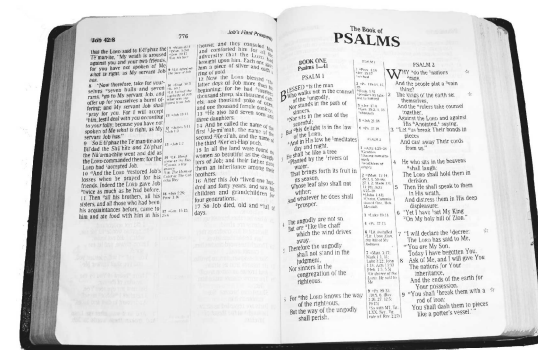


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



**November 2016**

Bible readings from Psalms 89  
2 Corinthians chapters 1 to 8

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*Providing honourable things*

Paul was planning to visit Corinth after he had sent Titus (9:3–4). He was thankful to God for laying *the same earnest care* that he had for the Corinthians on the heart of Titus also. He hardly needed to commend Titus to them, but if anyone did enquire about him, they were to be told that he was Paul's *partner and fellow-worker* in the gospel (23). The apostle was also sending two other brothers with Titus:

- *The brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches.* This brother is not named (some believe that he may be Luke), but the churches held him in such high esteem that they appointed him to travel with their gift for the Jerusalem believers (18–19).
- A brother who had many times proved his diligence and reliability (22). Do we have these qualities of character that are a precious asset in Christian work?

The apostle Paul was always very careful in money matters and he was above reproach. We have seen how men respected by the churches were to take the gift to Jerusalem and the Corinthians would have their own representative among them (18–23; cp. 1 Corinthians 16:3–4). The lavish lifestyle of certain tele-evangelists who make heart-rending appeals for money is a disgrace to the gospel. Though Paul was not shy about making an appeal for funds, it was always for others. He never begged for his own personal support. His example also gives a further principle for the administration of church finances. One person alone should not be allowed to allocate church funds without reference to other church officers.

It is absolutely essential that church leaders are seen to be above reproach concerning financial matters: *Providing honourable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men* (21). **We too must be honest and honourable in the way we conduct our financial affairs both privately and in relation to church funds.**

*My covenant I will not break*

These verses take up the subject of the covenant which God made with David (cp. verses 3–4; 2 Samuel 7:4–16). A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. God committed himself to David, to help and strengthen him, and to give him victory over his enemies. Though his descendants forsake God, the Lord promised, *'My covenant I will not break'* (34).

One of the covenant promises was that David's seed (descendants) and throne would endure for ever (35–37). You may wonder how this can be, for Israel has no king today. The promise is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ whose human descent came through David and who was born in the city of David (Luke 1:31–33; 2:4, 11; Acts 2:30). When Jesus was called the Son of David, it was an acknowledgment that he was the promised Messiah (eg. Mark 10:48; John 7:42). The Lord Jesus is our King whose throne is for ever and ever (Hebrews 1:8). It is a great mistake to look for an earthly kingdom of Israel which will be under the rule of Christ. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

God kept his covenant with David and he has bound us to himself through the new covenant which was sealed by the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15). *'Nevertheless my lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail'* (33). Listen to Spurgeon's comment on this verse: 'O glorious fear-killing sentence! This crowns the covenant with exceeding glory. Mercy may seem to depart from the Lord's chosen, but it shall never altogether do so. Jesus still enjoys the divine favour, and we are in him, and therefore under the most trying circumstances the Lord's lovingkindness to each one of his chosen will endure the strain ... Man fails in all points, but God in none. To be faithful is one of the eternal characteristics of God in which he always places a great part of his glory' ('TREASURY OF DAVID'). God is totally committed to his people (cp. Isaiah 54:10; Romans 8:31–32, 37). **Let us rejoice and be encouraged in our God who is always faithful to his covenant!**

*Lord, where are your former lovingkindnesses?*

Solomon, who succeeded David to the throne, turned away from God later in his life (1 Kings 11:4–6) and many of his descendants were also unfaithful to God. The Lord visited the nation with judgment just as he had warned, but he did not break his covenant (30–34). The situation at the time this psalm was written was so desperate that the psalmist felt that God had renounced the covenant that he had made with David. The words, ‘*But you*’ introduce a dismal contrast to the happy times when David reigned (38). God had withdrawn his favour and had brought destruction, disgrace and shame to Israel (38–45). It appeared that God had renounced his covenant with David (39).

