A further reading of this section shows that time and again it says what *God* will do (see the recurrent "I will"). You will discover that no contribution is expected from the people as in the old covenant. When God Himself guarantees then the *new covenant* cannot come to naught.

Another reason the new covenant cannot come to naught is the basis on which it is established. The basis is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which He shed on the cross at Calvary. How impressive are the words spoken by the Lord Jesus at the institution of His Supper! Of the cup He says: "This cup [is] the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you" (Lk 22:20 Darby translation). Matthew adds: "For many for forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).

Here we can see how the original conditions laid before the people have been fulfilled. The Lord Jesus fulfilled them. God gave His Son that He should fulfill all that man failed to do. The basis of the new covenant is the blood of Christ.

Now back to 2 Corinthians 3. There Paul calls himself a servant of the new covenant (verse 6), though his service is in connection with the nations

rather than Israel. However, the fact is that the new covenant is based on the shed blood of Christ, which means that the blessings as well as the responsibilities are not restricted to Israel.

You also have to do with the new covenant. Not in the sense as if you are standing before God in a covenant relationship, but you can now enjoy the blessings of the new covenant because of the blood of the Lord Jesus that was shed for your sins; and God knows the full value of that blood. You also may know the privilege of having Christ written in your heart and that you are able therefore to manifest His glory in your life. Israel will enjoy these blessings only when God has reestablished His relationship with them. Then the laws of God will be written on their hearts, and they will know the Lord (Heb 8:10-11). I have written here somewhat in detail because it is important to understand why Paul calls himself a servant of the new covenant.

The last part of verse 6 is connected to that subject. The new covenant is a covenant which is related to the life giving work of the Spirit. The old covenant consisted of letters on stones. The new covenant consists of the work of the Spirit in the hearts of people; you have read that in Hebrews 8. V7-13. Verses 7-16 are a kind of parenthesis in which it is made clear how much more glorious is that which is connected to the Spirit than that which is connected to the law. This is made clear by contrasts. You read that the old covenant is called "the ministry of death" (verse 7) and "the ministry of condemnation (verse 9). This is contrasted by what is called "the ministry of the Spirit" (verse 8) and "the ministry of righteousness" (verse 9).

When Moses came down from the mountain for the second time with the stones something of God's glory was present. The Israelites saw the face of Moses shine. It was because Moses had been in God's presence and he reflected God's glory. The Israelites could not gaze at his face because of the dazzling brilliance. Moses had to put a veil over his face or else they couldn't even look at him (cf. Exo 34:29-35).

It was after all a little bit of glory and people were not attracted by it but they were afraid. Further, the law of Moses was still valid as long as the Lord Jesus Christ had not come, as it is written: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). Since

Christ has come, the law is no longer the basis of the relationship to God for everyone who believes. The glory of the law, in this sense, has disappeared, and is nullified.

V14-15. The unbelieving Israelites – and I am sorry to mention, also many Christians who prefer to stand under the law – are blind to this fact. A veil lies on their heart. When they read the Old Testament they can discover nothing but a demanding God. But the one who has accepted the Lord Jesus in faith has not a veil when ‘Moses is read’. ‘Reading Moses’ means reading the books of the Old Testament which are written by Moses. For everyone who has come to know Christ the veil is taken away.

V16. This also applies to the future Israel. The veil will be taken away from them when they return to the Lord. They will discover that the Old Testament was written in view of the Lord Jesus. This is what was discovered by the two on the road to Emmaus and the disciples (Lk 24:26,44-46).

Have your eyes been opened? Do you enjoy the Old Testament because it speaks about the Lord Jesus? The Holy Spirit loves to tell you about Christ from every page of the Bible. The Holy Spirit Who directed the Old Testament to be written has done this to present the Lord Jesus in it.

V17. The whole of the Old Testament breathes the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. This is the meaning of the words “the Lord is the Spirit”. I have heard people say after they accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior: ‘I got a different Bible now.’ Of course they have the same Bible but they read it differently now. From the moment they had the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins the Holy Spirit had the liberty to show them the glory of the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament. The veil was gone.

V18. Now it is possible to admire the glory of the Lord with open eyes without having to fear even for a moment. It is an inexplicable privilege. The more you engage yourself with the glorified Lord in heaven, the more you will radiate His glory. You will be thus transformed that God as well as people can see more and more of the Lord Jesus in you.

Now read 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 again.

Reflection: What are the differences between the old covenant and the new covenant? How is it possible to be more like the Lord Jesus?

2 Corinthians 4

2Cor 4:1-6 | The Light of the Gospel

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.

V1. It might appear that Paul wrote some theory in the third chapter. However the fourth chapter dispels this impression. In the third chapter Paul called himself a servant of the new covenant (2Cor 3:6). His service was connected to the Spirit (2Cor 3:8) and righteousness (2Cor 3:9). In this fourth chapter you see what a tremendous effect this had on his life.

He begins this chapter with the word "therefore" and this means that he is connecting to what he said earlier. The service he received was a powerful incentive to move forward, to persevere and not to get discouraged. There was a lot of resistance and hostility. But he was full of inner vigor. That was because he was always conscious of the Lord's abundant mercies that were shown to him. That was the secret behind the motivating force and the zeal that were operative in his service for the Lord.

Nothing really gives so much power to live for the Lord, as the consciousness you personally have of the mercy that was shown to you. In the parable of the good Samaritan we find a magnificent illustration of mercy (Lk 10:30-36). The Lord Jesus narrates this parable in which He Himself is that good Samaritan. You see how he took pity on the man who fell victim to robbers and was wounded severely. This is the exact picture of

yourself; it portrays your condition when you did not know the Lord. That was your situation when the Lord Jesus found you and that's the way He showed mercy to you. The more you are conscious of your past miserable condition, the more you will have zeal in your service for the Lord. It was so with Paul. He continued, no matter how great the opposition.

V2. Paul did not work secretly. The false teachers did that. False teachers are people who claim to be true servants of God, but they seek their own advantage. Their tactic is to seek the church members who are not strong in the faith. They first implant their false teachings into them. Once they gain influence enough they move out publicly and then cause untold misery to people. Paul did not adopt this insidious method.

His message was straight, clear and bright. He never distorted the word nor used any other cunning method in his teaching. He conveyed the truth he received from God. Everyone was allowed, yea, had to listen to his message. Everyone was allowed to prove it and examine his life to see whether he practiced what he preached. Otherwise his message is only a beautiful story worth nothing for practical life.

Unfortunately there are lots of Christians whose mouth pours down all sorts of biblical truths in pompous and grandiloquent language, but their life shows nothing of it. Their great sermons do not have a lasting effect on their listeners. Your life must express what your mouth speaks. Then you can touch the conscience of the people you address. When you live in the sight of God and are constantly aware of His presence, the truth that you speak will impact the life of your audience.

V3-4. The one who rejects the clear testimony of the gospel shows that he is completely blind. He cannot see because his eyes are covered. Is it your experience that you tried to share the gospel with someone, but you could not push the message across? In your opinion you expressed very clearly but everything bounced back. Why is it?

It is because people, just as you were in the past, are blinded by satan the god of this world. Once your eyes become open to the glory of the gospel you will be surprised to see that so many cannot see it. But you know how cunning satan is to prevent people from deciding for Christ. He has got innumerable methods: luxury, success, wealth, richness, career, but he

also uses great worries, sickness or any other misfortune, that people are obsessed with these things so that they cannot look to Someone else in life. How sad that they cannot see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”.

How glorious is the content of this passage! You must let the words of this passage work in you. What a malicious monster is the god of this world, bent on denying God’s blessings to people! These are people of whom it is said that they “are perishing”. Their end will be horrible. We must be ready to reach the lost ones with the gospel. A sharp contrast is presented here, and in verse 6 it is even sharper.

V5. But first Paul comes back to his message. He focuses his message not on himself but on Jesus Christ. He does not want to bind people to himself but to the Lord Jesus. He does not preach Him as Savior or Redeemer but “as Lord”. But he does not do so without reason. Paul’s conviction is that the Lord Jesus has all the rights over all people. Of course it is nice to present Jesus as the Savior before the lost people, but it is also essential that He is presented as Lord. No one can escape His rule.

This acknowledgment is essential for salvation. In Romans 10 this condition is made clear (Rom 10:9). Whoever does not confess Him as Lord now will be forced to do so later (Phil 2:9-11). The one who acknowledges Him as Lord will show it in his life. This is what Paul did. He made himself not only a slave of the Lord Jesus, but even a slave of the believers because he loved the Lord Jesus and he wanted to serve Him in everything.

V6. He comes to this attitude because the light shone in his heart. It happened in his heart as it happened in creation and it happens in every heart in which the light shines. The heart of a man who thinks he doesn’t need God and Christ is dark. It is just as dark as the earth was before God brought order out of chaos and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters (Gen 1:1-2). In the same way the Spirit of God begins His work in the dark and evil heart of a sinner. Then the voice of God is heard, Who says: “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

In the same way a powerful and an unstoppable work of God has taken place in your heart. The light has penetrated your heart and your eyes saw “the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ”. This

again is a statement with a rich content. What a gigantic change! What happened in your heart shines out of yourself.

After this personal testimony of Paul (and you can repeat that) you will learn from the verses following how this glory can be made visible in your life in the best way possible.

Now read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 again.

Reflection: How can you equip yourself against discouragement in the service of the Lord?

2Cor 4:7-15 | The Treasure in Earthen Vessels

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. 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.

V7. The opening words of this verse show a clear connection with verse 6. In order to understand the value of this passage first you must know what is meant by "this treasure" and "earthen vessels".

Verse 6 gives an exact description of 'this treasure'. The word 'treasure' indicates that it is something valuable and precious. Is not the knowledge of God seen in Jesus Christ something overwhelming? How great it is! It is really unimaginable. In the past you lived without God, wandered around blindly; you had no hope and your heart was empty. Now you have a treasure in your heart and it is invaluable. You know God because you had an encounter with the Lord Jesus and accepted Him. In Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). What more do you want? To have more than this is simply impossible.

And what is meant by earthen vessel? The Bible refers to a person or a person's body as a vessel. The Lord calls Paul: "A chosen vessel [instrument is literally vessel]" (Acts 9:15). This word 'vessel' is used in the same sense in other places (1Thes 4:4; 1Pet 3:7 [someone weaker is literally a weaker vessel]). In this verse vessel has a prefix. It is called *earthen*. This is to emphasize its fragility. Unlike a treasure that represents something precious, an earthen vessel is of little value.

That Paul presents these things in this way is not without reason. This is reminiscent of the history of Gideon in Judges 7. There we see a small army of 300 men. This little army had to fight against a formidable enemy who held the Israelites in slavery. What are the kinds of weapons Gideon hands out to his men? Trumpets, empty pitchers and torches inside the pitchers (Jdg 7:16). In the verses following you read how they use these weapons. They blow the trumpets, smash the pitchers and make the torch visible (Jdg 7:19-20). Thus the enemies got the impression of being surrounded by a huge army and took to flight.

Do you already see a parallel with verse 7 here? The torch, the light, is the treasure, and the pitcher is the earthen vessel. This treasure in all its glory must be revealed in your life. The important thing is not your own life and your own person. The earthen vessel cannot have a high opinion of itself and it does not seek its own interests. Self-importance is out of place. You have no strength in yourself to let the light shine. The more you are aware of your own inadequacy, the more the power of God becomes visible in you and the brighter the light shines forth from your life.

V8-9. These verses describe how this works. There you read on the one hand how the earthen vessel is broken and on the other hand how the power of God works to make the treasure visible to the outside world. The enumeration in these two verses is as follows:

1. On the one side “afflicted in every way” – thereby the earthen vessel is broken;
2. on the other side “not crushed” – because the power of God gives a way out.

You find these two sides subsequently in

1. “perplexed” – the earthen vessel, “but not despairing” – the power of God provides a way out;
2. “persecuted” – the earthen vessel, “but not forsaken” – God is there with His power;
3. “struck down” – the earthen vessel, “but not destroyed” – God prevents by His power.

When the weakness of the earthen vessel is felt, God gets the opportunity to make tangible the excellence of His power. Otherwise we would get the honor and not God, while the whole point is that He gets the honor.

We read the same thing in Judges 7. God wants to prevent Israel from usurping the honor which belongs to Him alone (Jdg 7:2). Therefore He reduces the army to three hundred men and then says: "I will deliver you with the 300 men" (Jdg 7:7). We understand one thing for certain: the more thoroughly the vessel is broken, the brighter shines the light of the torch.

Here you get *an* explanation (I do not say *the* explanation) for the trials you perhaps are going through or you might see in others. They serve to make visible God's treasure while we disappear from view.

V10. So the servants of God are constrained by the force of extreme circumstances to have "the dying of Jesus" in their mind always. If you look at that, you see your own death. This view prevents you living for yourself. This creates room for "the life of Jesus". His life is then seen in all your walk and talk, in your behavior and manners.

V11-12. Well, that is why Paul is constantly being delivered over to death. Do you see that he says "constantly"? Whatever happened to him did not happen occasionally. His dedication to the service of God took him to the greatest dangers. Think again on what he said in chapter 1 and read about it in chapter 11. All that happened to him had a wonderful result for the Corinthians. He risked his life to let others, among them the Corinthians, share in the true life.

V13. There is only one way to persevere in life like Paul and that is only in the power of faith. He had the same spirit of faith as the believers in the Old Testament had. That is why he cites Psalm 116 in this verse (Psa 116:10). Where true faith is present, it will be spoken about, whatever the opposition is. You simply cannot keep silent.

V14. When you remember God always has the last word then things cannot go wrong. God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, didn't He? The Lord Jesus had to pay with His life for the testimony He gave. Of course much more is connected with His death than His testimony. By His death He saved us from judgment. But the point here is that in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus there is a great encouragement.

God raised Him. Then the encouragement is that certainly God will raise you too when you testify at the cost of your life. Then you will stand before Him along with Paul. No circumstance in your life can change that. It is anchored in the power of God.

V15. When you view the difficulties in your service for the Lord Jesus Christ in this manner you will see the grace of God shining. The more fellow believers you serve in the midst of your trials and difficulties the more praises to the glory of God there will be. Is not the smashing of the earthen vessel worth it when you think of the fact that finally God will be glorified in those who belong to Him?

Now read 2 Corinthians 4:7-15 again.

Reflection: What is your experience in having 'a treasure in an earthen vessel'?

2Cor 4:16-18 | What Is Temporal and What Is Eternal

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.

V16. If you can see your Christian life with all the difficulties as Paul described it in the previous section surely you will not do lose heart. There is no reason to be discouraged. It can be that our outer man, the body, is wearing out because of our sufferings for the Lord. At all times in Christian history many believers have forfeited many things as they wanted to remain faithful to the Lord. If you want to glorify God in your body (1Cor 6:20), you must reckon with the fact that it is done at the cost of your body.

Living for Christ is *suffering* for Christ. It demands all the available energy in your body. It consumes a prohibitive quantum of energy when you swim against the current, especially as a new believer, in school or at work or may be in the family every day. To be a Christian is not a matter of relaxed life. At the same time this also does not mean that you can be irresponsible or careless with your health. You are the steward of your body. The Lord is the Owner.

Here I would like to place a warning against mysticism. Your body is not a prison or a shell which prevents the mind to unfold. Mysticism postulates such a theory and offers all kinds of grotesque techniques to have the body under control so that the mind can have a free movement. Colossians 2:23 condemns asceticism with the utmost and unsparing severity: "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, [but are] of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col 2:23).

You should never try to be 'more spiritual' by renouncing the natural needs of the body. For instance you cannot sleep less and less every day denying proper rest to the body. Such abuse of the body is the result of a wrong way of thinking. God places high value on the body.

In this passage it is made clear that man in his enmity against God can only aim at the believer's body. But the encouragement is that though the outer man of a servant of God is decaying, there is something present inside of him that never breaks down. The inner man undergoes a continual renewal by its daily fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Decaying means to go backward and renewed means advancement. Each time he is attacked there is an inner awareness and assurance that the power of God is present.

The attacks of the enemy and the difficulties you have to go through will bring you closer to God. The new experience you gain with Him each time will empower you to repel and overcome all difficulties. The result is that you receive new spiritual strength to go forward in your spiritual journey. This renewal you can experience every day. In this way verse 16 is a great encouragement in your service for the Lord.

V17. This verse contains even more encouragement. This verse tells us to see things in the light of eternity. The picture here is a weighing scale. Something is said about "light" (i.e. not heavy) and "weight". On one side of the scale Paul places "affliction" and on the other he places "glory". What happens to the balance? Does it swing up and down? Is it such that at one time suffering is slightly heavier and at another time glory? Not at all! Look how the scale on the side of *glory* goes down. It is incomparable. Of affliction Paul says it is *momentary* and *light* in weight. Of glory he says it is "an eternal weight ... far beyond all comparison".

Then, was Paul's tribulation short in duration and light by weight? Sometimes believers have to go through years of bitter persecution; can we then say it is short and light? Is all that you have to bear sometimes really short and light? Paul does not trivialize sufferings here as though they meant nothing. He also does not draw parallels for different grades and intensities of sufferings. What is severe trial for one believer is not so for another. Circumstances differ for each believer. Therefore it is impossible to make comparisons.

Paul does not make any comparison between kinds of sufferings. But he does one thing. He compares suffering with which each servant of God has to do in his own unique way with the future glory. Of this compari-

son each believer ultimately will acknowledge that his suffering, however hard and long it may be, is nothing compared to what he will soon receive. Each suffering works out its glory. That means the more intense the affliction is felt, the more overwhelming the experience and the enjoyment of the glory will be. If you do not have physical pain and you enjoy good health then you will be grateful for that. But will not be the appreciation of your health many times greater immediately after you have experienced excruciating pain and are relieved of that pain?

V18. Of course this is a poor example, but this is how it works in the comparison between affliction and glory. If you consider well the balance mentioned in verse 17 you will have no desire for the things that are seen. What you see, is all temporal. There is a time coming when everything will perish by fire. Nothing will be left. Would you be excited about the things in the world like the people in the world without God? They possess nothing else. Your eyes have seen other things, eternal things. It is important that your eyes are always focused on them.

There are a lot of things in the world which demand your attention. All the visible things in the world try to catch your attention, to bewitch you and to hold you captive. Sin entered the world through the eye: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food" (Gen 3:6). However it is not enough to turn your eyes away from something or not to look at a thing. As a child of God you need something where you can fix your eyes on. In general terms it is said here with what things you can be occupied. They are the things that are not seen. You are free to be preoccupied with these unseen things.

What kind of things are these 'unseen things'? These are things you cannot see with your physical eyes. You can see them only with the enlightened "eyes of your heart" (Eph 1:18). With this enlightened understanding of your heart you can see all the riches you have already received from the Lord and all that you will receive further. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ Who is now seated in heaven. God has glorified Him and has made Him "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This means that all things are subjected to Him – He is *Lord* – and all plans of God will be fulfilled in Him – He is *Christ*. Is this not sufficient to fill your whole field of vision?

Now read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 again.

Reflection: How are your eyes focused?

2 Corinthians 5

2Cor 5:1-5 | A Building From God

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.

V1. This passage connects directly to the end of the previous chapter. There Paul says that he is not discouraged though his body had fallen into a state of exhaustion through suffering. Here he says why he is not discouraged. In chapter 4 he drew a comparison between our life on earth with all the troubles and difficulties with all that waits for us when we are with the Lord. What is waiting for us with the Lord? The answer is here in verse 1 “a building from God”. For a Christian there is no uncertainty about it. That is why Paul says “for we know”. This concise statement rules out any doubt.