He asked, ‘*Lord, where are your former lovingkindnesses?*’ (49). It is important for us to note that this question was asked at the same time as the affirmation, ‘*I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever*’ (1). He knew that God is faithful and this led him to call upon the Lord for a reversal of the ill that had befallen the nation (46–51). **The Christian who has a praising heart is better equipped to cope with troubled times. He will more readily trust in God and call upon him in prayer than those who are unthankful to God.** He is already singing of past mercies and he will be encouraged to call upon God for new mercies.

The psalm ends on a note of praise: *Blessed be the LORD for evermore! Amen and Amen* (52). Spurgeon comments, ‘He ends where he began; he has sailed round the world and reached port again. Let us bless God before we pray, and while we pray, and when we have done praying, for he always deserves it of us. If we cannot understand him, we will not distrust him. When his ways are beyond our judgment we will not be so foolish as to judge; yet we shall do so if we consider his dealings to be unkind or unfaithful. He is, he must be, he shall be, for ever, our blessed God’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor*

Paul had urged the Corinthians to abound in the grace of giving (7). He was not commanding them to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem but he was testing the sincerity of their love by pointing to the example of the Macedonian churches (8).

He reminded them of another example of grace, of which they were well aware: ‘*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich*’ (9). The Lord Jesus was rich in his equality with God the Father, rich in his power and majesty as angels worshipped him, rich in his enjoyment of the perfection and glory of heaven and rich in his possession of the universe. He became poor, taking human flesh to be born into a humble family. He once said, ‘*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*’ (Luke 9:58). He took the form of a slave, being completely obedient to the Father’s will, suffering humiliation, torture and death to save us from our sins and to make us heirs of heaven (Philippians 2:5–11; Romans 8:15–17; 1 Peter 1:4). If we love him, how can we be mean or grudging in our giving?

The Corinthians had shown enthusiasm in their initial response to the apostle’s fund-raising project a year earlier. It appears that they may have begun to set aside money but had not persevered. Paul now urges them to complete what they had begun (10–11; cp. 9:2). He assured them that he was not expecting them to shoulder the greater share of the giving. Their present abundance would help meet the needs of the Jerusalem Christians but the situation could be reversed in the future, when their needs would be met with help from Jerusalem. He illustrates this principle of equality from God’s provision of manna to the Israelites (13–15). **The Lord’s work often suffers in difficult economic times. Let us be determined to give sacrificially knowing that when we honour the Lord in our giving, he will supply all our needs (Proverbs 3:9–10).**

*See that you abound in this grace also*

The Corinthians had been slow to respond to Paul's appeal for financial help for the poor Christians at Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–4; cp. Romans 15:25–27). He sought to encourage them by referring to the example of the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea were in Macedonia – see Acts 16:12 to 17:14). The Macedonian believers were suffering great persecution and were in *deep poverty* (2; cp. 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; 3:3), but they gave generously and sacrificially. They saw that financial help was urgently needed and they begged the apostles to receive their gift (1–4). Paul told the Corinthians that he had urged Titus to encourage them in this grace of giving as well (6). Practical Christianity involves helping other believers who are in need.

What lay behind the generosity and sacrificial giving of the Macedonian churches?

- They *first gave themselves to the Lord* and then to the apostles (5). They recognised the lordship of Christ over their lives. They gave willingly to help meet the needs of his people because they recognised that all that they owned belonged to him.
- The *grace of God* was bestowed on them (1). Generous, joyful Christian giving is a fruit of God's grace in our lives (1, 6, 7, 9; 9:8, 14; the same Greek word is translated '*gift*' in verse 19). The Corinthians rejoiced in their abundance of spiritual gifts (graces) and Paul urged them, '*See that you abound in this grace also*' (7). The old saying is so true, 'When God touches a man's heart, he also touches his wallet.' **Has God touched your heart? Are you abounding 'in this grace also'?**

*Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold.* (Frances R. Havergal)