Chapter 4 makes clear that “the earthly tent which is our house” – the body that we have now – “is torn down” (cf. 2Pet 1:13-14). With “tent” he means that our body is a temporal house in which we will not dwell for eternity. A tent is also a mobile house which means that the earth is not our permanent residence.

So it is with your body. The body which you now have is not the body in which you will spend eternity, for our body shows too many marks of sin. Our body is called “the body our humble state” (Phil 3:21). God cannot be satisfied to have you with this body with Him in heaven. No, He has something far better for you.

He already has a building for you and this building is not made by human hands but He Himself designed it and built it. This building is not like

your present body which is temporal and related to the earth. The building God has prepared for you is eternal and related to heaven. It also belongs to heaven. This building from God is the body you are going to receive when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to take you up.

V2. Now “we groan”. I wonder if you know of this groaning. We groan because we experience the limitations of our body. Groaning is an expression of grief for which there are no words. We groan when we are depressed and when we come across things which we would like to be otherwise but we do not have the possibilities to change them. You have new life and you long to serve the Lord but you are facing hurdles. It is because you are living in a world which is absolutely against the will of God.

You experience discouragement when you share the gospel with people, for they either resist or ridicule. They scoff at God and persecute those who stand up for the Lord Jesus. Then you feel the urge to get released from that “earthly tent” and be clothed with the “dwelling from heaven”.

“To be clothed with” means that our body is a clothing over which another clothing will be pulled so that the clothing underneath will be completely hidden. With “clothed” is meant that our body will be changed at the coming of the Lord.

V3. At a first look this verse appears to be difficult. When you do not compare and collate it with the previous and following verses you could even think that there are certain ambiguities in this verse. If verse 2 and verse 4 are clear then you can understand this verse also.

In verse 3 the matter is regarding being “clothed” in contrast to “not be found naked”. To be clothed means to have a literal body. ‘Naked’ means to stand before God on your own account. Despite his loin covering made out of fig leaves Adam felt so when he stood before God after he sinned (Gen 3:7-10). He no longer felt this nakedness after God provided a covering for it. God used the skin of an animal for this. That means an animal was killed for this purpose. Adam’s nakedness was covered on the basis of the death of an innocent animal.

From this you learn that in order not to be found naked you must be clothed upon with a clothing that is provided by God himself. This clothing is the Lord Jesus. The one who does not have this clothing to cover his sins and

stands naked before God cannot be clothed with the dwelling from heaven at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Only those who are clothed in the spiritual sense in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 8:1) will be clothed with that dwelling from heaven.

Although this book has been written for believers perhaps there is someone among the readers of whom it has to be said that despite being clothed he will be found naked should the Lord come at the very moment when he reads this. Then I suggest that such a one should not read further, but go down on his knees and confess his sins to God. He will accept you when you come to Him just as you are.

When you truly repent for your sins, God forgives you on the basis of what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. A song which I often sing on the streets along with other believers says in essence that He still wants to forgive you whatever your sins are; when you hand over everything to Him you will be free immediately. This is a great invitation. Take it!

V4. Only believers will be “clothed” which means that their bodies will be transformed at the coming of the Lord Jesus. But the meaning is still stronger. In fact the under clothing not only completely disappears but it ceases to exist. The under clothing is swallowed up by the upper clothing and nothing is left. Thus the old is completely replaced by the new (cf. 1Cor 15:51-54).

What Paul writes becomes still clearer in that he says that he would rather prefer to be clothed than to be unclothed. When the body is compared to a clothing ‘unclothed’ then can only mean to die. To die is like putting off clothing. Paul would therefore rather prefer to experience to be caught up and transformed at the coming of the Lord than first to die and be raised at His coming. So strong was his desire for this house in heaven. Can you repeat that after him?

V5. The one who did this is eagerly waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus and for all that is related to that event. Everything has been prepared by God and the beauty is that God not only prepared all things for you, but He also prepared *you*. The proof is that He has given you His Spirit as a pledge. Read again what I wrote earlier about this pledge in chapter 1 (2Cor 1:22).

We have already been given the Spirit Who gives us courage because we can look forward to the building from God. The Spirit Himself has come down from heaven and He sees to it that we do not feel at home on earth. But we know for sure that we have an eternal house in heaven.

Now read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 again.

Reflection: Why do you or do you not long for heaven?

2Cor 5:6-10 | The Judgment Seat of Christ

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.

V6. The two-fold statement that we do not lose heart (2Cor 4:1,16) is followed by the also two-fold statement that we are “of good courage” (verses 6,8). You get this confidence if you no longer look to the circumstances but only if you look upward or forward. If you look forward you will see all that you will receive when the Lord comes. If you look upward you see the Lord Who helps you moment by moment.

That does not make you blind to what is happening around you. It is indeed clear to you that as long as you live in the body you are absent from the Lord. This knowledge now is the determining factor for your life as a Christian.

V7. Your life is determined by the things which you do not see, but they are definitely there. Faith is the assurance of what we hope or yearn for and it is the conviction of what we do not see with our own eyes at the moment (Heb 11:1).

You do not need faith for what you can see with your own eyes. You are sure it is present there. But to see the things the Bible speaks about – and which are also really present – you need faith. The one who does not live by faith but is led only by what is seen has no right to call himself a Christian. Faith is the fundamental principle for the Christian. Being a Christian and faith (in the biblical sense of the word) inseparably belong to each other.

V8. We are not yet at home with the Lord, we still have our earthly body. But although we are not yet at home with the Lord, we do not lack good courage because we have the Lord with us. Yet we prefer to leave our abode in the body and go to the Lord. “To be absent from the body” happens when we die. This must be well distinguished from ‘to be clothed’ of which you read in verse 4, which refers to the rapture of the church.

Whoever dies in faith is immediately after his death present with the Lord Jesus in paradise. He no longer suffers under his sinful nature neither of enmity. He is perfectly happy.

Paul speaks very personally about his desire to depart and be with Christ. He calls it "far better" (Phil 1:23). But he also adds that he has a task on earth. That is why the Lord let him live here still. This applies to you also. I hope that, although you are young and perhaps have many ideals, yet you want to be at home with the Lord. That it is not so far yet is because the Lord wants to use you in His service. This is a great privilege.

V9. Make it your ambition to speak and act in a way that your life pleases the Lord. When your life's goal is to live only for the Lord, it does not then make any difference whether you are "at home" in the body, which is to live in the body on the earth, or are "absent" from the body, which is to be at home with the Lord in heaven. Wherever you are you will make the Lord Jesus rejoice by living for Him and asking His will in everything.

V10. You might ask how you can still be pleasing to Him when you are "absent". If you die then there is no more work you can do for the Lord, isn't it? But there is still something that is called the "judgment seat of Christ". I would like to elaborate on this as it is important that this judgment seat leaves an indelible impression on you. Every Christian including you must stand before it. This moment is at the coming of the Lord. Please note that the coming of the Lord is something other than the death of the believer. At death a believer goes up to be with the Lord. The coming of the Lord means the Lord Jesus will come in the air to take the believers to Himself (1Thes 4:17).

At His coming the Lord Jesus will first bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the motives of the hearts (1Cor 4:5). You will look back on your life together with the Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps it will be like a movie in which you will see again all that you did in and with your body on earth. Nevertheless there is a difference between the time when you did them and now when you see them again. The difference is that you see your life as the Lord Jesus always saw it.

What He especially will bring to light are your motives which led your life. There will be things of which you thought that the Lord would be happy

about, but of which the Lord will show you that your own glory was also connected with it. There will also be things to which you did not attach much importance, but of which the Lord might say how particularly He appreciated them. Before the judgment seat of Christ everything will be put in the right perspective and measured with the Divine standard. There will not be any dishonesty in reward and a mistake is not possible. Everyone will get what he is entitled to and will also be convinced himself that the reward is just. There will be no protest.

When I think of the judgment seat of Christ I desire to be well pleasing to Him at that place so that He will be able to say: "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21,23). The one who has as his ambition to be pleasing to the Lord will receive the due honor before the judgment seat when his life on earth comes to an end. Then there will not be so much difference between how the Lord saw it and how the servant saw it. We will not then fall from one surprise into another, although of course we can always be wrong.

We could have erred in our judgment but isn't it still beautiful to hear the judgment of the Lord and be at last completely in agreement with His judgment of our life? The reward for what we have done in our service to the Lord will be presented in the form of authority over cities in His kingdom (Lk 19:16-19). The Lord Jesus will erect this kingdom after our life has been revealed.

Maybe you are afraid of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ, fearing that you will be assigned to hell by the Judge. Do not let this thought frighten you, for it will not be so. Just bear in mind that the Judge Who sits on the judgment seat is your Savior Who died for your sins on the cross. God has already judged your sins there and you will not be subjected to His judgment again (cf. Jn 5:24; Rom 8:1). God is not unjust and He will not punish sin twice. This appraisal of your life has nothing to do with your eternal destiny, but with a reward you will receive for your life as a believer on the earth.

Maybe there are a few things in your life of which you know that they are not pleasing to the Lord and therefore you are still a bit afraid of the

judgment seat. That you can change. Unreservedly confess to the Lord all that could hinder your joy when you think of the judgment seat of Christ.

Now read 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 again.

Reflection: How do you imagine the judgment seat of Christ will be?

2Cor 5:11-15 | One Died for All

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. 12 We are not again commending ourselves to you but [are] giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have [an answer] for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Before we start with verse 11 let me share a few more thoughts about the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord Jesus will pronounce His judgment from the judgment seat at three different interludes. Three different groups of people will appear before the Judge at three different intervals. We can say there will be three different sessions:

1. The first session will take place when the church is caught up and all the believers are revealed. We saw this already in verse 10 of this chapter.
2. The second session will take place when the Lord Jesus has returned on earth. You read about that in Matthew 25 (Mt 25:31-46). He will sit on “His glorious throne” (Mt 25:31) and all the nations of the earth will be gathered before Him. The nations will be judged by Him according to their attitude toward those He calls “these brothers of Mine” who preached the gospel of the kingdom during the time of the great tribulation.
3. The third session will take place at the end of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. In this session the judgment seat is “a great white throne” (Rev 20:11). Before this throne will appear all the people who have lived on the earth and died in unbelief. They are people who never repented for their sins and returned to God. They will be judged according to their deeds, which are written “in the books” (Rev 20:12). On the basis thereof they will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

V11. The thought of the judgment seat should urge you to live for the glory of God and to warn people of the impending judgment. You know “the fear of the Lord”, don’t you? Paul had no doubt about it and therefore he

persuaded men. “Persuade” is not a friendly request but an insistent warning. The judgment seat has an impact upon your life to live for the glory of God, and this also impacts others. You will share the gospel with them.

Paul was not afraid of the judgment seat. He was quite transparent before God. He was always conscious of the fact that God looked into his inner life and he was pleased with that. Also before the Corinthians his life was always transparent and he had nothing to hide from them and hoped that they would see this in him. Some people spoke ill of him saying that he was after his own glory. Once suspicion is sowed it is difficult to judge the innocent victim – in this case Paul – properly and sincerely.

V12. He adds to refute the charge that he is after his own glory. He matters not about himself but on the contrary about them! By his manner of life they had reason to boast. The Corinthians accepted the gospel not from some stranger, but from someone who stood behind his message with his whole life. There were many other preachers who came to them with an outward appearance. Their aim was self-acclamation. They merely kept an outward appearance and they did not speak from their heart. They were mainly concerned with their name and fame. They could perhaps rouse the audience with their speech, or they could boast of their lineage. Paul spoke to their heart and gave food for their soul, while leaving nothing of all that man can boast of.

V13. He wanted to serve the believers. People could say that he was sometimes beside himself, ‘in ecstasy’. Others could say that he was out of his mind. Let such people just talk. Anyone who reads the Word of God with love and rejoices in the Lord Jesus will end up in intense joy and delight. God and the Lord Jesus are everything to them. I hope you also know such exhilarating moments.

But you can also be of sound mind as Paul was. Then you can speak to your fellow believers about every day activities like eating and drinking, your work, marriage, of course in the light of the Bible.

V14. The *love of Christ* is the only right motive for all that you do. His love was so great that He gave Himself up in death for guilty sinners. That the Lord Jesus had to die speaks volumes about the condition in which

mankind had come. That means every man is dead. Death means there is no life for God. We “were dead in ... trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

The fact that the Lord Jesus died for all shows that there was no one who lived according to God’s expectation. The death of the Lord Jesus shows how hopeless was and is the condition in which man brought himself with his sins. Man could not free himself. How can a dead person do anything?

The uniqueness of the gospel message is that the Lord Jesus has done what no man could do, namely, to give life to men who are sentenced to death. This became possible because He did not enter death because of His own sins. He never did anything that deserved the death sentence. He took this place voluntarily and out of love and for the sake of others so that everyone who believes in Him passes out of death into life (Jn 5:24).

V15. For the second time it is said that He died for all. Now it has become possible for everyone to be saved through what He has done. Every man is dead. The Lord Jesus went voluntarily into that same death and by dying identified Himself with the condition in which every man was. That does not mean that every person is now saved. Salvation from sin and the judgment of God will benefit only the one who personally and sincerely confesses his sins and believes that the Lord Jesus died in his place on the cross. The one who has done this lives and will continue living. He “has passed out of death into life” as mentioned in John 5 (Jn 5:24) to which I already referred.

It was so with you also. The life that you received is Divine life. When you were dead you were living, but you lived for yourself. That was not the real life. The life that you now received is the eternal life which is not the life in which you are the center of attention. God has given you this life so that you can live for the One Who died and rose again for you. The Lord Jesus is the center of the new life that you have received.

It is a privilege to live for the Lord Jesus, you may always think of that. But here it is presented as a normal thing, nothing exceptional but as a natural course of life. The Lord Jesus died in order to show you the true meaning of life and let you live the real life. A person really lives only when he serves God and Christ. He has been created for this purpose. Every person

who lives for himself has missed the actual goal of his life. Unfortunately there are plenty of Christians who do not understand this.

God and the Lord Jesus know that you will find the greatest joy and satisfaction if you live for Him Who died and rose again for you. Every dedicated Christian will testify to this.

Now read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15 again.

Reflection: How does 'the love of Christ' work in you?

2Cor 5:16-21 | In Christ a New Creation

16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know [Him in this way] no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, [he is] a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all [these] things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 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. 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.

Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, God showed how He judges everything on earth. Since the fall of man God is not able to find anything here in which He could have His joy. Soon after the fall God had to testify that the wickedness of man was great on the earth. Of the earth He had to conclude that it was corrupt in His sight and filled with violence (Gen 6:5-11). That never changed since then, although God gave man countless blessings.

The greatest blessing, doubtless, is that the Lord Jesus came to the earth. How many blessings He spread around Him! But what did men do? They filled up the measure of their wickedness by crucifying Him. Now even for God the measure is filled up and reached a stage where He really couldn't do anything more with man at all. Fallen man is set aside. He is no longer useful.

V16-17. Then God starts working in a different and new way. He makes all those who believe in the Lord Jesus a new creation. As for God the one who believes that the Lord Jesus died and rose again is placed in another area. There the way of living is totally different, with a completely different attitude and motives and a different goal. Your relationship with your family members and your neighbors has changed. You recognize no one according to the flesh.

What does that mean? Do you now need to no longer listen to your parents, your teachers or your boss? Do you now have nothing to do with

what others say? No, this is not what is meant here. 'Recognizing no one according to the flesh' means you view people around you and things around you from your new position and not any longer in the earthly way. You are still living on the earth and you are standing in earthly relationships, but you yourself are a new creation. Paul even goes to the extent of saying that he now knows Christ in a way other than what is according to the flesh. What he means is that he didn't see Christ as Man on the earth but as the glorified Lord in heaven. For when the Lord Jesus came with the purpose of being accepted by His people, they rejected Him. Consequently the establishment of His kingdom on earth is postponed and now He is in heaven.

The old things have passed away, for God does not expect anything from man anymore. God tried everything to bring something good out of man but without result. For the Christian everything is new. He is connected to and made one with a Christ in heaven and not on earth. His life's realm is where Christ is because he is in Christ. This is how God sees you also.

V18. God Himself invented all. He found a solution to bring you into this new position. With your old nature you couldn't be placed in Christ. Therefore God reconciled you to Himself. Reconciliation is a necessity when there is enmity between two parties. There was hostility between God and man. God was not man's enemy, but man was God's enemy. Man became the enemy of God by his sins. It is not God Who must be reconciled to man but conversely man must be reconciled to God.

Man could not provide a solution but God provided one for him in Christ. Reconciliation proceeded from God. The power of reconciliation is such that God changed man, His enemy, into His friend. Through Christ God brings the reconciled man to a new relationship with Himself. Isn't that great?

Paul draws the conclusion that the ministry of reconciliation has been given to him. In a certain sense you also may draw this conclusion. The one who is reconciled will testify to it.

V19. That Christ was in the world is proof that God wanted to reconcile the world to Himself. By sending His Son into the world God made a reconciling gesture to the world.

The reconciliation itself was to take place only through the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. He came to reconcile and not to impute to men their transgressions and to settle with the world. The Lord Jesus said: "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (Jn 3:17).

But the world did not know Him. That's why reconciling the world is still future. The Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God has already accomplished the requirements for this reconciliation on the cross of Calvary (Jn 1:29). Also Colossians 1 speaks about the future reconciliation of the world (Col 1:20). The verses following show that reconciliation already applies to all who have accepted the Lord Jesus (Col 1:21-22).

The ministry of reconciliation consists in carrying out "the word of reconciliation" in word and life, which means the preaching concerning reconciliation. The message must now be carried out by all who are reconciled. You know what it means to be reconciled. You were an enemy of God and the wrath of God rested on you. But by Him you have been made a new creation in Christ.

V20. You are still in a world hostile to God, and Christ expects that you are acting as an ambassador here. An ambassador is the one who represents the interests of his own country in another country and gives an impression as good as possible of his home country in the foreign land. In the same way you are here as an ambassador for Christ. You have the great privilege and the great responsibility to represent Christ here and bring His message in word and deed. God wants to appeal through your whole life to the conscience of the people who are to be reconciled to Him.

But God does not want this to be done in a haughty manner. You can talk to people persuasively and confront them with the truth of God in a way that scares them, but you always must take care that you give your message with all humility in agreement with the spirit of the One Whom you represent. That's why it says: "We beg you on behalf of Christ." This kind of persuading is unfamiliar to the world where people want to persuade with impressive arguments and evidences to degrade and discredit others.

V21. "Be reconciled to God" is an invitation from the God of heaven and earth Who gave His own beloved Son to death. God not only gave Him to

death but put to death His Son Himself. The Lord Jesus is here referred to as the One “who knew no sin”. He was the sinless One. He had nothing to do with sin and had no part in it. Therefore He was the delight of God in His whole life as He had always been in heaven before He became Man.

This unique Man was made sin by God. That did not happen in His life time on earth but only in the three hours of darkness on the cross. There He was identified with sin that found its way into the world. There the complete wrath of God against sin was turned on Him. There sin was judged and blotted out before the face of God.

That the righteousness of God manifested itself in the judgment of His Son is seen in everyone who has accepted reconciliation. God is righteous when He sees you in Christ because Christ made all well for you. God relates everything to that. All that God made of you, you are because of the work of Christ.