**2 CORINTHIANS**

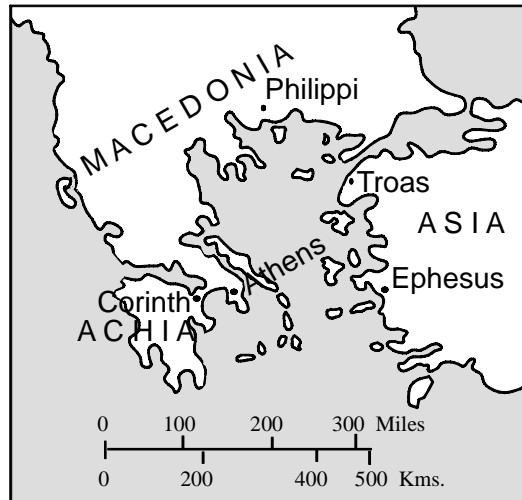
Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians during his three years at Ephesus (approx. AD 55–57; see Acts 19:1–41; 1 Corinthians 16:5–18, 19). This second letter was sent within a year of the first, after he had left Ephesus (Acts 20:1–6). He found Titus in Macedonia and heard from him of the reaction of the Corinthians to his first letter. Some of them had heeded Paul's instructions, but others still opposed his authority and his teaching (10:10–11; 11:5–15). In this letter, the apostle defends his authority, his motives and his work. He also gives instructions about the collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem (chapters 8 and 9; cp. 1 Corinthians 16:3).

Phil Arthur writes, 'Certainly the readers of this epistle would have faced a challenge that is all too familiar to modern Christians in the West: how are we to make our lives count for Christ in a multicultural society with no fixed moral boundaries' (STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS – 2 CORINTHIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED, page 13).

**Outline of 2 Corinthians**

- |   |   |               |
|---|---|---------------|
| 1. Greetings and review of Paul's recent trials and travels | – | 1:1 to 2:13   |
| 2. The nature of the Christian ministry                     | – | 2:14 to 6:10  |
| 3. An appeal to the Corinthians                             | – | 6:11 to 7:16  |
| 4. Collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem              | – | 8:1 to 9:15   |
| 5. Paul's defence of his apostolic authority                | – | 10:1 to 13:10 |
| 6. Closing greetings  | – | 13:11–14      |

## Macedonia and Achaia



## A recommended commentary on 2 Corinthians

Phil Arthur, pastor of Free Grace Baptist Church, Lancaster has written New Testament commentaries on 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. I have found Phil's work helpful and very practical. If my notes encourage you to study 2 Corinthians in more depth, do purchase and read Phil's commentary: *STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS – 2 CORINTHIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED* (Published by Evangelical Press, Welwyn Commentary Series).

Derek Prime: *LET'S STUDY 2 CORINTHIANS*, published by Banner of Truth).

*Godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation*

Paul refers to the letter which had given him so much pain to write (2:4). This letter has not been preserved for us and we do not know its contents. The apostle regretted that he may have been too severe in his letter but he was thankful that it had made the Corinthians sorry for their sin and that their sorrow had *led to repentance* (8–9). They had been *made sorry in a godly manner and godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation not to be regretted* (10). The repentant sinner rejoices in the blessings of salvation such as forgiveness, reconciliation to God, cleansing from sin and eternal life.

Worldly sorrow over sin is often taken up with self-pity, excuses and bitterness but it produces death because it does not grieve over sin. Godly sorrow is different to the shallow remorse such as that experienced by Esau (Hebrews 12:16–17). The Corinthians had shown their godly sorrow in an eagerness to clear themselves (to apologise for their failure to deal with the member who had fallen into grievous sin) and indignation at the offence and at themselves for turning a blind eye to it. Other effects of repentance were fear, an earnest desire to be right with the Lord in their conduct, zeal to defend Paul, a readiness to see justice done and obedience to God's word (7,11,15). Titus returned to Paul from Corinth reporting that he had been refreshed to witness this work of God in their lives (13). They had received him with fear and trembling and Paul rejoiced that the misunderstandings and difficulties between himself and the Corinthians had been removed. (15–16).

Sin brings trouble to ourselves and to our church fellowship. **When we sin we must deal with it and show true repentance. If we haven't any godly sorrow and fail to deal with our sin, our Christian lives will be blighted. Let us examine our own hearts.**

*How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,  
When those who love the Lord  
In one another's peace delight,  
And so fulfil his word!*

(Joseph Swain)

*Outside were conflicts, inside were fears*

Paul again appealed to the Corinthians to open their hearts to him (2; cp. 6:11–13). It was as if he was asking them, ‘What tales about us have you been believing? Be open! Have you been listening to slander from those false teachers who have come to your church?’ Paul and his friends had wronged no one nor had they corrupted any through false teaching. They had been beyond reproach in financial matters, defrauding no one (2). Paul had no desire to condemn the Corinthians whom he loved; they were in his heart (3).