How much we have to think about and to thank God for. What reasons we have to tell others about it!

Now read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 again.

Reflection: How can you be an ambassador for Christ?

2 Corinthians 6

2Cor 6:1-4 | The Path of the Servants of God (I)

1 And working together [with Him], we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— 2 for He says, “AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.” Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION”— 3 giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, 4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

V1. The last verses of the preceding chapter contain an exhortation for all the people who still live without God and without Christ in the world. The exhortation is: “Be reconciled to God.” In the first verse of this chapter there is an admonition addressed to the believers in Corinth and to all those who call themselves Christians. This admonition is “not to receive the grace of God in vain”. Is it possible to receive God’s grace in a way that it doesn’t work out anything? That really is possible!

For a child of God salvation is sure and secure. This is an absolute truth that is based on the faith in the work of the Lord Jesus. This work is accomplished completely independent of you and is accepted by God. Anyone who has a part in it is perfectly saved. But there is yet another truth, namely, that of the responsibility. This side of the truth is about what others can see in your life that you are a child of God. That is evidenced when they see the Bible at work in your life. They can see that, for instance, in the way you react when something is said to you from the Bible.

If someone is truly converted he will love the Bible and love to do what is written in it. If someone wants to hear and do only the pleasant things of being a Christian, you can put a question mark over his confession that he is a believer. Paul’s exegesis here is about this point. Among the real children of God there could be people who were never in the light of God;

they accept the things of God only with their mind and feelings. They have never gone to the Lord with real repentance for their sins.

It is not enough to know that God is merciful. The letter of Jude speaks about people “who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” (Jude 1:4). It is possible therefore to deal with the grace of God in a completely wrong way. The grace of God becomes ineffective in such cases.

V2. For those who really believe there is a word in this verse which is the touchstone of real salvation. The first part of this verse is a quotation from Isaiah 49 (Isa 49:8a). This is about God’s listening to the Servant of the LORD, the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus there says that His work is in vain. But then God says that He will connect His blessings to His Son’s work (Isa 49:4-7). The acceptable time, the time of answering, dawned when God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

A further hearing is yet to come when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth to take possession of all. At that time He will receive the reward that God will give Him for His work. We are living in between these two hearings. How wonderful it is to see that we also have an acceptable time and a day of salvation and that is now! Everyone who confesses his sins and goes to God with repentance and asks Him to save him will be heard and will receive salvation.

This is what Paul preached and the Corinthians believed. Paul now reminds them of this. He says so to speak: ‘You must bear in mind that when you deny us as servants you show that you never really believed our preaching. Then all could be in vain.’

V3. Paul had sufficient reason to speak to the Corinthians in this way. There were false apostles who disparaged him and his co-workers charging that they labored for their own honor and fame. Paul elaborates on this in chapters 10-11. The Corinthians inclined themselves to listen to those so called preachers who unlike Paul presented a convenient gospel. How did Paul present himself as a true servant of God? Surely not as someone who enjoyed all the comforts, while preaching to others that they should live accurately.

No, the way he lived was completely in accordance with what he preached to others. He did his utmost not to be an offence to others. He would have

been an offence to others if there was a difference between his life style and his preaching. That indeed would result in real defamation of his service.

This is what a lot of people are irritated about when the gospel is preached to them. They can cite profuse examples of people who sit at the front in the church on Sundays, and try to rip you off on Mondays. If what you say is not reality in your everyday life, your words will have no impact on others. Does it mean that you must be perfect and impeccable before you give a testimony? No, it means that you must confess your sin if you make a mistake. Paul's preaching and his acts were consistent and therefore no one could point a finger at him. I hope your life also is like that.

V4. One can say that verse 3 shows the negative side and therefore make sure that you do nothing the wrong way. Then the positive side is shown in verse 4 and the next verses. They show how you can show that you are a true servant of God. We find in these verses a list of no less than twenty eight characteristics for a true servant of God.

It begins with "endurance". It is said that what is 'well begun is half done'. But it must be added that this cannot remain like that; the other half must follow. Endurance is best shown when it is put to test. Then the apostle names other characteristics through which this can happen. Before you let this list work in you, you must bear in mind that God is called the "God who gives perseverance" (Rom 15:5). He helps you to persevere, to endure, despite trials. Also read the encouragements we find in 2 Thessalonians 3 and Revelation 3 (2Thes 3:5; Rev 3:10).

The first test is "affliction". This means you come under pressure. You can think of believers who are being persecuted. You can also think of your own situation. How easily you come under pressure when you know that in all possible situations you are observed as a Christian for your attitude and reactions. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says: "In the world you have tribulation: but take courage, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

The second one, "hardships", has to do with things you lack, but which you need. You may rely on God for His provision.

In the case of "distresses" the thought is that there is no room for any free movement, being in a situation in which you do not know how to behave

to uphold the honor of the Lord. You feel that you are inevitably dependent on the Lord. He will see to it that you do not deny Him.

These first three trials are common in nature. They go together and God uses them as a means by which you can show your endurance, while at the same time you can go to Him for what you need.

Now read 2 Corinthians 6:1-4 again.

Reflection: How did you receive the grace of God?

2Cor 6:5-13 | The Path of the Servants of God (II)

5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, 6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, 7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, 8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; [regarded] as deceivers and yet true; 9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, 10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. 11 Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. 12 You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. 13 Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide [to us] also.

V5. We continue with the testing of your patience or endurance. We considered the first three tests. The following three also belong together. You recognize them easily: “In beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults.” These have to do with the body and they were inflicted by others on Paul. They were not trifles. In Acts 16 you read how he was beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:19-24). In Acts you also see how he was at the very center of tumultuous crowds (Acts 19:29-31; 21:27-36).

Then again follows a group of three which belong together: “In labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger [or: fastings].” However, there is a difference between this group and the previous ones. The previous tests were involuntary. A life which shows that one is a witness for the Lord Jesus often provokes a negative reaction from other people. However, labors, sleeplessness and hunger (or fastings) are situations the servants of the Lord expose themselves to voluntarily.

There are many Christians who are satisfied that they are saved from hell; but when it comes to ‘labor’ in living as a Christian they shun all inconveniences. The word ‘labor’ means strenuous work.

‘Sleeplessness’ or ‘watchfulness’ means that you must keep awake all the time and you cannot fall asleep because dangers are imminent. The spiritual application for you and me is to keep the eyes wide open and be on the alert for the lurking spiritual dangers which could in no time put your Christian life on the back burner. All sorts of persuasive logics of people

can't lull you into thinking that all things will end well without you taking any pains in your spiritual walk.

The same goes for 'fastings'. It primarily means that one does not take food. It also means that you voluntarily waive certain pleasures which are not wrong per se but which can disturb your life's priorities. A bit of relaxation is not wrong. But it is certainly wrong to enjoy relaxation at the cost of your Christian obligations, for instance if you reject a call to help preach the gospel.

You can escape these three voluntary things.. But a true servant of God will not do that because he is always conscious of his life as a servant.

V6. Verses 6-10 list the characteristics God looks for in His servants, the characteristics which become predominantly visible in God's servants as they go through circumstances mentioned previously.

1. The first is "purity". Purity means you keep yourself unspotted from the world, and have no friendship with it.

2. This is followed by "knowledge". Knowledge means you know God and know what He expects from you; for this you have the Bible.

3. "Patience" you have to show in your contacts.

4. By "kindness" you let others know something of the goodness of God.

5. The power to present yourself this way is not in you but it is "in the Holy Spirit".

6. "Genuine love" is the unfeigned, not hypocritical love. Love is the nature of God and you must show it. That does not mean that you condone what is wrong or feign as though it is not there.

7. V7. That's why the servant of God always must use "the word of truth" and apply it to all life's situations.

8. "The power of God" will manifest itself when he uses the word of truth in dependence on God and not by human wisdom.

9. "The weapons of righteousness" refers to the practical life of the servant. When the servant cannot be accused of unrighteous practices, because he gives to everyone his right, then this is a weapon with which he can repel all the accusations leveled against him from all sides. For a servant is al-

ways subject to criticism both from the right and from the left side. That's why he has to be balanced to be able to defend himself against both sides. Criticism and opposition are things you must always expect when you live and work for the Lord. Not that you must feel exalted above all criticism, for that is arrogance.

10. V8. Here it is about a servant who wants to please his master in all things. In such cases you go through "glory and dishonor". Sometimes you are hailed and at another time you are nailed.

11. The greater the servant, the more people talk about him, in a negative as well as in a positive sense. He goes through "evil report and good report".

12. One portrays him as a deceiver and another as a trustful one.

13. V9. In the world he is unknown, but with God he is well-known.

14. As for the world he is as dying, useless for the world. The cause of that is that he lives for God and not for the world.

15. By all he experiences he feels "as punished" by the hand of God. Chastisement is not punishment and surely "not put to death" by it. Chastisement is always meant as education. For that education God uses all kinds of means, as for example you have read in verses 4-5.

16. V10. Chastisement is not a pleasant experience; it certainly can make you "sorrowful". But because you experience in it God's love and care you are "rejoicing".

17. A servant does not have riches in this world. In this respect he is "poor". His real wealth is in Christ and with this wealth he can make "many rich".

18. The end of verse 10 shows that he is "as having nothing" in this world. His real wealth is Christ and that's why he is "possessing all things", for all things are His.

It is not a small thing to say of yourself that you are a servant of God. When I say this I hope you will not be discouraged but rather encouraged by it. For this service incorporates a lot of rich promises.

V11. Perhaps you can imagine a bit of what deep impression these verses would have made on the Corinthians. Paul opened his heart to them. He poured out his heart without reservation. They must know what is hidden

in his heart. He loved them with all his heart. In order to bring the gospel to them he underwent all the experiences he talks of here in these verses.

Do you see how personally he addresses them as “Corinthians”? In two other letters he addresses the recipients of his letters in such very personal terms. He does so to the Galatians (Gal 3:1) and the Philippians (Phil 4:15). In all these three letters he speaks from an overflowing heart.

V12. Here in Corinth he wants to have in their hearts that special place which he had earlier. The problem is not that they had a restrained place in his heart. His heart was wide but they were restrained. They had very little room for Paul in their hearts. They could not reciprocate his appreciation of them.

V13. He appeals therefore that they open their hearts again for him and his service. He says that he deserves room in their hearts as recompense or as reward for all that he did for them. Did he not dedicate his whole life for them? Then should they not love him with a special love? They were his “children”, weren’t they?

You can notice how by the whole style of writing that Paul is doing his best to win their hearts again. His yearning is that the relationship between him and the Corinthians would be restored and that they would again listen to his wise advice. Paul’s prime concern was the honor of the Lord and the well-being of the believers.

Now read 2 Corinthians 6:5-13 again.

Reflection: What things that are listed in verses 4-10 are found in your life?

2Cor 6:14-16 | The Unequal Yoke

14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

V14. Quite a lot has been said and written about these verses. It is because they are of great importance for your practical faith life. You must pay attention to the stark contrast between these and the previous verses. In the previous verses Paul describes the life of a true servant of God. Did you discover in it any characteristic that would bring you any respect and honor from this world? Not in the least. But the Corinthians were after them. They also wanted the profits of the world.

They were narrow-minded with regard to Paul and his service. But they were broadminded when it came to their relationship with the world. They easily fell in line with the world's systems. They wanted the benefits of the world. With this unsound mind-set they preferred to be spared from all unpleasant and extreme circumstances and hardships Paul experienced.

Unfortunately today there are Christians young and old who are also of the same mind-set though these things are not said aloud. Their life shows that their connection to the world is not thoroughly severed. The subject here is the kind of compromises which prevents a believer from pursuing the right way of obedience to the Word of God.

This does not mean that you should not at all have any dealings with unbelievers. For instance your work or school situation is something different. With your colleagues or class-mates you are definitely not living in an unequal yoke. It is your duty to go to work and to school. It is wrong to free yourself from such obligations.

But there are relationships that lead to disobedience. This could be business connections or friendships. This is certainly true of marriage as well, although this is not the prime subject here) Therefore, never begin a relationship with an unbeliever, then marriage will never be possible either.

In the Old Testament you can see God saying the same with regard to connections between His people and the surrounding nations. He speaks of this figuratively when He says: "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together" (Deu 22:10). An ox is a clean animal, which can be sacrificed to God. A donkey is an unclean animal; its neck must be broken or it must be redeemed with a lamb (Exo 13:13). The same as these two animals cannot plow together so a believer and an unbeliever cannot go together. With this picture in mind Paul razor sharp demonstrates the difference that exists between believers and unbelievers.

Before I dwell further on these verses let me call your attention to verses 17-18 where you find great promises in store for everyone who says good-bye to the world. Do you find it difficult at the moment to let go off anything that still connects you with the world? Have you no strength to break with it? Then read verses 17-18. Let them encourage you.

Now back to verse 14. The Corinthians are called upon not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. You know if your life is not wholly connected to the Lord Jesus that will inevitably lead to a connection with the world. A few comparisons which follow this admonition clearly show why such relationships are impossible.

A believer and an unbeliever are opposite poles as they are guided by totally very different sets of motives and feelings. There is a vast difference between their life's starting point and their life's goal. The source of an unbeliever's life is completely different from that of a believer. There is the greatest imaginable difference between them. Paul here shows their two extremes, not to exaggerate, but to show things as they are. Any other depiction will obscure the facts.

These are the facts:

1. "Righteousness" is doing what is in tune with the rights of God. "Lawlessness" is doing one's own will without recognizing any authority. What "partnership" can these two have with one another? 'Partnership' means to have the same part in something. Righteousness belongs to the new life of the believer. The unbeliever does not have this new life and so he does not listen to God and also he does not acknowledge His authority. These two expressions of the life of the one and the other are far apart.

2. "Light" and "darkness" denote the spheres which both parties find themselves in. On the first page of the Bible, right after creating light, God causes a separation between light and darkness. This fact shows more clearly than the first fact that any form of "fellowship" between a believer and an unbeliever is absolutely unthinkable. 'Fellowship' means there is something in common, a common interest. In light a believer enjoys intercourse with God. In darkness an unbeliever enjoys sin.

3. V15. "Christ" and "Belial" specify to whom an individual belongs. The believer belongs to Christ and the unbeliever to Belial. I need not tell you Who Christ is. He is the Man after the heart of God and also after your heart since your conversion. The name 'Belial' appears only here in the New Testament. We find this name more often in the Old Testament. Originally it means 'worthlessness' or 'useless pile of rubble' or 'utmost malignity', 'devastation'. So it is clear that it is a name for satan. Can you imagine just one thing in what Christ and Belial have "harmony"?

4. "Believer" is the term for a follower of Christ and "unbeliever" is the term for a follower of Belial. A believer is the one who places his complete trust in Christ not only for eternity but also for his daily life. An unbeliever does not consider Christ. The "common" part of the believer is Christ and that of the unbeliever is satan.

5. V16. In "the temple of God" God is honored and served by the believer. There is no place for "idols". Idols fill the life of the unbeliever. Paul says even more emphatically about the temple of God: "We are the temple of the living God." That means the church is the dwelling place of God.

The perception here is God's desire to dwell with His people and walk with them. He wants to be their God and He wants to acknowledge them as His people. With reverence it can be said: God wants to feel at home here and to move around freely. This is possible only when there are no disturbing elements. But this is inevitable when believers associate themselves with the world. "Holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore" (Psa 93:5a).

The logical sequence can be none other than the appeal in verse 17. I would like to continue on this subject in the next section.

Now read 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 again.

Reflection: Is there something present in your life that shows you are unequally yoked?

2Cor 6:17-18 | Separation – From What and to What

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. 18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

V17. The word "therefore" is meaningful. God will dwell in the midst of His people and walk among them and that's why His people cannot associate with the world. His people must be radically separated from the world and from everything found therein. The preceding verses make it clear that this separation already exists, but that God's people must live this out in practice. A believer must break all relationships in which God does not have the first place.

This applies primarily to relationships a believer enters into on a voluntarily basis. It is about relationships in which a believer carries responsibility together with an unbeliever and makes compromises. The unbeliever is guided by an entirely different set of motives and therefore the believer has to make compromises. Jehoshaphat – a Godly king in the Old Testament – was reproached by God for being unequally yoked (2Chr 18:1-3). You can read what God thinks about this in 2 Chronicles 19 (2Chr 19:2). Unfortunately he falls into this error again (2Chr 20:35-37). You can see there the consequences are more serious than the first time.

There are also other examples. I know of young men who played in a music band and quit the band after their conversion. They still play music but now only with believers and for the Lord. I know believers who had relationship with unbelievers. When they realized that it was not right they confessed it as sin before God and broke off the connections. Sometimes the Lord worked in such a way that the other got converted later and the relationship resumed and they got married.

In connection with this, a few words about marriage. Once a marriage has taken place it should not be broken. God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). The appeal "come out from their midst and be separate" does not apply to marriage (1Cor 7:10-11). But all other connections, in which you join forces with unbelievers in order to achieve a common goal and in which you cannot give God the first place you must give up and let go. You can think

of a business you want to set up with someone in which both you and the other person are equally responsible for the management. On the basis of this scripture such a partnership cannot be approved if the other person is an unbeliever.

Obedience to these instructions has cost many a person much trouble. Separation can be painful. It also can be painful to the other party from whom you separate because that person can get the impression that you are superior. This never may be the reason. Then try to explain to the other party about the specific issues you cannot compromise. I cannot guarantee that the other person will understand or will accept your decision, but you are responsible to the Lord to obey His Word.

You separate from something or someone. Separation in itself can be nothing else than Phariseeism, the kind of holiness doctrine that indicates that you feel yourself far superior to others. Separation in the biblical sense does not have a negative but a positive goal. God wants you to be set apart for Him. In order to help you to reach His standard God gives you the following great promises in which He shows what He does with you and what He wants to be for you.

1. "I will welcome you" (verse 17b). You might ask: 'Was I not already welcomed?' Yes, that's right. But in this verse the point is that you also enjoy it. When you are not separated God cannot let you feel that you are welcome.

V18. 2. "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me." Here also you can ask: 'Was I not so already?' Yes, but He cannot let you feel that you are precious to Him. For example, my children are and will remain my children, no matter what they do. But if they are disobedient I cannot let them feel my love as their father. So it is with the Father in heaven. He cannot recognize His children as His children when they live like the worldly people. He is ashamed of them. He very much wants that His children exhibit His character.

The power to separate lies in "the LORD Almighty". The name "LORD", "Yahweh" indicates the connection God had with Israel and the promises He has given to these people. All these promises will be fulfilled. "Almighty" is the name by which God revealed Himself to Abraham. Abraham is a good example of someone who broke away from his family and

lived separately in a pagan country. He put his faith in God. To him God was the only One Who will fulfill everything He has promised. God is not ashamed to be called his God (Heb 11:16).

How God blessed Abraham! In Isaiah 51 there is a beautiful verse: "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; when [he was but] one I called him" (Isa 52:2) The consequence of your separation could be that you stand alone. Then think of Abraham and see what God did for him. Your obedience will end in God's blessings. Probably you already know God so well that you know that He gives back twofold or threefold of all that you give up for Him. God is no man's debtor.

Now read 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 again.

Reflection: What is the result when you break a wrong connection?