The apostle had sent Titus to Corinth with a letter because he was anxious about the church. He had hoped to meet Titus at Troas and to receive the latest news from Corinth, but failing to find him there, a restless Paul travelled to Macedonia (2:12–13; see notes for 9 November). In Macedonia he encountered further trouble: *Outside were conflicts, inside were fears* (5). Paul was a great Christian leader, but he was human and he needed sympathy and encouragement. He was encouraged by the marvellous truth that God comforts the downcast. How did the Lord encourage Paul? It was *by the coming of Titus* (6). Titus brought the good news that the Corinthians had received him with fear and trembling and that they had repented of their sin (8–16).

God often uses other Christians to comfort and help us. Many believers are passing through testing times. They face conflict outside and fears within and need to be encouraged. Are you mature enough in the faith to be able to help them? Are you concerned and sympathetic towards your fellow Christians? **Are you involved in the great and necessary ministry of encouragement?**

*O strengthen me, that while I stand  
Firm on the Rock and strong in Thee  
I may stretch out a loving hand  
To wrestlers with the troubled sea!*

(Frances R. Havergal)

*Grace to you and peace*

Derek Prime entitles his chapter on today’s reading, ‘God at the Centre’. (LET’S STUDY 2 CORINTHIANS, page 1). He points out to the Corinthians that:

- He is *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God* (1). Paul may have found it necessary to emphasise this because there were some at Corinth who were questioning his apostolic authority (10:7 to 11:33; 12:11–13). Paul regarded Timothy as his *true son in the faith* (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2) but here he refers to Timothy as his *brother*. Timothy was a faithful worker and highly valued friend of Paul to the very end (Philippians 2:19–22; 2 Timothy 4:13, 21).
- He writes *to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are in Achaia* (2). Achaia was the province in southern Greece which was governed by Corinth. Christians in the early church were known as ‘saints’. All Christians, from all ages, are called ‘saints’ (God’s holy ones, set apart to himself). We will not be sinless until we die, but we are saints who are called to lead holy lives (1 Peter 1:15–16).
- He greets them with a prayerful desire, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. We all have needs, the need for forgiveness of sin and the need for help. We have the privilege of coming to *the throne of grace where we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:12). If we are being severely tried and are facing great uncertainty let us come to God’s throne of grace and pour out our hearts to the Lord. God will give us his peace which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6–7).

Derek Prime comments, ‘The more we daily enjoy God’s grace and peace, the more like Paul we respond in gratitude and put God at the centre of our life (LET’S STUDY 2 CORINTHIANS, Page 4). **Do you put God at the centre of your life?**

*The Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us*

The Corinthian church had been visited and influenced by men who were opposed to Paul's ministry. These false teachers claimed to be apostles and Paul opens his letter by stressing that he is *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. He refers to the Corinthians as 'saints' though their behaviour was often far from saintly (1).

Paul follows his opening greetings with a burst of praise to God for all the comfort that he and his companions had received from him. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation* (3–4). The Greek noun and verb translated 'comfort' and 'consolation' are found ten times in verses 3 to 7. They are the words used to describe the Holy Spirit as our Comforter or Helper ('Paracletos', John 14:16,26). God is the source of mercy and comfort. He is not remote from us nor is he unconcerned for us when we suffer sorrow or pain. He promises, 'As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you' (Isaiah 66:13). He told the prophet Isaiah, 'Comfort, yes, comfort my people!' (Isaiah 40:1). He comforts the downcast believer (7:6) who looks to him and trusts in him.

Those who have known suffering and the comfort of God are able to truly identify with other sufferers and comfort them (4). God's holy Word urges us to comfort each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; cp. 7:6). It is possible to be so full of our own troubles that we hardly notice that some brother or sister is going through a time of fiery trial. They may be assailed by the devil who is tormenting them with doubts. Are you aware of the needs of others?

**Are you laid low through trial or suffering? Be encouraged! Draw near to your heavenly Father now, though you may not feel like praying.** The *God of all comfort* will surely comfort you and you will soon be praising him.

*Perfecting holiness in the fear of God*

Notice how Paul quotes from the Old Testament applying its exhortations and promises to Christians (16–18). We must read and learn the Old Testament as well as the New because it is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16).

The church is the temple, the dwelling-place of God and we must lead holy lives which are pleasing to the Lord (16–17). *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (7:1). What are these wonderful promises? They are: God dwelling in us, walking among us, being our God and we his people (16), that God will be a Father to us and we shall be his sons and daughters (18). Satan deceives many into believing that holiness is the enemy of happiness. This is not true! Holiness brings joy, peace and much blessing (cp. Romans 14:17).

The fear of God (a sense of reverence) is often absent from our life and worship. Many Christians do not understand that holiness of life is essential and is an evidence that our faith is genuine (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15–17). We must *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (7:1). We have great privileges, but also awesome responsibilities to remove from our lives all that is filthy.

We do not have to yield to temptation and we can overcome sin in the strength of Christ (Romans 6:14). We have the word of God to guide us and the Holy Spirit to help and strengthen us. We must turn from anything that we know is displeasing to God. We need to discipline ourselves, controlling the things that we read or view on the internet and on television. **Does your lifestyle witness to others that you are a child of God? Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of God?**

I commend to you two books by Jerry Bridges: THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS and THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS (published by Navpress).



*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers*

Paul's relationship with the Corinthians may have been strained because of the pernicious influence of false teachers but he still loved them. Paul reminded them that he and his fellow-workers heart had spoken openly to them and he appealed to them to be open with him (11–13).

Corinth was infamous for its vile and depraved way of life. It also boasted many temples and shrines where Greek gods or idols were worshipped. In his first letter, the apostle called upon the Corinthians, 'Flee sexual immorality ... Flee from idolatry' (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14). Paul urged the Corinthians, 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?' (14). Oxen were yoked together to pull a plough, but the Israelites were forbidden to yoke an ox with a donkey (Deuteronomy 22:10). The animals were different in size and in strength and could not possibly work together effectively. The apostle uses this illustration to show that Christians must not join themselves with unbelievers in marriage or in business. A Christian business is run on principles of honesty and integrity and it honours the Lord's Day.

The history of Israel stands as a warning against compromise. The appeal to avoid the unequal yoke with unbelievers and to be separate is of vital importance to us all (14–17). In the 21st century, 'Corinth' is all around us. We must uphold the sanctity of marriage and not join ourselves to the world in its wicked ways. When a Christian marries an unbeliever, they are unequally yoked. How can God be glorified and honoured if we disobey his word?

We must not be 'yoked' with false religion. Christians who attend inter-faith meetings or services at mosques or heathentemples are violating God's commands. **We must also resist the pressures of the ecumenical movement to conform to a watered-down Christianity that has little resemblance to apostolic doctrine and practice.**

*That we should not trust in ourselves but in God*

Do you ever wonder at Paul's God-given success as a missionary and a church-planter? There was a price to pay! This great servant of God was followed by trouble and suffering wherever he went. He writes in these verses of some trouble that had come upon him and his companions in the province of Asia (probably in Ephesus) but he does not provide us with any details. It would appear that they were in great peril and in danger of losing their lives (9–10). Look at the way in which he describes his suffering here: '*the sufferings of Christ abound in us ... we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves*' (5,8–9; cp 6:4–10). Paul likened his enemies in Asia to *beasts* (1 Corinthians 15:32; cp. Acts 19:23–41; 20:18–19).

**God not only allows the righteous to suffer, he ordains their suffering (cp. 2 Timothy 3:12). No normal person enjoys suffering, but the Lord uses our suffering for his own glory and for our good (Romans 8:28).** To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know the power of his resurrection (Philippians 3:10). Tribulation produces Christian character (Romans 5:3–4). Paul also saw that his suffering brought him to a position of greater trust in God and dependence upon him: '*that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead*' (9).

Paul affirmed his trust in the Lord but he also reminded the Corinthians of the value of prayer: '*You also helping together in prayer for us*' (11). When we pray, we acknowledge our dependence upon God in all our trials and struggles. We also express our concern for our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ when we pray for them. We help missionaries by praying for them and our evangelistic efforts must be watered with prayer. **Why then, is the church prayer meeting neglected by so many Christians?**

*The testimony of our conscience*

You may find it hard to believe that less than five years after planting the church at Corinth, Paul experienced opposition to his ministry, but such things do happen. Paul had planned to visit Corinth, his route being Ephesus – Macedonia – Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:5–7) but he then decided he would go direct to Corinth from Ephesus before going to Macedonia. He would then return to Corinth before going to Judea (15–16). He still had not visited them as promised and his detractors at Corinth alleged that the change of these plans was an evidence of weakness and fickleness.