2 Corinthians 7

2Cor 7:1-8 | God, Who Comforts the Downcast

1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Make room for us [in your hearts]; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. 3 I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. 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. 5 For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. 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. 8 For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—[for] I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—

V1. This verse clearly belongs to chapter 6. The promises given at the end of chapter 6 are meant as an encouragement to cleanse yourself. The world is impure and if you stay in touch with the world the impurity will stick to you and defile you. The Lord Jesus would like to present the church to Himself “in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). Spots mar a garment and must be removed. Also the spots that mar the life of a believer must be removed.

“Defilement of flesh” means the visible outward life of the believer. Examine if you are guided by God and by His Word in your behavior, in your speech, in your clothes etcetera or whether you are led by the motives by which unbelievers are led. If you discover that you are guided by wrong motives you need to cleanse yourself. Again: What was the promise?

In addition to this defilement of flesh there is also the “defilement ... of spirit”. The advice to cleanse yourself holds true here as well. The defilement of spirit is a danger that you are constantly exposed to. What are

your reading materials? What kind of movies are you watching? These are things you choose yourself. What fills your thought field? On top of this there are incredible numbers of things which come to you without invitation.

The current thinking in the world is permeated with demonic principles. This is evidenced in the world's acceptance of the alternative style of living together, in same sex marriage and in the lack of acknowledging the authority relationships. I was shocked once when I realized that I also thought the same way as the world thinks on a certain issues. When I looked at this issue in the light of the Bible I saw how my spirit was defiled.

To cleanse ourselves from both the defilement of flesh and of spirit we must read the Word of God. The Bible is compared to water. How it works we read in Ephesians 5: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:25-26). The Lord Jesus is making every effort to bring you in conformity to Himself. The Father desires that He is able to acknowledge you as His child. The Father and the Son give you all that is necessary to help you reach Their standard.

The purpose of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is that you will be "perfecting holiness". God wants you to live totally for Him and for Him alone. If you live "in the fear of God", that is, in reverence and awe for Who He is, you will meet the purpose He has for your life.

V2. In the previous chapter Paul shows how to identify the servants of God. They are not people who make themselves comfortable. They are people who will not spare themselves in order to serve others. The Corinthians knew Paul as such a man. He had sacrificed everything to bring them the gospel. They also accepted it. Now Paul asks if they would again give him a place in their hearts. Did he do any injustice to them when he preached Christ to them? Did he condemn anyone citing wrong reasons? Did he exploit them?

One gets the impression that some people accused him of doing so. Jealous people claiming to be servants of God were whispering into the ears of the Corinthians evil reports about Paul. The danger was that the believers in

Corinth pushed Paul into insignificance and denied him his due place in their hearts. They should not have listened to such people.

V3. Paul says this to teach them a lesson, but please note how he does this. He does this not in the judgmental tone and he does not look down upon them. When someone does this he has already lost what he wanted to win. The apostle reiterates that they had a place in his heart; and what kind of a place? He opens his heart to them. He vents out his feelings toward them, and says how he and they belong to each other in order "to die together and to live together".

Yes, this is a remarkable order. Normally people say that they would first live together and then would die together. But faith and love argue otherwise. In 2 Samuel 15 Ittai says to David: "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be" (2Sam 15:21). David was on the run, and Ittai, although he was with him only for a short time, loved him. That brought him to a complete commitment to David regardless of the outcome. Love sees that there are dangers, but is willing to face them no matter the cost.

In this way Paul speaks to the Corinthians. He loves them and expects their love in return. United in this love they can die together for the Lord and if this is not necessary then they can live together for Him. This sequence shows how his love for them was unshakeable.

V4. In this verse he continues to enumerate the things that must touch their hearts. He does not restrain but he gives a free rein to his heart and feelings. He now writes frankly and without any restraint. He can boast of them to others, for his first letter produced the desired result.

V5-6. How worried he was until Titus arrived with a joyful report. What a consolation his restless heart found in his report. An overflowing joy took possession of him and that in the midst of all afflictions. Indeed Paul had been in great distress in Macedonia. He already mentioned a little about it in chapter 1. In chapter 2 he wrote how troubled he was and how anxiously he was waiting for the arrival of Titus who would come with news from and about Corinth. At that time things were not easy for Paul.

He was surrounded by hostile people and he was troubled in his heart over the uncertainty about the Corinthians.

If you have ever had such feelings yourself, you can imagine what a great relief it was for Paul when Titus brought him the good news that his first letter had the desired effect upon his readers. How much can good news mean for a person! May be you can also be a kind of Titus for believers who have a hard time. Tell or write to them a few nice things from your experience what God can do in the lives of believers. Paul was greatly comforted by what Titus told him.

He received that comfort from the hand of God “Who comforts the depressed”. You see Paul’s mind here. You can be sure that he called upon God for the sake of the Corinthians. He knew that it was not in his hands to change their condition; but it was God who influenced their hearts. That realization brought him down to his knees. He humbled himself before God. A believer who assumes this position always receives comfort.

V7. Paul enjoyed a twofold comfort. First, the report of Titus which assured that the threat of a breach in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians had been averted. Second, he was comforted when he heard that Titus himself was comforted by the Corinthians. When Titus reported this Paul rejoiced even more.

What beautiful moments both would have experienced when they shared their joyful feelings about the Corinthians. Titus also reports about their earnest desire for the apostle. They loved Paul and would have him once again with them. How they mourned when they realized what terrible evil they had tolerated in their midst. That is why Paul had to admonish them sternly (1Cor 5:1-13). It made them zealous to do what Paul had told them in his letter. Paul’s letter produced the right result and he was happy about it.

V8. The fact that the letter caused sorrow was not a matter of grief for Paul. This type of sorrow is necessary. God is not happy to see superficiality in sensing sin. What God expects is genuine sorrow over evil. First Paul regretted having written this letter. He had posted, so to speak, this letter and then he thought of the stern tone of it. Then the big question that plagued him was how the Corinthians would react to the letter. Paul’s

empathy shows that he does not feel exalted over the believers like people who expound the truth coldly and without any feelings for the listeners.

The way he talks here is certainly not inconsistent with the inspiration of the Bible. Some see inspiration as though the writer wrote down like a robot what was dictated to him being completely detached from himself. But that is not inspiration. What inspiration is you can read in 2 Peter 1 (2Pet 1:21). When you read the Bible you will notice that each writer has his own style which is not apart from his personality. This makes the Bible a book in which every word is inspired by God (2Tim 3:16) and in which each writer, chosen to be an instrument of God, retains his own character still.

Verse 8 makes it clear that Paul did not feel sorry for what he wrote but that he was worried about the consequences. This gives a beautiful picture of his love for the Corinthians. Similarly it can happen that you have someone who means a lot to you, such as a friend, and you have to tell him or her something which is altogether unpleasant. But you are constrained to do so out of your love for him or for her. However, having done that the fear then can be that you would lose your friend. But how happy you are when you discover that your admonition did not lead to a rupture in the friendship but it was well received.

Now read 2 Corinthians 7:1-8 again.

Reflection: What is Paul's consolation in this section? Write down for yourself what comfort means to you.

2Cor 7:9-16 | Godly Sorrow

9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to [the point of] repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to [the will of] God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to [the will of] God produces a repentance without regret, [leading] to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, [it was] not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. 13 For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 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. 15 His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. 16 I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.

V9. To cause grief is never a pleasant thing. Also for Paul it was not a pleasure to write to the Corinthians about things that were wrong with them. But now he rejoices because their sorrow proved that they were brought to their senses and that they repented. They realized how low they had dropped in their spiritual condition. This led to their repentance.

Do you realize that repentance is not something only for unbelievers? It applies to believers also. When a believer deviates from the right path by allowing sin in his life he must repent for it. In the book of Revelation you read in chapters 2-3 over and over again of the call to the different local churches to repent for their wrong doing.

Genuine sorrow will bring a sinner to honest confession and he spontaneously goes to God with it. Confession is not something enjoyable. You will certainly find it unpleasant when you have to admit that you have sinned. But where there is such acknowledgment there is joy. Paul rejoiced

that the Corinthians understood their faults and confessed them to God. His letter therefore caused no damage but brought profit.

V10. Sorrow according to the will of God is something which you will never retreat nor regret. That means you have the same kind of feelings of grief over sin as God Himself. This is not a sorrow as seen in the world. People who take no account of God are also sad about the wrong things they committed; but that is not sorrow according to the will of God. The sorrow of the world has nothing to do with sin. It has only to do with the misery that they brought upon themselves.

They regret their acts when they suffer the consequences; but they never regret the act itself. The sorrow of the world does not lead to repentance but to second death which lasts for eternity. Sometimes the sorrow of the world is so intense that people in their desperation even commit suicide.

Are you desperate about the sins you committed in the past? The devil might whisper in your ears that your sins are too big to be forgiven. But he is lying. Read 1 John 1:9 (1Jn 1:9) and do what it says and believe what it says.

V11. The Corinthians proved that their sorrow and their repentance were genuine. Paul had written to them earlier that they should remove the evil from their midst (1Cor 5:13b). Now he can testify that they had shown "earnestness" in the way they dealt with sin and evil.

Their earnestness was associated with "vindication" or "excusing" [this is a better rendering of the word]. They asked, so to speak, the Lord and also Paul to forgive them for their lax attitude and now they even showed "indignation" for the evil they had allowed in their midst earlier. That indignation was not of a fleshly nature, as if they were better than the evildoer. Therefore it says there is "fear" with them, because they know themselves a bit better now.

None can exalt himself over someone who sinned, for he is able to commit the same sin himself. That's why Galatians 6 says that the one who has to deal with the sin of a fellow believer must do so "looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal 6:1). In this spirit the Corinthians could exercise discipline over the evil one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5.

They were seized by a “longing” that impelled them to act as God asked them to do. They showed “zeal” again for the glory of the Lord Jesus in the church. They put everything back in order and that act brought them to the “avenging of wrong”, which means the authentication of their genuine repentance and their zeal to punish evil. Their attitude and the manner of handling issues also showed that they no longer wanted to have anything to do with the sin that happened and was tolerated among them without dealing with it. Thereby they proved themselves “to be innocent in the matter”.

V12. Paul returns to his first letter and says that it was written not primarily because of the one who did wrong or because of the one who suffered wrong. His letter was a kind of a test for them to see if they would obey him. If they would follow the instructions given in it, then it is evidence that they still recognized Paul as a servant of God. By this they also showed that in Paul they met God. Paul’s letter must have given them the feeling that their relationship is directly with God Himself. Happily this had happened and the report from Titus about it comforted him very much.

V13. Paul cannot be silent about the comfort and joy he experienced through their attitude and their way of handling issues. He speaks about them over and over again in this chapter. Paul is overwhelmed by the joy of Titus. By what Titus witnessed among the Corinthians he was not only “comforted” (verse 7) but he also was “refreshed”. He had thus, so to speak, received new courage. Isn’t it encouraging that someone breaks his ties with sin and makes a new beginning with the Lord? This will refresh you.

V14. Paul had another reason for his overflowing joy. He had boasted to Titus about the Corinthians on some matters, of course in a good sense. This is really beautiful. There were many things to criticize. I do not know if Paul told Titus all about them. But there were also good things to share and Paul had done that anyway. He expressed his confidence that they would obey him. Now that his boasting has turned out to be true Paul is not ashamed of the Corinthians. He had told the truth to the Corinthians and to Titus he had mentioned the positive things about the Corinthians.

This is an important lesson. If you see in someone things that are not good, then talk to him about them. But when you talk to another about him, talk about the good things you also know about that person.

V15. When Titus thought of the way the Corinthians received him, he felt an overflowing love for them. He again saw how obedient they were, and also their fear and their trembling. Their complacent attitude as sounded in the first letter has disappeared. Titus was able to see the real work of the Spirit in their midst.

When the Spirit receives access to the life of the church obedience to the Word of God is the inevitable result. Fear and trembling are the characteristics of believers who have learned to judge their own views and their own acts before God. They know very well that nothing good can come out of them. That is why they fear and they only want to hear the Word of God.

V16. You can be confident of a local church which works on such a basis. Then everything that is still not in order will come to order. Paul had every reason to be confident about the Corinthians. Can you say the same of the local church you belong to?

Now read 2 Corinthians 7:9-16 again.

Reflection: How are you talking to others about your brother or sister: in a good or in a bad sense?

2 Corinthians 8

2Cor 8:1-8 | The Grace of Giving

1 Now, brethren, we [wish to] make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, [they gave] of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and [this], not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. 7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, [see] that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking [this] as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul returns to the theme he had already dealt with in chapter 16 of his first letter to them (1Cor 16:1-2). It relates to the financial support of believers who live in poverty. To put it more bluntly he is concerned with the contents of your wallets. It will cost you in terms of money if you delve into this chapter. So consider well before you do this.

In the section which you now have before you Paul in a very impressive way will set you free from your earthly possessions. He deals with this sensitive subject without the slightest self-interest. He speaks not for his own benefit but for the benefit of the suffering believers in Judea. Pay attention to what it's about: he detaches you from your money; that's different from the reverse, that he's trying to detach money from you..

You can learn a lot from the instructions he gives to the Corinthians. He does not speak about the percentage of income one should give. Everyone knows that the Old Testament norm is ten percent of the income. In the New Testament it is not about the amount but about the motive, the mind and the why of giving.

V1-2. One gets the impression that there were believers in Corinth who were wealthy. But Paul does not say that they should give because they were rich. He commends to them the churches in Macedonia as the model. They must learn from them. These churches had every reason to think on themselves only. The believers there were going through tough times; they were going through persecution. Perhaps they were living in terrible poverty due to affliction. But they were not concerned about their own plight. In the midst of affliction they had an overflowing joy in the Lord. That's why they thought of others who were in need, and that is the reason why they were abounding in their giving. That is, as Paul calls it, the "grace of God".

V3-4. That grace had led them to give on their own accord. Here the subject is not about a command or a commandment. On the contrary, you read of these believers in Macedonia that they begged Paul to allow them to give. What was their motive? This attitude is something you can find exclusively among believers who are deeply aware that they are connected to one another as a family. This is the special characteristic of brothers and sisters who have the same new life, the same Father, the same Lord and the same Holy Spirit. They wanted to have a part in the ministry that took place among other believers. So ministry is not only the ministry of the Word but also the ministry in deeds.

Of them Paul could testify that they gave according to their ability and even beyond their ability. They did this because for them giving was a grace. For them giving was not an obligation but a privilege. The one who is of this view does not cling to his money. "It is more blessed to give than to receive", said the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:35).

V5. What the Macedonians gave exceeded the expectation of Paul. What is the secret behind such generosity? That you can find in this verse. First they gave themselves to the Lord. The one who devotedly gives himself fully to the Lord first has no trouble giving his earthly possession to others. He knows full well Who the Lord is and trusts that He will provide all his needs. Did He not say: "The world [is] Mine, and all it contains" (Psa 50:12b)? Someone once said to me: 'You can always keep on giving because you can never empty God.' In other words you can always continue to give away what you receive, for God's resources can never be depleted.

It is the will of God that you first give yourself to the Lord. Next you read that the Macedonians gave themselves to Paul. That means they fully agreed with what Paul exemplified to them as the model for the art of giving. My admonition to you is that you also give yourself to 'Paul'. By that I mean you read his letters from the Bible and listen to his instructions in them and take them to your heart. This is what God expects from you.

V6. With this thought in mind Titus was urged to go to Corinth to take the money which they had laid aside and stored up in response to his first letter (1Cor 16:2). By this act they can participate in the grace of giving. You can notice that in all this there is no trace of manipulation or exploitation for the sake of money. Paul's point is that the believers in Corinth handle money in the right way, in the Christian way.

V7. He points to them the abundance of spiritual blessings they already possessed, namely, "faith and utterance and knowledge". He mentioned these blessings already in 1 Corinthians. There he had to say that they had used those blessings in a fleshly way. Now he speaks positively about them and also adds something more to them. With great joy he speaks to them about the "earnestness" they had shown and their "love" for him. They proved their diligence in listening to what he wrote in his first letter. This also showed their love for him.

Faith and utterance and knowledge were no longer things they wanted to flaunt. Now they enjoyed those fundamental graces in the right way. Their trust in God (faith), how they spoke about it (utterance) and what they knew of God (knowledge) were visible in their lives. Now they should add something more to them. They were allowed to give abundantly and therefore he again uses the word "grace".

V8. To avoid any misunderstanding Paul stresses that he does not give any command. He writes about the diligence of others, i.e. of the Macedonians, to motivate the Corinthians to emulate them in their generosity in giving. He goes further still. A good example has a good following. You also can inspire others to do good by your good example. The subject here is not the sum of money but the motive of giving.

Here Paul adds one more point as the litmus test to prove their love. John writes in his first letter: "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his

brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1Jn 3:17). So John presents in strong terms that someone who sees his brother or sister in need and does not mind about it, though he can, is not a believer at all. In such a person the love of God doesn't dwell.

Your purse is the easiest test for your brotherly love. Paul says here as it were: 'Show that your love for your poor brother is genuine by giving him what you are able to.' This aspect of the test of love you may apply to yourself.

Now read 2 Corinthians 8:1-8 again.

Reflection: What do the Macedonians say to you by their example?

2Cor 8:9-15 | That There May Be Equality

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give [my] opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do [this], but also to desire [to do it]. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as [there was] the readiness to desire it, so [there may be] also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what [a person] has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For [this] is not for the ease of others [and] for your affliction, but by way of equality— 14 at this present time your abundance [being a supply] for their need, so that their abundance also may become [a supply] for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, “HE WHO [gathered] MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO [gathered] LITTLE HAD NO LACK.”

V9. This verse is again the strong evidence that Paul – and you see this with the other Bible writers as well – always brings up the example of the Lord Jesus in the most practical issues. In the forgoing verses he presented the Macedonians as role model; but the example of the Lord Jesus Whom he presents now of course outshines all others.

You indeed also do know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, don't you? The Lord Jesus here is called by His full name. The complete glory of His Person comes to expression in the verse in the middle of the section which speaks about giving. There have been many generous people, but no one has ever given so much as the Lord Jesus.

He was rich. How rich? He is the Creator of heaven and earth. Everything you perceive around belongs to Him. He owns the “world ... and all it contains (Psa 50:12b). Innumerable angels serve Him in heaven. At His command they do what they are asked to do (Psa 103:20). His wisdom is unsearchable and in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). Who could ever estimate how rich the Lord Jesus was?

He renounced all His wealth when He was born as a poor Baby on earth. He was wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in a feeding trough for animals. Of His wealth and wisdom there was nothing to be seen at that time,

although He remained God the Son still in full possession of all Divine wealth. He grew up in the most despised part of Israel, in Nazareth of which it is said: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). As He went through Israel He had "nowhere to lay His head" (Mt 8:20). He did not possess money. To pay the temple tax He had to order a fish to supply the needed amount (Mt 17:24-27). If He needed a boat or a donkey He had to borrow (Lk 5:3; Mt 21:2-3).

At the cross the soldiers tossed dice for His possessions. All that He had were a few pieces of clothing, probably given to Him by some women (Jn 19:23-24; Lk 8:2-3). Even the grave in which He was laid belonged to another: "And Joseph took the body ..., and laid it in his own new tomb" (Mt 27:59-60). What poverty!

We could guess that the Lord Jesus surely had friends and they could have helped Him to make His poverty bearable. He indeed had. But when it really mattered His friends left Him in the lurch (Mk 14:50).

The last thing that still remained, and what remains for every man, was God. Now the real and terrible poverty of the Lord Jesus is clearly shown: even *God* forsook Him. We did not become rich by the material poverty of the Lord Jesus. We could become rich only through what the Lord experienced in the three hours of deep darkness on the cross. There you see the absolute depth of His poverty and the deepest bitterness, because then He was forsaken even by His God. There He was made sin and bore your sins in His own body on the tree. God Himself turned against Him and judged Him.

Why did the Lord Jesus want to endure this terrible poverty? That is said in the next part. It was "that you through His poverty might become rich". He did it all for you who was so incredibly poor – poor through sin. And now you have become so rich, "blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ" (Eph 1:3), "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17), with a dwelling place in the Father's house (Jn 14:1-3). They are too many to enumerate and to be listed. You should stop and think for yourself all that you have received thanks to the poverty of the Lord Jesus. Then you will say: 'What unspeakable riches have I re-

ceived!' Against this background, will it be difficult to give away some of your material wealth? Surely not.

V10-12. Paul says it is 'profitable' for the Corinthians that he shares his opinion in this way with them. And it is profitable for you also. A year ago the Corinthians began to do something for the poor brethren in Judea. They did not simply do it; they desired to wholeheartedly involve themselves in this act. You can give something without knowing why and what for you do it. But it was not so with the Corinthians. But there was something more: they had to finish their task.

You can have the intention to regularly lay aside a certain amount for the Lord's work or for someone who has a need. You might make a good start but after some time you can be slack or careless. There could be all sorts of justifiable reasons. At first you are impressed about a certain need. After some time your willingness diminishes and finally it dissipates into nothing and you stop your giving. Therefore you must be reminded of your original plan and of the good start you made.

It is about what you have. Your giving is acceptable if you have the eagerness, the desire to do according to what you have and not according to what you do not have. "Acceptable" means your gift is accepted with great joy. This joy is with God and those who receive your gift.

V13. In this passage you are not compelled to give more than what you have. Paul is quite sober. The idea is not that you give beyond your capacity to the welfare of others and then beg for your own needs. No, it is about an equal distribution of possessions. From your wealth you give away the superfluous to others to help meet their basic needs. Then there will be equality.

Things must be different with us as believers than in the world. The reason for the unequal distribution of wealth among the nations is man's self-centeredness. While people die of hunger tons of food are destroyed to create an artificial demand and to keep the prices high.

V14. Your abundance may serve the lack of your fellow believers. This act of yours will prompt others to stand by you when you are in need. This happens as something normal in the church of God. This equality is not a kind of communism. Communism says that everything that belongs to

you also belongs to me. In communism one enriches himself at the cost of others. In the church of God it is the other way around. In the church of God one enriches the other at his own cost saying everything that belongs to me belongs to you also. Think again of the example of the Lord Jesus.

V15. To illustrate the principle of equality Paul points to the example of Israel in the manner they collected the manna in the wilderness (Exo 16:18). Every morning the manna was available in abundance as food for the day. There were Israelites who gathered much and there were those who gathered less. Some collected more than they could eat, while others could use some more. What did they do? Whoever collected more than he could eat, gave the superfluous to him who had less. They shared.

I do not think they shared with the lazy Israelites. Also in our days the word applies: "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2Thes 3:10). But when someone was not guilty in which he was not able to collect, for instance because of illness or age, it was shared with him. By the way, what would the one who collected too much do with the superfluous? He could not keep it until the next day, because it was then infested with worms.

So consider the abundance that you might have. It is a better spending to give from your wealth instead of spending it for the worthless things which have no lasting value.

Now read 2 Corinthians 8:9-15 again.

Reflection: Do you cooperate to get equality?

2Cor 8:16-24 | Deacons

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. 18 We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in [the things of] the gospel [has spread] through all the churches; 19 and not only [this], but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and [to show] our readiness, 20 taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 22 We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of [his] great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, [he is] my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, [they are] messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. 24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

After all that Paul had said about giving there is yet an important question that needs an answer. That question is: Who are the ones who ensure that the money – which means all the money and not just a part of it – reaches the right destination? It is good that such ones are regarded for their trustworthiness. When you give money surely you will not be indifferent about whether it reaches its destination.

The people who were entrusted to collect the gifts from the Corinthians and to take them to Jerusalem were introduced to them by Paul. He does this in order not to give the impression that he was seeking his own advantage. He also does this to ensure the Corinthians that their money will be handled with great care. This is a responsibility on his part which he gladly accepts. Checks and balances are essential, even today.

In the church of God money is still collected, usually on the first day of the week (1Cor 16:2). The church has appointed brothers who must take responsibility for the money collected. They are called deacons. There is not just one brother but more than one. The risk of abuse is greater when

money is in the hand of one brother than in the hands of two or three brothers.

Things can happen unintentionally. For instance suppose that the brother who handles money alone needs some money at a certain moment for his private use but he is not able to draw from the bank because he has not enough money on his bank account. But he has in his hands the amount of the collection. Then he takes that amount – as loan of course, with the intention to pay it back. This is postponed due to some unforeseen circumstances. In the meantime he faces some financial problems. Sure you understand well that the brother who handles money alone can easily abuse the responsibility. Therefore each brother appointed to take this responsibility will appreciate doing it with other brothers and be controlled by one another.

V16-17. Who are the people capable of doing this service? Three brothers are presented in this section. The first is Titus. Of him you learn the following: Titus was known to the believers in Corinth and felt related to them. In verse 6 we read that Paul encouraged him to go to Corinth. Here we read that God put the concern into his heart and so he really did not need Paul's encouragement.

Paul underscores the fact that Titus was not an errand boy for him, as though he influenced him to do it. Titus did this on his own accord. So Paul cannot be accused that in a subtle way through Titus he sought his own advantage.

V18-19. Then another brother is mentioned. Paul doesn't mention his name but he mentions his qualities. From this we understand that a brother who is responsible for the believers' money should be faithful and be someone of good reputation. Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 also speak about the qualities such brothers must possess (Acts 6:3; 1Tim 3:8-13).

Paul gives a good testimony about this brother in verse 18. He proved himself in the gospel. Everywhere he was known for his heart for the lost and the poor and for his desire to make known the grace of God to them. So in the church of God someone can be chosen to bring another kind of grace to meet another kind of misery. Again giving is called grace in verse

19. This grace was to meet the material needs of the believers in Jerusalem. This brother must however travel with Titus.

V20. This should further make clear that Paul's only concern in this ministry was the glory of God. That was Paul's concern in whatever ministry he was occupied. This is what you too should remember in everything you do. That Titus takes this brother with him makes it clear that Paul takes all steps to prevent suspicion when he travels with so much money.

V21. It is not only a matter of transparency before the Lord but also before people. He knew full well that God knew him through and through and that nothing can be hidden from Him. He lived accordingly.

A transparent life before God helps in making right decisions. But there is more: you also have to do with people around you. Paul is not so arrogant to say: 'I have got to do only with the Lord. The Lord knows how I am and further I have got nothing to do with anyone else.' No, he is careful about what people could think of him. He did everything to be honest to all people. There are always people who could think bad and talk bad, but that may not stop you from doing all that you can to take from them all ground to accuse you of dishonesty.

V22. A third brother is mentioned who is going with them to pick up the money. This was the brother whom the apostle has "often tested and found diligent in many things". He proved his diligence in all kinds of tasks he was entrusted with. He was not a novice; he was not an inexperienced person who got this important order. Even today it is good that the one who would carry the financial responsibilities before believers proves that he can handle such a task. The certainty that this third person will be well received by the Corinthians further encouraged this brother to do his task. Any task becomes pleasant when people react positively.

V23. Paul again mentions the three brothers whom he presented in the preceding verses and adds something more. With Titus, as a partner, he had a common share in the work among the Corinthians. The other two brothers – mentioned earlier in verses 18,22 – come on behalf of the churches and receive the special title "a glory to Christ". In this purely material service both these brothers radiate the glory of Christ. This expresses the great value of this service in the eyes of God. Can it then be difficult for the

Corinthians to accept these three valuable brothers in a worthy way? They would confidently commit the saved money to these men.

V24. Paul makes the other churches spectators of the Corinthians' behavior. The other churches had already given much. Can the Corinthians be lagging behind in this regard? They must prove their love by their contribution. Their love must be perceptible. Further they should not put Paul to shame by their reception of the three brothers; for he had boasted about them to other churches. Imagine nothing of his boastings is proved true now! Paul was counting that the Corinthians would respond as he expected. Is this not applicable to you also?

Now read 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 again.

Reflection: What are the qualities a brother must have to be a deacon?

2 Corinthians 9

2Cor 9:1-7 | God Loves a Cheerful Giver

1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, [namely], that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; 4 otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. 6 Now this [I say], he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one [must do] just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

V1. The word “for” with which this chapter begins shows that it is connected to the last verses of the preceding chapter. You see this also in verse 3 where again the brothers are mentioned of whom we read at the end of the preceding chapter. Paul speaks of the confidence he has in the Corinthians; he is sure that they would keep their contribution ready by the time he came to them. But note how tactfully he puts it. He tells them that it is actually superfluous for him to write to them about it. He expressly avoids a commanding tone because he is conscious of the delicateness of the subject. The act of giving should be voluntary.

V2. Paul knew their readiness. He had boasted about them to the Macedonians. He had told them how the Corinthians began collecting money a year ago. This had a wonderful effect on the Macedonians. The Corinthian model had inspired the believers there to give what was possible and even more than what was possible. You read about this at the beginning of chapter 8. But there Paul uses the Macedonians conversely as an example for the Corinthians, because the latter had become sluggish in their col-

lection. So you see a mutual reaction. Paul does not set the believers one against the other, but he presents them as models for one another so that one would follow the other in doing good.

It is not his intention to mobilize a contest in giving nor is it his intention to make the believers get discouraged, and think: 'We cannot do what they do.' He also does not specify any amount. His only purpose is to set the believers as models for one another. He could have said enough negative things about the Corinthians, but he did not. He speaks to others about the good things he found in them. We must learn from Paul.

V3. If the danger is that Paul spoke too many positive things about the Corinthians he now attempts to justify his statements. He sends the brothers to them who would see for themselves how far they fared in their collections. If they did not fare well the brothers would help them. If they kept themselves ready then in the event of Paul accompanying them it would not be necessary for him to take back his laudatory statements about them.

V4. The Macedonians will accompany Paul. How would he face a situation if all the statements he made about the Corinthians proved false? No doubt, he will certainly be ashamed of his confidence. Of course the Corinthians themselves would also lose their standing.

V5. You see how Paul helps them by all means to make their promises come true. He does not wait with folded arms and see them fall short and then come with his scathing comments, as we do sometimes. That is why he sent the brothers ahead to arrange beforehand the "bountiful gift", they had "previously promised".

Here the gift is called 'bountiful' or 'generous'. This is a beautiful expression for your gift. With the word 'generous' you think only of the good things and never of the bad things. If giving is generous then you do not think about what you lose but about what good others receive through it. Then you will also not have the unpleasant feeling that you have been forced to part with your money.

Here it is not about the church tax which one must pay to defray the church's cost of maintenance. No, it is about giving, the real giving. Do it not sparingly. Not because others should think high of you. You also should not get a high opinion about yourself saying: 'How good I am.' The

Pharisees gave their alms this way. You must read in Matthew 6 to know how the Lord Jesus warned His disciples for that way of giving (Mt 6:2-4). The danger of this kind of Phariseeism is in all of us.

There is a story in Acts 5 which is meaningful in this regard (Acts 5:1-11). The first Christians were characterized by their practical love for one another. They sold their possessions and laid the money at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-37). Ananias and Sapphira did not want to stand back. They sold a piece of land for a certain amount. Let us suppose they received 5000 dollars for it. They thought that it was too much to give the entire amount. That's why they gave a little less.

There is nothing wrong if they had done so. But they gave as if they gave the entire proceeds of the sale. In reality they took only say 4500 dollars to the apostles. They had no obligation to give everything. Peter says later that they could have done whatever they wanted to do with that money. But they now gave the impression to the Christians that they gave everything sacrificially even though they had put 500 dollars in their pocket. What hypocrisy!

Stop, wait a minute! Do not shout too loud. Indeed, they were hypocrites and liars. But don't you ever project yourself better than you are? God expects from you no more than what you want to and what you can give. This is primarily true of your money, but you also can apply it to your time. You say that the Lord must decide everything for you, but do you really take Him into consideration in all that you want to do? I do not speak about people's general weakness in practice. No, I mean the illusion that we keep up the appearance of a life of surrender, even though there may be things that we know do not fit into a life dedicated to the Lord.

V6. After this foray to Acts 5 we return to the chapter we are in. I wrote: Do not give sparingly. Why not? Because then you don't get back much. In fact giving is compared to sowing. What would you say of a farmer who sows sparsely but expects a huge harvest? Your reaction is obvious. The farmer is not right in his mind. If you sow little you will reap little. The farmer who wants to have a rich harvest must sow with his hands full. This is nature's simple instruction which Paul presents here. Everyone will agree with this fact and this principle applies to giving.

I wonder if you believe in this application. In a slightly different way but with the same goal God Himself says in Malachi 3. I will quote the whole verse to make you aware of the importance, with the hope that you accept this challenge of God; I can assure you that it works: *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,”* says the LORD of hosts, *“if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows”* (Mal 3:10). What a promise of God!

V7. You might ask for a norm for giving. How much one should give? In the Old Testament the Israelites were required to give ten percent of their income. That was the law. Christians no longer live under the law but under grace. Can we use the grace of God to give lesser than what the Israelites had to give? This is just a question. Here it is stated that you may give according as you have decided in your heart. Think about it, pray about it and then give the amount.

Do not give impulsively or triggered by emotion. You might regret it later because you acted carelessly. Do not give if you do not have a desire for it. God does not love the gifts given grudgingly. Do not give either because you laid an obligation on yourself. Forced gifts do not fit Christian giving. Give cheerfully and joyfully. You then experience God’s love in a special way, as it is written here: *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* He loves to see His own features in you. Is He not the great Giver?

Now read 2 Corinthian 9:1-7 again.

Reflection: How do you give?

2Cor 9:8-15 | Thank God for His Indescribable Gift

8 And 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; 9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. 13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for [your] obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, 14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. 15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

V8. Paul is not exhausted by using persuasive arguments to motivate the Corinthians to giving in the right way. His arguments place 'giving' in Divine light. It's not about money-making. It is about an incredible privilege to which special blessings are attached.

You have to do with a mighty God. Do you want to be a cheerful giver? God is able to give you in a mighty way what you need. Not a little, but in abundance. Note these words in verse 8: "all", "always", "all", "everything", "every". Do they not speak of a great abundance?

Does it mean that God will give you much money? This is possible if need be. In any case He makes "all grace abound to you". This is what you need first because giving starts with this. Giving begins with the attitude of your heart and then comes the doing of your hand.

He gives "all sufficiency" not to buy nice things for yourself (although sometimes you can buy nice things), but that you may "have an abundance for every good deed". In 1 Timothy 6 you read that God gives us all things richly to enjoy. But this is immediately followed by the way you may enjoy and that is "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (1Tim 6:17). Can it be clearer? A Christian enjoys giving. Hudson Taylor, the man who founded a great missionary work in China, once said:

‘My experience has been that the more I give to others, my soul is all the more filled with happiness and blessings.’

V9. This verse is a quote from Psalm 112 (Psa 112:9). There some characteristics of a Godly man are cited. One of this is giving to the poor. God gives you certain resources which when you pass on to others you show that you are God-fearing. Whatever you scatter abroad and give to the poor is not lost. God sees it as “righteousness”, because it is a righteous act whose worth remains till eternity.

V10. Again there is a comparison to the sower, as in verse 6, but with a different application. In verse 6 you saw that you cannot expect a great harvest if you sow sparingly. What you reap is dependent on the quantity you sow. Here the lesson is that God gives you earthly possessions in the first place that you might distribute it and after that God provides what you need for a living. First He gives seed and then bread for food. It is about the order in which you deal with your property and your money. Sow and reap. Give first and then take for yourself.

Practically you can do this by first laying aside something from your income and then consider your own needs. God gives both seed and bread. Only His way of calculating is a bit different from the way we often calculate. He gives that we might first give away, and then we take something for ourselves. Often we do it the other way around. First we take for ourselves and then we look if anything is left over for God.

Speaking of calculation, God also multiplies. You get back not only the seed you scattered. You get a lot more so that you can give more in turn. The fruits of such righteous deeds always increase.

V11-12. It creates new wealth with which new deeds of love can be performed. What emerges from this is thanksgiving to God. By this you go a step higher.

The closer we come to the end of the chapter the more cheering is the tone. In the previous verses the scene of action is more the earth with its needs. But in the verses following it terminates in heaven where God is and where grateful hearts praise Him until finally in the last verse God Himself is the object of admiration and adoration.

What a splendid result of a ministry that 'only' satisfies the practical needs of the believers. This service not only alleviates suffering but also leads to a heart overflowing with thanksgiving to God.

V13. The beneficiaries lift up their hearts to God and glorify Him. They do so because they see in the gift the giver's commitment to the gospel of Christ. Their confession is not simply lip service but a service done with their hand. Do you see here that a joyful giving is connected with the obedience to the gospel of Christ?

You thought perhaps that the gospel is meant only for the lost sinners. Of course it has primarily to do with them. A sinner who recognizes that he is guilty before God and sees that he can be saved only by the Lord Jesus from sin and hell will gladly submit to the gospel. But here you must see that as believers the submission should be a permanent attitude and the determining factor in all things pertaining to life.

Who wants to be free from sin and judgment only and then have nothing more to do with the gospel for the rest of his life? The one who argues thus does not give the impression that he is truly converted. Subjection to the gospel with heart and soul also means a joyful submission to the good news (the meaning of the word 'gospel') when it comes to your money.

V14. Apart from the fact that God returns what you gave to Him and to His own – and He always gives more than what you gave to Him and to His own, for He never will be anyone's debtor – there is yet another beautiful result by the recipients of the gift. They will pray for you. It is of immeasurable value that people pray for you and you must appreciate this more than anything else. A special bond is formed through the gift. The receivers of the gift perceive the surpassing grace of God in you.

It is not about praising you and telling you what a great guy you are. When you give, you take part in what is called the "surpassing grace of God". You notice how Paul is searching for words to let them know what great value giving has.

V15. Inevitably he ends up with God as the great Giver. God has given the greatest and absolutely incomparable gift that has ever been given. God could not give a greater proof that He is the Giver than in the gift of His Son. God gave His own, only beloved Son. God did not give Him

impulsively in a fit of emotion. God knew what would happen to His Son, how people would mistreat Him and in the end kill Him by letting Him die the vilest, the ugliest form of all deaths. But God *gave*.

God knew that this 'seed' would bring an enormous fruit. The Lord Jesus Himself said in John 12 when He spoke of His death: "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" (Jn 12:24). The Lord Jesus died as a grain of wheat and you and I and all believers are the fruit thereof. What fruit! "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Now read 2 Corinthians 9:8-15 again.

Reflection: Get on your knees and thank God as the Giver of His Gift and submit yourself to the gospel of Christ by giving.

2 Corinthians 10

2Cor 10:1-6 | The Destruction of Fortresses

1 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I [need] not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 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. 5 [We are] destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and [we are] taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

The final part of the letter begins with chapter 10. In that part (chapters 10-13) Paul defends his apostleship to the church in Corinth. This subject we already came across several times in the first chapters of this letter. Now the apostle elaborates on it.