Satan loves us to think the worst of our fellow-Christians. How did Paul react to this unfair criticism? He examined his own motives and he had a clear conscience in the matter. He writes of *the testimony of our conscience* concerning his conduct which had been in *simplicity* (some manuscripts have ‘holiness’) and *godly sincerity* (12). Paul was convinced that when Jesus comes again (*‘in the day of the Lord Jesus’*), they would boast of him (14).

Paul went on to explain the reason for the change of plans. He was not a fickle person saying ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ in the same breath. It was out of love and concern for the Corinthians that he had changed his plans. He was hoping that if he delayed his visit, they would have more time to deal with the serious problems in the church and so spare him the pain of having to discipline them (23; 2:1).

How do you react to those who you think are unfair in their criticism of you? Do you angrily cut them off or do you seek to clear up any misunderstanding in a conciliatory manner as Paul did? Are you prepared to speak well of them as Paul was prepared to boast of the Corinthians (14)? **The work of God’s grace in our lives will be seen in our attitude to those who criticise us (12).** Let us always remember that *God is faithful* (18) whatever others may say or do.

*We give no offence in anything*

Paul was an ambassador for Christ with a message from him. He writes of God pleading through him (5:20) and as one who worked together with God, he pleaded with the Corinthians *not to receive the grace of God in vain* (1). What did he mean by this? The false teachers who had come to Corinth had turned many of them away from the simplicity that is in Christ to a false gospel (11:3–4). Paul pressed upon them the urgency of rejecting false teaching and of being sure that they were right with God: *Now is the day of salvation* (2; quoting Isaiah 49:8).

There is a vital principle here for all who would serve Christ. **Our lives must be beyond reproach:** *We give no offence in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed* (3). The Greek word translated *offence* means ‘a stumbling-block’. The message of the cross is a stumbling-block to many, but we too can be a stumbling-block if we do not lead a godly life (cp. 1 Peter 2:8; 4:14–16). Our lives must match our Christian profession in order to commend the gospel (6–7). Paul and his fellow workers had a good testimony as ministers of God in much suffering and hardship for the sake of the gospel (4–5). **Think about the other requirements of a servant of Christ found in verses 6 and 7. Are they evident in your life?**

There is a price to pay for success in Christ’s service (4–5,8–10; cp. 4:8–12; 11:23–33) but there are great rewards – *as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things* (10). What greater riches can there be than the riches of the grace of God (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7)? Phil Arthur asks, ‘Where is the next generation of spiritual leaders to come from? It will come from among those who will look a life of hardship squarely in the face and take up the cross for Jesus’ sake (STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS, pages 109–110).

*He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us*

These tremendous verses sum up what Christ has done for us to bring us to God. The ministry of the gospel preacher is a *ministry of reconciliation* (18) and he is an *ambassador* (representative) of Christ who bears his message to sinners (20). Why is such a ministry of reconciliation necessary? We are all born with a sinful nature: *by nature children of wrath* and enemies of God (Ephesians 2:3; Romans 5:10). Our sin separates and alienates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). God takes our sins as a personal affront to himself, to his holy nature and goodness.

It is important that we see God's initiative in reconciling us to himself: *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them* (19). He does not impute (account) our sins to us. How? *He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (21). The righteous, sinless Son of God took our sins upon himself and died in our place, as our representative and substitute. Our sin was transferred to him and his righteousness is transferred to us. Someone once said of Christ, 'He came to pay a debt he didn't owe, because we owed a debt we couldn't pay.' How wonderful this is! Doesn't your heart warm and thrill to our glorious Saviour? Don't you want to make it your aim *to be well pleasing to him* and to live for him (9,15)?