He did not like this but it became necessary because the honor of his Sender and the wellbeing of the believers were at stake. Certain people had come in Corinth who presented themselves as apostles. They are false apostles who try to put Paul in a bad light with the Corinthians. We will see how they proceed in this. They do this with the intention to separate the believers in Corinth from Paul and connect them to themselves. The sad thing is that the Corinthians listen to them.

It also happens today. One has a work among a group of believers and then other people come and criticize that work and they do this to gain entry into that work. Perhaps you have also discovered in yourself how prone you are to believe the evil that is told about someone. It is good to see how Paul responds to all this suspicion. He does not beat his fist on the table to legitimize his authority. You can learn a lot from the way he exhorts the Corinthians. In this he follows the Lord Jesus in His footsteps.

V1. That he takes this matter personally to heart he explains clearly saying: "Now I, Paul, myself." He does this, not to defend his person, but his service. His attitude toward the Corinthians is an attitude of "meekness and gentleness". This is a spiritual masterpiece. To keep one's face like flint and react in such a way, is a real hard job. This is not possible unless you live close to the Lord. You can learn from Him Who said: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt 11:29).

Meekness and gentleness are not traits that are appreciated in the world. It is considered weakness there. In the world one must use high flown words and grandiose language to defend one's position. People impress others to push their case. But an attitude of meekness and gentleness doesn't mean that you are a wimp or a softy. The Lord Jesus also did not mince words but called a spade a spade. Plainly and right to their face He said to the pharisees and the scribes that they were hypocrites. So also Paul expresses himself clearly and authoritatively in his defense.

At the end of verse 1 Paul ironically quotes what the false apostles said about him. They said that he behaved very humbly when he was with the Corinthians but had a big mouth when he was far away from them.

V2. Paul says that he does not hope that it would be necessary to prove that this representation of him is pulled out of thin air. He wants to give in an unequivocal manner a strongly worded answer to the people who accused him of walking "according to the flesh". To walk "according to flesh" means to speak and act from fleshly motives. But that was not the way Paul wanted to deal with things that came up against him.

V3-4. That he walked "in the flesh" was not anything special, for flesh here means body. Every man walks in the flesh.

The warfare Paul had to do with – and which every Christian has to do with – is not a struggle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers. This struggle cannot be fought with carnal resources. Ephesians 6 speaks about the armor with which the spiritual battle must be fought (Eph 6:10-20). There you find spiritual weapons such as 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God', and 'prayer'. These are not weapons of the flesh but Divinely powerful weapons. With them you can achieve victory and destroy the fortresses of the enemy.

V5. What these fortresses are, you read in this verse. They are “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”. Summarized in one word it is the pride of man. Such man is always busy seeking arguments in everything for his own advantage. It never occurs to him to acknowledge that God is above him and everything. You come across this attitude when you share the gospel with people. Of course we cannot expect anything else from unbelievers but unfortunately this is prevalent even among believers. Paul writes to such people.

The Corinthians came under the influence of such people. These intrusions, the spirit of thinking and speaking which gained entry among the Corinthians could be overcome only by the power of God. As for the world they are foolish weapons used by the believing warriors.

To the world the Bible is an ancient book and praying is a sign of weakness. The inhabitants of Jericho may have laughed themselves sick when the Israelites marched around their city once every day for six days and even seven times on the seventh day. Every time they finished one round nothing happened. How foolish it would have appeared to do the same again the next day. But on the seventh day while they were on the seventh round suddenly it happened. The walls came tumbling down. The people took Jericho which was said to be invincible. They defeated the mighty city with its high walls not in their own strength but by doing exactly what the Lord told them to do.

The method might have looked foolish in the eyes of the inhabitants of Jericho but that was the way to victory. This is the way Paul also wanted to destroy the fortresses of the enemies in Corinth. In this way in the power of God – not in your own strength – you can also conquer people who appear to be invincible.

Paul would come to Corinth and share his strategy which would, he expected, help Christians taking “captive” every imagination of the false apostles who brought the Corinthians under their influence. The wrong thinking is called the enemy here. The thoughts formed in their brain were considered huge dangers against the believers. They brought them to a wrong path, a path that did not lead them to Christ but to their own self. The only solution was to take those thoughts into captivity.

Paul wanted to show them what were the intentions of the false apostles, what stood before their eyes, and he wanted to direct the thinking of the Corinthians back to Christ and make them obedient to Christ. That was the goal of his own life, and this goal stood before his eyes for everyone who was converted through his ministry.

You also, keep this goal before your eyes. Don't give in to all kinds of impressing speeches of people who have a great show, but who don't direct your thoughts on Christ. The touchstone to appraise if your work is done in the right way is to test if your work redounds to the glory of God and if it magnifies the Lord Jesus.

V6. Paul was ready to punish all disobedience. Disobedience is the basic sin in the believer's life that can in no way be tolerated. Paul in his wisdom did not punish disobedience immediately. First the Corinthians had to show that they obeyed his first letter in everything. Even when it comes to pointing out and condemning the wrong things patience is necessary. Not all wrong issues were taken up immediately and addressed simultaneously.

Don't you also agree that the Lord was patient with you and led you step by step on the path of obedience? And that He endured so many wrong things you committed until the moment when He showed them to you, and you in turn could condemn them and put them away?

Now read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 again.

Reflection: What are the strongholds in your life that still need to be pulled down?

2Cor 10:7-18 | To Everyone a Sphere

7 You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, 9 for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. 10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." 11 Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons [we are] also in deed when present. 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. 13 But we will not boast beyond [our] measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting beyond [our] measure, [that is], in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, 16 so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, [and] not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. 17 But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. 18 For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

V7. We all easily fall into the same error in which the Corinthians fell: to look at what is before our eyes or to observe things as they are outwardly. Someone who is able to keep up appearances, flexible, accommodative and smooth-tongued impresses us more than a puny little man who moves stiffly and has a simple message. The false apostles knew how to cash in on the human weakness of the Corinthians and find an entry among them. Paul did not have an impressive appearance. He makes clear to them that if these people claim that they belong to Christ, he also can in all respects. They must know it for certain.

V8. He could boast of the authority the Lord has given him. The false apostles could not claim that. This authority was not purposed to destroy but to

build them up. Paul always saw his ministry and authority in view of the welfare of the church and did not use it for his own pleasure. Also in this he followed his Lord. The Lord Jesus never used His authority to defend Himself. He always used it to stand up for the honor of His Father.

If Paul used his authority to destroy, then that happened in his love for the Corinthians. He destroyed in them the things and thoughts that did not agree with the thoughts of God. In that way they would again be able to accept the apostle's edifying instructions. There was no need for him to be ashamed of his authority. He did not abuse it as it occasionally happens today with spiritual leaders.

V9. Paul was accused that he was trying to terrify the Corinthians by his letters. According to some opinions he used in his letters a threatening language in the sense of: 'If you do not listen to what I say you will reap the consequences.' But threatening is something different from warning. Warning means that you make another aware of certain hazards and help him avoid such dangers. He will be grateful for it. To threaten is to instill fear. Warning happens out of concern.

V10. Paul warned not to be misled by people who said that he was an unbalanced person. They said that he has a big mouth in his letters but as a person he is meaningless. To put it in modern terms: he had no charisma. You cannot pull down a person better than by making people to talk about him like that. Tell around that he is moody; he talks one thing one time and another at another time and then the confidence in him is gone.

V11. Well, Paul clearly says that someone who talks like that is missing the mark considerably. There was no difference between his letters and his appearance. Whoever drew this conclusion from his humble demeanor that he had no courage to sort out the misunderstanding with the Corinthians was wrong. In chapter 1 Paul says why he had not gone to Corinth: it was to spare them (2Cor 1:23). That is something different from not daring. In his letters as well as in his appearance he shows clearly what he is about. Misunderstanding is ruled out. From this you can learn that it is important that others know what you are and that you do not behave differently on different occasions.

V12. In this verse the irony sounds again. Paul did not dare to be counted one with the false apostles nor compare himself with them. Of course he never wanted that. They were people who recommended themselves. Never believe people who are self-satisfied. They cannot stop talking about all of their fabulous performances and capabilities. It is amazing how many fall for it over and again. In times of political elections the top candidates of a party flaunt the most impressive feats of their party to convince voters that their party deserves the support of the voters. They all recommend themselves.

In professing Christianity also spiritual leaders boast of their qualities and achievements just to get more followers. They are not like the Lord Jesus even a little bit. They compare themselves with themselves and not with Him, Who is the only standard around which all else revolves. Paul calls them "not wise". To him they disqualified themselves. Of course it is an embarrassment to the people who boasted in their understanding.

V13. Paul was not thinking about himself. His thought was about the Lord and His work. For this work the Lord had given him a sphere. He had no say in this.

You also have your own sphere of activity. This is your residential area. Let your light shine there in front of the people who live there. Do not work in an area where you know that there are other believers working for the Lord. Respect their work. You also would not be happy to find others work in your area in a competitive way. Such activities do not build up but destroy.

V14. Corinth lay in the area which God allocated to Paul. So it was the Lord Who brought the Corinthians in contact with Paul and it was he who preached the gospel to them. Would they now turn away from him and listen to people who had infiltrated into his area?

V15. These people wanted to adorn themselves with the results of the work that Paul had done among them. It was a clever method which Paul did not approve. He would not enter an area where others had already begun their work for the Lord. He did not want to decorate himself with borrowed plumes. What he was hoping was that they would grow in their faith. Now their growth in faith has come to a standstill through the influ-

ence of the false apostles. If you begin listening to the insinuations of false apostles against a true servant of God, that would be a major obstacle to your spiritual growth.

If their faith must again start growing – and this could happen only if they condemned the negative influences – then Paul would enjoy more esteem than he had. The way will then be free again to instruct them further in the truth.

V16. The way would also be free to travel to other areas where Christ had not been preached. But Paul was prevented from going further with the work, for the Corinthians, his ‘problem children’, had to be dealt with first. Even now it can still happen that a servant of the Lord must devote all his time and energy to deal with all kinds of problems among believers and that he finds no time to preach the gospel to the unbelievers. If Paul will be able to go to other regions where other workers had already brought the gospel it was not to take credit.

V17. Besides, he is not at all concerned to boast in himself. He says again what he wrote in his first letter (1Cor 1:31) that one should boast only in the Lord, for He is the One Who produces results.

V18. The best yardstick to assess a servant of the Lord is to see if he recommends himself by speaking of himself, or whether he is recommended by the Lord and is his service all about the Lord Jesus Christ. That makes clear if someone is a tried and tested servant.

Now read 2 Corinthians 10:7-18 again.

Reflection: What is the sphere God has assigned to you?

2 Corinthians 11

2Cor 11:1-4 | Simplicity and Purity to Christ

1 I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. 2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you [as] a pure virgin. 3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity [of devotion] to Christ. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear [this] beautifully.

Paul continues to unmask the false apostles who spread lies about him. May be you are thinking now whether it is necessary that we know so much detail about Paul's defense. Yes, this knowledge of his defense is important for our time. Indeed there are still people today who argue that we do not need to attach authority to what Paul wrote. They also assert quietly that Paul at certain instances was totally wrong and that he was not in step with his times. The people who maintain this position present themselves as people who know the Bible well. This includes even theologians.

But criticism of Paul ultimately is criticism of God Himself Who gave the order to Paul to write. So it is good that you get to grips with all his arguments and by doing so you will not get upset in case you meet people who have something to find fault with Paul.

The way the apostle speaks to the Corinthians makes it clear how severely they were influenced by the false apostles. Paul is forced to compare his doings to the people who claim the Corinthians for themselves. These comparisons must open the eyes of the Corinthians to the duplicity of the false apostles who professed to have come with a message from God.

V1. He first asks if they are willing to endure a little folly from him, for it is foolish to talk about oneself. At the end of the previous chapter he said that it was important that God recommended someone instead of one recommending himself. But note well that what he does happens out of

necessity. He pleads to bear with him, for he must say a few things which may not be pleasant.

V2. He does so because he is “jealous”. The word jealousy is used in the good sense here. Normally one thinks jealousy is something wrong and something negative. When your friend has something which you do not have, you can easily feel a sense of jealousy rising in you. With Paul it is about a jealousy which God also has. There can be nothing wrong in it; it is a jealousy that has to do with love.

Through his ministry Paul had related the believers in Corinth with Christ. He compares this to an engagement. When young people get engaged a connection which goes far beyond friendship is established. You can have many friends but only one fiancé or fiancée. Certainly the person whom you are engaged to would relate only to you. None of you will have a similar connection with anybody else and if it happened, then that would strain the relationship and things would be very difficult for both concerned. Then the partners will be jealous also. You want the love of your engaged partner wholly for yourself and you are right. This is God’s jealousy which Paul expressed, because the Corinthians had turned away from the Christ Whom Paul had preached and instead listened to what the dissemblers preached.

He compares the Corinthians to “a pure virgin” and this applies to the whole church. A pure virgin has had no marital relationship with a man. If the church forgets her relationship with Christ and connects with the world then that causes great grief to the Lord Jesus.

V3. Paul fears that the church is becoming less and less aware that her love must be directed only to the Lord Jesus, her Bridegroom. The reason is that the church, like Eve, fails to discover the craftiness of Satan. You find this illustration Paul cites in Genesis 3. In paradise the serpent came to Eve. The serpent is the devil (Rev 12:9; 20:2). He was crafty in approaching Eve. He does not approach with a coarse lie. No, first he quotes something that God had said. But watch out. He twisted the words of God (cf. Gen 3:1 and Gen 2:16).

This is the first mark of Satan. He always quotes from the Word of God in a way that raises doubts. Then he says bluntly that God doesn’t make true

what He has said (cp. Gen 3:4 and Gen 2:17). Finally he replaces God's Word with his own lies (Gen 3:5).

The allurement of this lie is underscored by what Eve sees when she looks at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She concludes how gorgeous it looks. It is exactly as the serpent said! Can he be wrong then? When it came this far evil was already born. Eve had already forgotten what God had said and her thoughts were tainted by what the serpent said. What should she have done? She should have stuck to what God had said.

But is it any better in the church? Did the church always consult the Word of God when something had to be done or is she misled by rhetoric? I am afraid of the latter. The church has departed from the simplicity and purity to Christ. Her thoughts didn't remain fixed on Christ alone. Simplicity means that there is only one object on which you are focused.

Purity is abandoned and the church is defiled through its dealings with the world. The church has begun to think and act more and more like the world. The church has begun to be like a commercial enterprise that is governed in the ways of the world. What do you think of the World Council of Churches that has mixed up with all kinds of political issues, sometimes even providing funds for arms purchases? It goes so bad when thoughts are corrupted and Christ is no longer the only object in the heart of the believers.

V4. As for the Corinthians they fell in danger even to the extent of rejecting Paul because he seemed not to be a genuine apostle. What he told them perhaps was too simple and too radical. Do you really have to live all alone for Christ? Is Christ to have the full authority over their lives? The teachers who came after Paul had views that were easier to accept. The other Jesus they preached was better to them. This is one who does not ask everything of you, as Paul preached to them, pushing to the background what the true Jesus did for them.

This "different spirit", the spirit which these teachers brought to them, they easily accepted because it left them some more room for their own thoughts. The Holy Spirit they received did not give room for this. The Holy Spirit Who would guide them into all truth (Jn 16:13) was pushed to the background. A "different gospel", a comfortable gospel that not called

for radical conversion, not a thorough self-judgment, was easier to accept than what they heard and accepted from Paul. Paul indeed exposed the utter bankruptcy of man. But wasn't there still something good in man?

Such arguments as these were accepted by the Corinthians. They proved how much they had opened themselves to the corrupting influences of the false apostles and how those influences had worked in them. Take the lessons to your heart. Keep yourself focused on what God has said in His Word and let your eyes be focused on the Lord Jesus alone.

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 again.

Reflection: What is the best thing you can do to prevent the serpent from leading you astray?

2Cor 11:5-15 | Paul and the False Apostles

5 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. 6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not [so] in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made [this] evident to you in all things. 7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? 8 I robbed other churches by taking wages [from them] to serve you; 9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows [I do]! 12 But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

V5. Paul was blamed of all kinds of evil. All kinds of nasty gossip about him did the rounds. The false apostles brought bad stories into circulation that were well received by the Corinthians. Since their entire Christian life was at stake Paul started his defense. Paul could not let the Corinthians fall prey to the swindlers, for he loved them too much. Therefore he feels compelled to speak about himself and to show the Corinthians the difference between the way he worked among them and the way those abusers lived among them. You realize the irony when he says in verse 5 that he can very well measure up to those ‘super’ apostles.

V6. Did they say of him that he was not fluent in his exposition? It could have been true although he does not comment on that. But what he possessed was “knowledge” and that they could not dispute but had to admit. Had he not told them? In his first letter he wrote to them that they had been made rich in Christ, in whom they possessed all knowledge (1Cor 1:5). How did they reach that standard in their knowledge? Was he not the

means for this? They did not owe it to the intruders who wanted to come in between them and him.

V7. There was another difference between him and those fake apostles. He never accepted even a penny as support from the Corinthians while those others did. His way of expressing this should have touched their hearts. It looks as if they considered it a sin that he kept himself independent of them. His so called sin was that he refused to accept any money from them.

He lets them know that in this way he purposely kept himself humble so that they could be exalted. He preached to them free of cost and now they cannot say that he went to them with the intention to earn something. He had in his mind only their wellbeing, namely, that they would be set free from sin and be brought to the heart of God.

The false apostles found in his selflessness a new argument to slander him. They said that every servant who had self-respect must take money from the church he served. That Paul accepted no money from them proved that there was something wrong with him. There was certainly something wrong but that was not with Paul but with the Corinthians themselves. If he had taken money they would have had another reason to boast. They could have shown to others how good they were that it was they who helped him do his work. This is what Paul did not want. His concern was that God alone must be glorified.

V8. He accepted money from other churches but these churches, unlike the Corinthians, were spiritually mature. He accepted from them because he was sure of their good motives for their giving. They financially supported the Lord's work and did not brag about their generosity. These churches gave but they did not lay any claim on Paul. You see, giving is not only an act but it is also an attitude.

V9. However, here the subject is not primarily about the giver but the receiver. Paul was not someone who accepted automatically what is given to him. During his stay with the Corinthians he had some needs but he never mentioned that to them. This is something that you need to learn from Paul. Supposing you are short on cash, do not try to tell it to others. Tell it to the Lord and He will provide. "For your heavenly Father knows that

you need of all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:32-33).

Quite a lot of begging letters are sent from Christian missions or about Christian works. It's difficult for me to call such letters 'ornaments of faith'. Such workers are not bothered from where or from whom they receive the money. As for Paul he didn't work that way.

The wealthy believers among the Corinthians must have been shocked to hear that Paul had suffered need during his stay with them. I imagine that their faces blushed when they read that it was the poor Macedonian believers who supplied his needs. Anyway Paul had deliberately avoided financial support from the Corinthians and would not accept it for now either.

V10. He emphasizes his stand in this matter in strong terms saying: "The truth of Christ is in me." He knew what he said and what he did. He was not easily brought to another way of acting. First he was waiting for a tangible change in the Corinthians. For him the proclamation of Christ was the focal point. Everything was subject to that. If he accepted money from the Corinthians then the danger would be that "this boasting" – that is the proclamation of Christ and nothing else – of him would have stopped.

V11-12 That again could be misinterpreted. They could say that they in fact were keen to give something but Paul did not allow them, and he certainly did not love them. However, he does not speak about it. A skeptic cannot be convinced of the truth. Paul says that God is the Witness of his love toward them. Incessantly he will yield to his beloved children in the faith and refute every argument of the deceivers. These deceivers will be revealed as false apostles, as he is revealed as a true apostle.

V13-14. And then he says straight away what kind of people they were who wormed their way into the Corinthian church. They were servants of satan. In appearance they were apostles of Christ but in reality satan was their lord. They could speak beautifully with their sugar-coated tongues, but their words were full of deadly poison. This exactly is what satan does. He presents himself as "an angel of light", but he leads you into darkness.

In the world countless number of young people walk after him with their blind eyes wide open. He promises them a brilliant experience, but he

leads them in the way of death. It is not different in Christian territory. He knows how to twist things so that you think you are dealing with something Christian, whereas in reality it is something antichristian. Don't be fooled.

There is a good way to escape his craftiness, and that is by engaging yourself with Christ and with God's Word. Fake is determined by comparing it with what is real. Those who deal with currency notes easily find out the fake currency by their profound study of the real. They need not study and compare all kinds of fake currencies, for they are many and different. Banknote forgers always try other ways. This is a good comparison to discover whether what is coming to you is counterfeit or real. That is what Paul does here. He shows what a real, true apostle does. This we will see in a clear way when he speaks about his suffering as an apostle.

V15. What satan does is also evident in his servants. You need not wonder about that. They pose as champions of righteousness but pull you from the true goal of life. The true goal is to glorify Christ in all areas of your life.

People who conscientiously strive to hinder this goal will have an end in accordance with their deeds. After they have carried out the work of satan to its completion they will share their end result with satan and follow him into hell.

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:5-15 again.

Reflection: What do you learn from Paul's attitude to false accusations?

2Cor 11:16-23 | Paul, a Fool and Speaking Foolishly

16 Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if [you do], receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little. 17 What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. 19 For you, being [so] wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. 20 For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. 21 To [my] shame I [must] say that we have been weak [by comparison]. But in whatever respect anyone [else] is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

V16. The apostle had to say that he was constrained to talk about himself again and again. His heart was full of Christ and he only wanted to talk about Him. But since his apostleship has come under attack now and thus indirectly his Patron and the gospel which he preached to the Corinthians and by which they came to the faith, he now had to defend his apostleship. He loved Christ and the believers in Corinth so much that he could not bear to see the servants of satan do their pernicious work among them.

They should not think that he was a fool. But if they thought so, let them take him for granted. He wanted to boast a little and list off just a few things which showed them the kind of servant that he was. Again: he did it reluctantly.

V17-19. He knew full well that the Lord would not like such kind of boasting. But he also knew that the Lord considered that he did it for their sake. It is like an unwilling child who needs a spanking. It is not a pleasure to do it but it is necessary.

The Corinthians bore well with every kind of foolish people like the false apostles who boasted about anything and everything. They considered themselves wise and thought that they could judge what these people brought. Well, if they were really wise they would also be able to judge what he as the true apostle had to say.

V20. Paul lists off all that they tolerated from the false apostles. They allowed them to “enslave” them. They had let themselves be taken captive by these fraudsters in their thoughts, probably because they again preached the law as a rule of life. This was in contrast to the liberty in Christ that Paul had preached to them and by which he had bound them to Christ and not to himself.

They would even tolerate anyone who ‘devoured’ them and ‘took advantage’ of them. The false apostles had demanded that the Corinthians must contribute toward their livelihood. They had gained entry into the houses and once they gained the acceptance of the inmates they took money from them. This is in contrast to the attitude of Paul who never wanted to accept any money from them.

Those people placed themselves above the Corinthians and assumed a glamorous status. The Corinthians had to listen to what they had to say. This is in contrast to the humble attitude that characterized Paul when he was with them. Probably those people did not spare them even from physical violence. It seems the term “hits you in the face” at least means that. It can also mean that they used a hurting and mocking language to humiliate the Corinthians. This is in contrast to the loving attitude of Paul who spoke of himself as a father and so dealt with them (1Cor 4:15).

V21. ‘I know well’, says the apostle, ‘that my behavior brings “shame” on me and that I’ve been too “weak” in the way I handled.’ But he considered it a privilege, for that was the way he wanted to serve them.

It is strange that believers can accept a lot from false teachers and how little they can accept from the real servants of God. It seems that believers quickly want to hold fast to things which are wrong. If this is pointed out to them, they will not accept it with gratitude. There are still others who let your conscience remain undisturbed. They ask a lot and persuade you to consider it as payment for their services. The believers in turn persuade themselves to believe that they have fulfilled their obligations and therefore they are free to live their life according as they like to. Please note that he is talking about believers and not about unbelievers. This must speak to you and me.

The characteristics of the false apostles Paul presents here to the Corinthians are found in the many sect leaders who are found in the Christian field today. Sect leaders are often leaders with charisma who have the answers for all things from the Bible. They are present in any community of believers regardless of denomination. From the Bible they take up any particular truth and mix it up with error so cleverly that error is made attractive and therefore the more deadly.

The reason why they get easy access to many believers is that the believers do not study the Bible themselves. Countless Christians have left the job to their leaders. This happens nearly in every faith community. This is a grievous evil through which the false servants can easily do their deadly work and lead many ignorant believers astray from the truth. Therefore the exhortation: Listen to what Paul says, for he tells the truth.

To underscore this Paul now tells his experiences in the service of his Lord. Against this the false apostles would have no answer. Before he begins he again expresses his aversion about telling these experiences. He uses the words "foolish" and "foolishness" to let the Corinthians feel how far they had gone away from the truth that he had to do that. The other side of the coin is that God uses the Corinthian situation to give you a glimpse of what this man went through during the course of his service for the Lord.

Did the false teachers venture to talk about themselves? Well, he also had the courage to do so although it is foolish and unwise to talk about oneself. He could compete with them!

V22. Did they brag about their Jewish ancestry? He could also. By the way, you can derive from this that these false apostles probably had a Jewish background. Note my comment on the expression "if anyone enslaves you" in verse 20. With the term "Hebrews" he refers to a nation that remains separated from other peoples while going through this world. "Israelites" denotes a people belonging to God. "Descendants of Abraham" denotes a people to whom God has given the promises. These descriptions are used to identify his lineage and his background. In all these he did not lag behind others in anyway.

V23. What follows now is an impressive example of his dedication in the service of Christ. It is no longer about the nice talks, but about what we are

willing to do for the Lord. Did they dare to call themselves “servants of Christ”? He will report about his service for Christ. Then they must come to the conviction that in this service he was head and shoulders above those other ones.

He felt like “insane”, he felt a great reluctance to speak like this, but he had no alternative. The Corinthians had to be convinced that the people who had infiltrated them were not the true ministers of Christ.

Their relationship with Paul was at stake and thereby their relationship with Christ. When they said ‘good bye’ to Paul and swapped him with the false apostles they also did the same with Christ Whom he preached to them. He had to speak this way for the sake of Christ’s honor and for the sake of the certainty of the faith of the Corinthians.

Paul sets off. He presents an impressive list. Without any exaggeration he lists off all that he did, faced, and felt. It is not a success story or boasting. They are just sober facts about the life of a servant who put his heart and soul into the task that the Lord Jesus had given him.

If you thought that serving the Lord is a cake walk, then you will be disappointed. You can see here that it is associated with anxiety and resistance. This is not mentioned in this section of the Bible to discourage you but to show you how much a man who loves his Lord must endure. Several of the different experiences Paul mentions can be found in the book of Acts. The Lord is still the same and He wants to help you through all your sufferings for Him, although in most cases it will not be as hard as what Paul delineates here. In some cases, however, it will be so.

Let us take the first point: “In far more labors.” You can imitate this. Paul had a special service. What he experienced, nobody else has experienced. But still it remains true that you can also dedicate yourself fully to what the Lord wants you to do.

Then he talks about his circumstances. He often was in jail. That was not a luxury apartment that people call, at least in the Western world, prison today. They were often dark dungeons, underground passages, swarming with vermin, damp and musty smelling. The treatment one received there was not polite. He had never landed there because he committed a crime;

it was always as a result of the hatred of the Jews, because he had preached about Jesus in that particular place.

He was not spared from physical violence. He received a lot of punches. This was quite an experience beyond description. But he could not be crushed. He continued the work with renewed zeal and enthusiasm. It is remarkable that he never used the special power of the Spirit that was in him to save himself from any difficult situation; in this he faithfully imitated the Lord Jesus.

“In danger of death” means that the dangers of death were nothing unusual for him. This might sound simple but think how he might have felt when his life was at stake. It was not disease that was going to kill him but hostile people who were thirsting for his blood.

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:16-23 again.

Reflection: When should you speak for yourself and when should you not?

2Cor 11:24-33 | Paul's Sufferings

24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine [lashes]. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 [I have been] on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from [my] countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 [I have been] in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from [such] external things, there is the daily pressure on me [of] concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? 30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, 33 and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and [so] escaped his hands.

V24. The Jews had given him no less than five times “thirty nine [lashes]” (literally “forty [stripes] minus one”). The law actually sanctioned forty stripes (Deu 25:3). To be careful not to exceed the sanctioned number by a counting error they stopped with thirty-nine stripes. Imagine the kind of experience this might have been. It was not a pleasant experience when it happened for the first time. But at each subsequent time he knew what awaited him.

V25. By being beaten with rods his back was torn open three times. ‘Only’ “once” he “was stoned”. Normally this happens only once; that is the reason why his enemies drew him out of the city supposing him to be dead (Acts 14:19).

Three times he was passenger on a ship that suffered shipwreck. He drifted on the sea for twenty-four hours before he was rescued.

V26. He was constantly travelling to places to preach the gospel. Travelling those days was a dangerous thing. There were no modern road networks with bridges and tunnels as we see today. It was a real risk to cross fast flowing “rivers”.

Added to these were dangers from the side of men: of “robbers”, “countrymen” (Jews) and “the Gentiles” (heathens). The “city” offered no protection, nor did “the wilderness” and nor did “the sea”. Nowhere was he safe, nowhere did he have a resting place.

V27. And if he thought he could take some free breathing space in the church, then there were the false brethren, pretending to be members of the church, but who in reality twisted the truth of God.

The great apostle was not called to a life of ease. His calling meant

1. working very hard – “in labor and hardship”,
2. always watching out – “through many sleeplessness nights”,
3. very little to eat and to drink – “in hunger and thirst”,
4. many times to abstain voluntarily from food – “often without food” or “in fastings often”,
5. suffering freezing temperatures and having little clothing to become warm – “in cold and exposure”.

That Paul did not act as a stoic in these hardships is evident from 2 Timothy 4 where he asks Timothy to bring him his cloak (2Tim 4:13). In my opinion he would not have requested for the cloak if he could warm himself up comfortably under the sun.

V28. What probably pained him the most was his “daily pressure ... [of] concern for all the churches”. You read that it was “on” him. Wherever he preached the gospel churches were established. That was a joyful matter, but it did not stop with that. It is important that the believers in these new churches grew in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and that they were not slack in knowing the mind of God for their life. The enemy, the devil, did (and does) everything, as is his wont, to bring things into believers’ life to make them backslide into acts which bring dishonor to the Lord’s Name. Paul was very concerned about this.

V29. This list shows that when we deal with Paul we do not deal with him as with a ‘muscleman’ but as with someone very weak. No one can survive such hardships with one’s own strength. Is there anyone who underwent more hardships to prove that he supersedes Paul in his weakness? There is

only One Who surpasses Paul in weakness and that is the Lord Jesus. "He was crucified because of weakness" (2Cor 13:4).

The awful experiences of Paul would have served other people to stumble and they would have given up following the Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul's burning love for Christ kept him going ["led into sin without my intense concern" is literally "made to stumble and I do not burn"].

V30. Does this magnify Paul? No, he rejects all honor for himself. If he boasts at all he boasts in his weakness. Through all his experiences he felt the weakness deeper and deeper.

V31. He repelled all accusation of ambition or self-exaltation or selfishness with a powerful appeal to "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever". God knows that Paul is not lying and right through all the sufferings that came upon him Paul praises Him.

V32-33. Oh yes, there is something else which comes to his mind, and this makes him still weaker and smaller than what he was hitherto. Once he escaped from his enemies in a very humiliating and awkward way. How nice if it were such a miracle that his enemies were struck with blindness or got paralyzed or deceived or cleverly hoodwinked. No such thing.

Once when he was in a city under siege by his enemies who desired to arrest him, he was let down in a basket through a window in the wall. Can you imagine the great apostle hanging in a basket? That was not a great escape which impressed people nor did it create a sensation, was it? Yes, such is this apostle.

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:24-33 again.

Reflection: What are your weaknesses in the light of what Paul portrays here (it need not be the same as his).

2 Corinthians 12

2Cor 12:1-6 | Caught up to the Third Heaven

1 Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. 5 On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to [my] weaknesses. 6 For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain [from this], so that no one will credit me with more than he sees [in] me or hears from me.

This section is the climax in Paul's defense. The experiences mentioned earlier made a big dent in the claims of the false apostles and now they disappear totally. None of the false apostles can excel Paul in his experiences he narrates here. These are experiences unique to Paul, the others are by far the lesser. And that is not because he is so great; he has stressed that all the time.

This section deals with the special honor God gave him, namely, that he was caught up to the third heaven. This had to be the ultimate proof to the Corinthians that he was a real God-sent servant.

From the way he describes this experience we can conclude that Paul is not saying this for his own glorification. He speaks of "a man in Christ" (verse 2). It sounds as if he is speaking of someone else. But he speaks of himself. This can be derived from verse 7 where he speaks in the first person singular, namely, 'I' and 'me' while describing his special revelation.

V1. As we begin this section first I would like to point out the big difference this has with the last verses of the previous section. There Paul was let down in a basket to escape from his enemies. Here he is caught up to the third heaven. In the previous section he talks about his weakness and

therein he wants to boasts. Everything he experienced made him small but made Christ great. Now he writes about his special experience which no one else ever had.

He writes about this experience not because it is beneficial for him but for the Corinthians and even for us. He had been silent about this experience for about fourteen years and this in itself is quite an achievement. Can you keep a beautiful and an extraordinary experience only to yourself? Perhaps you would like to share it with others. But Paul was not so. Now the time has come for him to speak about it, but without conceit. Further God had already given him a 'medicine' against it as seen in verse 7. We will come to that later.

Paul could speak of "visions and revelations" given to him by the Lord. Some of the visions he got we see in Acts (Acts 9:12; 16:9; 18:9). One of the revelations the Lord gave him, perhaps the most beautiful one you can read in Ephesians 3 (Eph 3:1-11). These are the things that made him tower over the fraudsters. At the same time these were things that made him incredibly small in his own eyes, for they came from God. He was deeply impressed by them.

V2. In addition to those visions and revelations from the Lord something special happened to him. He did not know how it happened and what state he was in. It may be that he was in the body – I imagine a kind of dream state – and then the heavens came to him or God caught him up along with his body. It could also be that the Lord led his spirit into the third heaven while his body remained on earth so that he was in this state right in heaven for a moment. He did not know but God knew it. That was enough for him.

The third heaven is the highest place in creation. Heaven is the place where God lives and where His throne is. This gives the height to which Paul was lifted: above the clouds in the sky, which could be called the first heaven and even above the stars and the planets which could be called the second heaven. It is a place where also satan has access to as we read in the book of Job (Job 1:6; 2:1).

V3-4. But satan has no access to paradise. A different atmosphere prevails in paradise. It is the place where the spirit and the soul of the fallen asleep

believers are and where they rejoice in the Lord Jesus undisturbed. Paul had a glimpse of it and even heard some things. What he heard there made a huge impression on him. The words he heard were “inexpressible” to be reproduced in human language. It was a heavenly language. This is not meant for human communication. Even if it were so he could not speak it because no one would understand it.

God gave him this particular experience as an incentive to his service. That fits well with the service that God committed to him. His service was in connection with a Christ Who is now glorified in heaven. Wherever he went that was the main theme of his preaching. The experience he had in paradise, the third heaven, should have remained in his memory and motivated him continuously in his work for the Lord.

Is this not so with you also? We must agree that these were experiences unique to Paul; but we must also admit that each one of us knows certain beautiful experiences with the Lord Jesus. They may not be great visions, but every day events which in themselves are not great but for us they are proof that the Lord is at work in our life. Such experiences with the Lord give you added incentive to serve Him.

V5. What is Paul boasting about? He wants to boast only about a man in Christ, because it is all about Christ. Then the man Paul has disappeared from the scene. He is as it were absorbed by Christ and nothing more is seen. It is nice to remember that God sees you in Christ (2Cor 5:17). The more you are aware of this, the more it will define your life. You no longer think of yourself and you no longer live for yourself. The secret of such a life you read in Galatians 2 (Gal 2:20). Read that verse well and pray that God lets this verse work in your heart and decide your life.

Paul did not want to boast in himself but in regard to his weaknesses. His weaknesses prove that he was by no means an impressive person, but God decided to show His power in him.

V6. Of course Paul could have used the circumstances he had been through, both in suffering and in paradise, to prove himself. If he had done so he had said the truth only. The natural temptation is to talk a lot about one’s own experiences and that again is to win the admiration and appreciation of people.

To imitate Paul's attitude is not easy. He deliberately chose the art of depiction that would ultimately ascribed all glory and honor due to God and Christ. He guarded others from yielding to the temptation to appreciate him more than what is consistent with bare facts. Are you sometimes doing your best to make people think a little bit better about you than what they see in you or hear from you? This is inside of each one of us. We are eager to appear a little better than we really are.

Paul did not desire a hero worship for himself, not a glory to which he is not entitled. His main concern was to prevent people from giving him the honor and glory which belonged only to God and Christ. He had a lot of things to boast in especially his 'visit' to paradise. We are always surrounded by the lurking danger called self-glorification. Paul by nature was a sinner like any one of us. But the privilege of having the excellent revelations always put him the more in danger of falling in pride. God was not unaware of this. Therefore He gave Paul a bodyguard to protect him from this danger. Let us see Paul's response in the next section.

Now read 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 again.

Reflection: Have you had special experiences with the Lord by which you are encouraged to live for Him?

2Cor 12:7-10 | My Grace Is Sufficient for You

7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 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.

V7. Paul had an exceptionally outstanding experience of which he could be very proud. Someone said once: ‘It is not dangerous *to be* in the third heaven but *to have been* there.’ In order that he is not conceited by “the surpassing greatness of the revelations” God gave him a bodyguard as a preventive. And what kind of bodyguard. It was “a messenger of Satan” to torment [literally beat] him. That was not a pleasant company. Since no less than fourteen years this servant of satan accompanied him.

This messenger or angel of satan caused to him “a thorn in the flesh”. No one would like to go near a thorn bush, for it will cause only pain. The angel of satan saw to it that the pain had a lasting effect and he did not do it gently. Paul felt as if he was beaten with fists. Some say that this thorn meant a disease in his eyes. This is deduced from Galatians 6 (Gal 6:11). It could also be a speech impediment as deduced by some from chapter 10 of the letter which we are dealing with at the moment (2Cor 10:10).

V8-9. Anyway it was something that constantly reminded him of his own weaknesses. He would be happy to have been delivered from it, for he prayed for it, even three times. The Lord did not answer that prayer but He gave him a balm for the pain, namely, His grace.

What a comfort and an encouragement this answer has been for many through the centuries! Even today the comfort derived from this answer is still available undiminished to you. May be you are also bearing something that you would like to get rid of and despite your earnest prayers the long awaited deliverance has not yet come. I trust that you can say from experience that the Lord said to you also: “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Have you already prayed for more than three times and yet you have not received the answer? Does it seem that that your prayer would not be answered? Then I may point you to a man who also had a very difficult life. He is none other than Jeremiah. He was sitting right in the midst of suffering. Yet he says in Lamentations 3: "For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men" (Lam 3:31-33). This is the language of faith, the language you also can speak.

The greatest victory that satan can win is that we begin to doubt the love of God because He does not give what we ask for. We must not allow him this victory. God uses your problem to keep you small and weak so that He can manifest His power fully in your weakness. You must understand that everyone who serves Him will always have something which keeps him weak in his life. This is God's way to keep us from pride and that we do not forget that we need Him in all things.

Incidentally, these verses do not mean that we are allowed to pray only three times for a thing. The Bible is full of exhortations to persevere in prayer. See for instance the parable the Lord Jesus tells in Luke 18 (Lk 18:1-8). These verses make it clear that God allows certain things in your life to keep you humble. You prayed several times for a thing, but after a certain period you are convinced that you should not pray further about it because He considers that it is better you live with it. At the same time you will experience His help and strength in a way which you would not have learnt otherwise.

V10. This prompts Paul to say that he is well content with weaknesses. Were they not opportunities in which Christ's power became visible in his life? He would gladly do and suffer anything for the sake of Christ. He was always very happy to see less of himself and more of Christ. He practiced what John the baptist says in John 3: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

If this is the deepest desire of your heart you will want to go through trials and afflictions to show thereby how weak you are and how strong Christ is. When you are weak in the face of all these difficulties then you are

strong, for the power of Christ dwells in you. The power of Christ takes possession of you, because you cannot overcome difficulties in your own strength.

I would like to come back to Paul's three time prayer. This is reminiscent of the three time prayer of the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. We find this in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22 (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46). There He asks His Father three times if it would be possible that the cup, i.e. the judgment on the cross, pass from Him.

Of course there is a big difference between this prayer and that of Paul. Paul prayed that he might be delivered from something which kept him from pride. This makes clear that sin was present in Paul and its action was to be restrained. But the case with the Lord Jesus was different. In Him there was no sin. That is why He prayed to the Father so, because He did not like to come in contact with sin.

The horror of the cup that the Lord had to drink was that He had to be made sin and that He had to take upon Himself the sins of all those who believed and all those who are going to believe and thereby suffer God's full judgment. It was impossible for Him to long for that. With Paul it was his imperfection that led him to pray; with the Lord Jesus it was His perfection that made Him to supplicate.

Another point to note is what the Lord Jesus immediately added to His prayer: "Yet not as I will, but as You will." He was in complete agreement with the way the Father decided for Him. He never wanted to choose a way other than what the Father decided for Him, but He abhorred the prospect of coming into contact with sin which would cause a separation between Him and His God. That is the reason for His prayer. After that prayer there is perfect peace in His heart and then He allows His enemies to capture Him to accomplish the whole work He was destined to finish saying: "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn 18:11).

It will enrich your faith life and your prayer life when you learn to say: 'Not my will but Yours be done.' The submissiveness of your will to the will of God is the secret of peace in your heart in the midst of so many things that you wish were different.

Now read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 again.

Reflection: Do you have 'a thorn in the flesh' in your life? What do you think of God's will for you?

2Cor 12:11-21 | Paul's Concern for the Corinthians

11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. 13 For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! 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. 15 I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? 16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. 17 [Certainly] I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? 18 I urged Titus [to go], and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit [and walk] in the same steps? 19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. [Actually,] it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. 20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps [there will be] strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; 21 I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

V11. Paul looks back on his defense. He repeats what he had always said, namely, that he had become “a fool” to talk about himself. But the Corinthians had forced him to do so because they had started listening to other apostles, indeed false apostles. These men had spoken negatively about Paul. The Corinthians had allowed their negative influences although they were supposed to know better. Has not Paul been the means through which they came to faith in the Lord Jesus?

It should not have been necessary for Paul to defend himself. It was the Corinthians who ought to have defended him. He was not a whit behind

the most eminent apostles who were with the Lord Jesus. This is with regard to his service. His person mattered nothing.

V12. When he was with the Corinthians they were witnesses to the signs and wonders and mighty deeds he had performed. Those signs and wonders were not flukes, but they were things he did with all perseverance. Through perseverance someone shows what kind of man he is. In Paul's case the Corinthians could recognize that he stood up to what he preached and that his preaching originated from a Higher Authority.

V13. Compared to other churches Paul's service to the Corinthians was not lacking in any way. He was fully committed to them as he was to the others. The only difference was that he did not accept any money from them as he did from other churches. Did they see it as a proof that he did not really love them? As he had mentioned earlier he never wanted to give them the impression that he was after his own profit or advantage.

Their spiritual standard was such that they would only boast that they also made their contribution in the sustenance of the apostle. Paul wanted to avoid this. He wanted to serve them without any obligation so that he could tell them freely where they were lacking. Did they say that Paul was wrong in not asking for any financial support from them? With some irony he asks them to forgive him.

V14. At the same time he says that he will not deal differently when he comes "this third time" to them. Again he will not accept any money from them.

By the way, how can Paul speak of "this third time" when we find no proof for a second visit to Corinth in his itinerary mentioned in Acts? An explanation could be that he set out for a second visit but the Corinthian's poor progress made him postpone it. He wanted to spare them a sharp reprimand and give them time to change the wrong things for the better. This can be inferred from what he says in chapter 1 (2Cor 1:15,23).

Now for the third time he was ready to come and this time he loved to come because he had their well-being before his eyes. He was interested in them personally and not in their money or possessions. They were his children in the faith. As a real caring father he did not want to get any profit from his children, but on the other hand he wanted to give them as

much as he possibly could out of all that he had. Like parents who save money for their children, Paul had great spiritual wealth which he wanted to distribute among his children.

V15. He was not bothered whether or not they understood his mind. He loved them extraordinarily and what he says here is a proof of his true love. Whether love is reciprocated or misinterpreted the nature of love remains the same. Despite all the troubles the Corinthians gave him he continued to care for them. In fact the hassle they created for him augmented his concern for them all the more and thus his love for them only became more abundant.

He who is influenced by gossip always explains wrongly the things the other one does. But Paul thereby was not discouraged. He went to the deepest possible level. He was willing to spend and to be spent for them, if only they went again in the right way of the Lord.

V16-17. Didn't they accept his proofs of love despite all he did for them? Let it be. In no way he has been burdensome to them. As for him he let them interpret his work as crafty and deceitful, if only they shouldn't think that he did things for his own interest. He certainly didn't adopt any questionable means. Perhaps they thought that he sent others to them to have profits.

V18. Now he could boldly look them in the eyes and even challenge them about the attitude of his co-worker Titus and the brother who was with Titus. They had to admit that those two brothers were of the same spirit of love and service as they had noticed in Paul and that they acted in the same way.

V19. How persistent and troublesome when the once sown seeds of mistrust take up root! It is very difficult to uproot them. The false teachers had done a very damaging work. But Paul was tireless and confident to restore the breach of trust. The thought that he was trying to defend himself is brought by Paul in the presence of God. You can only do that if you have a clear conscience before God. And Paul has. Christ was the content of his ministry. The presence of God was the starting point of his service. The goal of his service was edifying the believers in Corinth.

See how he addresses them; he calls them “beloved”. This is not a casual remark; it shows the feelings of his heart. This is the best way to win the erring believers. Does it mean that he was lenient toward their falsehood? No not at all. Love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth” (1Cor 13:6).

V20. That is why Paul adds a warning to his comments that must deeply touch them. There are yet a few things which are not in order. He didn’t make up the list he sums up. They are things that were present among the believers in Corinth. No doubt they are present even today among believers.

V21. For Paul to see such errors in the church when he would visit them was a humiliation. He would consider as if God Himself kept ready such humiliation for him and that too in their midst. He would experience it as a personal failure before God, for he has not succeeded in persuading the Corinthian believers to put away the wrong things. How sad he should be to see many of those who have sinned still have not repented of the sins they had committed. The damage sin causes is more than what one can imagine.

It is not enough to break with sin. Sincere repentance is essential. Only then the way is open to receive and enjoy God’s blessings through His servants. When there is no sincere repentance for a sin the risk is huge to fall into the same sin again.

When you reflect on the beginning of this chapter you see a big contrast with the end. The chapter begins with a man in Christ who was caught up in paradise and it ends up with people who have not yet distanced themselves from terrible sins. Both are possible. I trust that you have truly broken with your previous sins and that now you live as a man in Christ.

Now read 2 Corinthians 12:11-21 again.

Reflection: How does Paul relate to the Corinthians? How does he express himself about that relationship?

2 Corinthians 13

2Cor 13:1-6 | Examine Yourself

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. 2 I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest [as well], that if I come again I will not spare [anyone], 3 since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God [directed] toward you. 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? 6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

V1. As Paul mentioned in the previous chapter (2Cor 12:14), he was ready for the third time to visit them. It is evident that he held the Corinthian believers close to his heart. His attachment to them was true and deep. He was not indifferent to his children's development in their faith. He had heard much about the poor quality of their faith life. There was much that needed correction. But he could deal with them only on the basis of clear facts and evidences. Certain things came to his ears but he could not pronounce judgment based on superficial evidences. The facts must be shown.

Witness statements are of great importance in each case of sin that happens in the church. God has already had it recorded in the Old Testament (Deu 19:15) that in the case of iniquity and sin conviction should be established only if there are two or three witnesses. There might be one trustworthy witness, but still there must be a second or even a third witness to establish the fact without leaving any room for ambiguity. If only the church had acted cautiously according to this prescription the amount of divisions wouldn't have been that manifold as unfortunately is seen today. Paul,

a man of great discernment who was well aware of all that happened in Corinth, wanted to stick to this biblical principle.

V2. He will spare those who sinned before. Once again he gives this warning. He did not want to come with a rod. What he wanted was a pleasant visit in which they would together rejoice about the great things the Lord had worked in their life. They would prepare themselves for this event if they listened to what he wrote in this letter. This letter played a preparatory role for his coming.

V3-5. In verse 3 he refutes the latest charge of the false prophets. According to them Paul was a 'nobody', an insignificant person and therefore it was impossible that Christ could speak through him.

Verses 3b and 4 must be read as a parenthesis to see how Paul refutes this accusation. Verse 3a continues in verse 5. Did they seek a proof of Christ speaking in him (verse 3a)? Well, then they must look at themselves (verse 5). Could they say they were in the faith? Yes, they could. Then they have to admit the fact that Christ spoke through Paul because they came to the faith through his preaching.

They should just test themselves to see in what way they are saved. Were they saved because something they did themselves or because Christ had done something for them? Also here they must acknowledge that it was only because of Christ, and that Christ was preached to them by none other than Paul.

Verse 5 does not challenge you to check the proofs of your salvation. It is not meant to bring you to doubt the certainty of your salvation by examining your heart and life to make sure that you have brought forth enough fruit. Such a test is not mentioned here, but just the opposite. This verse confirms the assurance of your salvation. What is essential is that we are aware of the foundation of your faith. Is your faith founded on something in you or from yourself? Or is your faith based on something that happened outside of you, separate from you and for your benefit? The latter is the case.

The work of Christ was fully accomplished outside of you regardless of your feeling or experience. God expects that you simply accept it by faith. That afterward the works of faith must be visible is also true and that is spoken of elsewhere in the Bible, as in the letter of James, but this is not the

subject here. Beware of the ones who teach that you cannot know for sure if “you are in the faith”. ‘To be in the faith’ means that you are a believer. “Examine yourselves” means consider how it happened and not what is seen in your life. The one who says that Christ is not in him stands outside of salvation, and he is not a believer and therefore he has no part in the life of God.

In all it is seen that Christ spoke in and through Paul. Paul accepts that it is possible that he did not create any sensation in his ministry. In the parenthesis of the verses 3b-4 he explains the reason why he did so. First they had to know that Christ has not been weak toward them. What power went out of Him when they came in contact with Him. He turned their whole dirty, corrupt life inside out. Their evil and dark heart came to the light. They came to know themselves and were converted in repentance to God and accepted the Lord Jesus as their Savior. What a power!

But how did He make this possible? It was because He was crucified in weakness. Is there anything weaker than a crucified man? Can such a person ever do anything? Yet they placed their faith in Him, and rightly so. The power of God was needed to make Him alive, although He also rose in His own power – as the Lord Jesus is the Son of God at the same time (Rom 1:4). But here it is all about what people, including the Corinthians, saw in Him when He hung on the cross. Paul was pleased to be made one with such a weak Christ. That is the reason why his preaching was not with enticing words, and therefore he was weak in his outward appearance. He was weak in Christ.

But Paul also knew that one day he will live with Him indeed by the same power which had already worked out the new life in the Corinthians. Is it not something wonderful to see that he uses everything to win the hearts of the Corinthians and at the same time he keeps himself completely identified with Christ? He doesn't say that he himself will live for Christ through the power of God, although it is true, but he applies the power of God to what happened to the Corinthians in their conversion.

V6. There is nothing left for him except to express the hope that his explanation shows them that he did not fail the test or that he is not disqualified as an apostle. He just wanted to preach Christ and nothing else.

You have a good example in Paul that shows the way to deal with people who accuse you falsely. You cannot do anything better than what he did to win the hearts of your opponents. Show Christ and show that you want to be one with Him in your preaching and in your whole life. If those who bring false charges against you are believers, then show them the privileges they have in Christ. That will shame them. It is not easy but that is the Lord's way of victory.

Now read 2 Corinthians 13:1-6 again.

Reflection: What is meant by 'prove yourselves'? Why is it said?

2Cor 13:7-14 | Prayers and Closing Words

7 Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but [only] for the truth. 9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. 10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I [need] not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down. 11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

V7. Paul seeks the good of the Corinthians. First he says that he wants to prevent them from doing evil. All the evil a child of God commits casts a blemish on God and on Christ. You are surrounded by evil; you can be easily infected by it, and before you know it, you're joining in. Our prayer should be that God protects us from evil. Also that should be our prayer for one another as Paul does here for the Corinthians.

The motive is not self-glorification though it can happen in our life. For instance I may want to keep my children from doing wrong things to show what a good father I am. If that is my motive then nothing worthwhile comes out of it. My motive must be the welfare of my children. This should be in my heart. You can perhaps make a list of persons for whom you can pray that God will protect them from doing evil.

However preservation from evil alone is not enough. The one who does not do evil must begin to do good. Otherwise the greatest danger is that the void is filled with new and more evil. We see a connection between the good and the evil in Romans 12: "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9). Paul was so much for their good that he wanted to give himself up completely for that.

V8. The only thing that interested him was the truth. It was impossible for him to conceal the truth or invalidate it. He certainly did not act against the truth nor withheld it from the Corinthians. What he wanted was just

to bring the truth. He knew the truth of the word of the Lord Jesus: "The truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). The truth of the Word of God breaks apart every bond by which people, including believers, can be bound. People can be trapped in an immoral life or caught in certain legalistic or philosophical systems. But the truth sets them free. By presenting the truth we can help produce the desired result in the lives of people.

V9. Truth does not bother how strong a man or a woman who brings the truth is. Paul rejoiced in the fact that while he remained weak the truth made the Corinthians strong.

The second prayer he had in his heart for them was that they should be made complete or perfect. That is exactly the work of the truth. Whoever is busy with the Word of God will grow spiritually into maturity. 'Maturity' is one of the meanings of 'completion' or 'perfection'. Paul's desire to see them complete also refers to their completely being joined together. This is what is needed in view of the divisions in Corinth. That is why he writes to them. Now they have a letter in their hands in which instructions have been given to bring things into order in view of his coming.

Here one can draw a parallel with our situation. We also have a letter, the complete Bible, which contains instructions as to how we should live and bring to order the things which are not right. The Lord Jesus is coming back soon. How will He find us?

V10. Paul did not want to deal with them harshly. He had the authority, but he did not prefer that method. He wanted to use his authority in a positive way to edify them and build them up instead of destroying the wrong things. He was like a father in a family. A father has the authority and the right to punish his children. He must do it if necessary. But if his day is filled with beating his children, then imagine how the home atmosphere will be. Every father would like to use his authority to contribute good things to his children and help them learn the right way of life for the glory of the Lord.

V11. Paul concludes his letter by giving some exhortations. These should serve to help them to go the right way and in the right direction toward the ultimate goal of the Christian life journey:

1. He starts with “rejoice”. You might ask how he could say this after writing so much about what was wrong in their midst. Maybe that is just the reason why he says it. His aim was not that they should lose heart. There were so many things about which they could rejoice and the same applies to you also.

2. Again follows the admonition to “be made complete” or “perfect” or be joined together. We need each other very much and should not fall apart in groups.

3. “Be comforted” sounds like an encouragement in the midst of so many things that can make us sad and depressed.

4. “Be like-minded” means to have the same desire together and to have the same zeal to reach the goal. Everyone should work for the interests of the Lord and not for his own interests.

5. The list ends with the admonition to “live in peace”. Where there is peace there is harmony. Peace is an atmosphere in which people feel well. Therefore God is called the “God of love and peace”. Love is mentioned first, because God is love. Love is the source of all that is good. This God will be with us when we take these words of encouragement to heart and work toward its practical application. Can you imagine anything better than to have this God “with you” as your Companion?

V12. When the believers in Corinth gathered together for a particular reason they should greet one another with a holy kiss. It is not so much the form of greeting, like the kiss, that is the most important thing. In Western culture believers shake hands. In the East people greet with folded hands. The point is that it is a sincere greeting, not an artificial or feigned one. It must be done in a sacred manner. Behind the kiss or the shaking or folding of hands should hide no unholy thoughts against a brother or a sister.

V13. Paul also sends greetings on behalf of those who were with him. It was not the believers in Corinth alone who are related to one another. There are other believers in other places and Paul makes them feel the warmth of their fellowship also, despite the many wrong things among them.

V14. The words of blessings with which he concludes this letter are unique among his letters. Nowhere do we see such an impressive farewell address. In it Paul brings the triune God to the Corinthians.

1. First “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” is mentioned. Grace is necessary because we have forfeited everything. Wherever this awareness is present, the Lord Jesus Christ – you see His full name mentioned here – comes and gives in His grace what is needed. His grace is mentioned here for the second time. In chapter 8 we have come across the grace for lost sinners (2Cor 8:9). The grace mentioned here is the means to restore a failing church.

2. Then “the love of God” is mentioned. Love always seeks the good for others. God in His love gave His only begotten Son for lost sinners. The love of God is effective in bringing a deviant church back on the right path.

3. Finally “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” is mentioned. Believers can relate to each other in the right way only when everyone let the Holy Spirit guide his life. To experience this fellowship, sin must not be allowed let alone remain present in the life of the believers,. The Holy Spirit cannot have fellowship with sin.

We will receive a great blessing if we in the local church take the contents of this letter to heart. God grant that we commit ourselves to that. This will be to His honor and glory and to our joy and peace.

Now read 2 Corinthians 13:7-14 again.

Reflection: What can you do to realize the encouragements of Paul?

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