If all this leaves you cold, it is a good indication that you know little of Christ in your own life; it may be that you are backslidden. I plead with you, *'Be reconciled to God'* (20). Without him, you are lost and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). **How foolish you would be to spurn such a great invitation!**

*O, make me understand it,  
Help me to take it in,  
What it meant to thee, the Holy One,  
To bear away my sin.*

(Katherine A.N. Kelly)

*All the promises of God in him are Yes, and in him Amen*

The life of a servant of God must be consistent with his message. There wasn't any uncertainty or lack of clarity in the gospel of Christ preached by Paul, Silvanus (Latin form of 'Silas') or Timothy. They affirmed that *all the promises of God in him are Yes, and in him Amen, to the glory of God* (19–20). The person bearing the gospel message must not be fickle. This message must have a bearing on our character. We must keep our word just as God keeps his promises! Phil Arthur observes, 'The first qualification for the Christian ministry is not the ability to communicate, but integrity' (STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS – 2 CORINTHIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED – page 43). If you are not a reliable person, you do not commend the gospel of Christ.

All the promises of God are true and reliable! Look at what he has done for us:

- He has established us in Christ (21). The word '*establishes*' means to be made firm or stable (cp. Colossians 2:6–8). Read Psalm 1 for an example of godly stability.
- He has anointed us (21). Those chosen to serve God in Old Testament times (eg. kings or priests) were anointed with oil. We have the anointing of the Holy Spirit (cp. 1 John 2:20,27).
- He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit (22; cp. Ephesians 1:13). A 'seal' was a mark of genuineness (cp. Esther 3:12), of ownership and it was used for security purposes (the stone closing the tomb of the Lord Jesus was sealed – Matthew 27:66). We belong to the Lord and will be kept safe, *sealed for the day of redemption* (the return of Christ – Ephesians 4:30).
- He has given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit (22). The Holy Spirit is given to every believer as a guarantee of greater things to come.

**Let us think about these things that God has done in our lives and be encouraged and challenged to live worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

*Lest Satan should take advantage of us*

Paul chose to write the Corinthians a painful letter rather than come again to them in sorrow (1). He was a great pastor who grieved over this troublesome church and abundantly loved them. He wrote, '*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears*' (4).

He does not give us precise details of the problem with the sinning brother mentioned in these verses. The Corinthians obviously knew the details, but we do not, and commentators differ in their understanding of this passage. Some believe that this brother's offence was so grave that Paul paid an additional visit to Corinth between the writing of his first and second letters and that the letter mentioned in verse 4 is another which has not been preserved. In that sorrowful visit, the offender had been excommunicated, an action supported by the majority in the church (1,6). Other commentators identify the brother with the man guilty of incest (1 Corinthians 5:1–8) and the letter in verse 4 as Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

The lessons for us are quite clear, however. If we persist in sinning, it affects the whole church. The elders must exercise discipline and they must have the support of the membership. They must not act in a tyrannical manner however (1:24; cp. 1 Peter 5:3). Pastoral discipline brings anguish and grief to the servant of God because he loves the flock (4).

It appears that the offender at Corinth had repented of his sin, but many in the church were reluctant to forgive him and to receive him back into fellowship (7–10). **If we harbour grudges or refuse to forgive those who have repented of wrong done to us or the church we are on dangerous ground.** We must have a forgiving spirit *lest Satan should take advantage of us* (11). The devil will wreck a church through lack of discipline or through harsh discipline which does not seek to restore those who offend. Let us be sure that *we are not ignorant of his devices* (11).

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*

The reformed doctrine of particular redemption (that Christ's death was only for his elect) would appear to be denied by the statement in verse 15, '*He died for all.*' We must be careful not to establish our beliefs from isolated texts but to look at Scripture as a whole. This shows that Christ died for *his people* and for the *many* (eg. Matthew 1:21; 26:28; Isaiah 53:8,11–12). 'The inescapable meaning of this statement is that the "all" for whom Christ died are those who also died in him.' [cf. Romans 5:12ff; 1 Corinthians 15:22] – (Geoffrey Wilson, 2 CORINTHIANS – A DIGEST OF REFORMED COMMENT, page 72). Professor John Murray writes, 'The inference is inevitable that those for whom Christ died are those and those only who die to sin and live to righteousness ... the death of Christ in its specific character as atonement was for those and those only who are in due time the partakers of that new life of which Christ's resurrection is the pledge and pattern' (REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED AND APPLIED, pp. 70–71). I heartily recommend these two paperbacks which are published by Banner of Truth.

Paul's ministry was motivated not only by the fear of God (11) but also by love for Christ (14). Before his conversion, he judged Christ according to the flesh, as a blasphemer and an impostor, but now he loved his Saviour and lived for him (15–16). **Does the love of Christ constrain (compel) you to put him first in your life?**

The Lord Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). Those who are saved by grace, no longer live for themselves, but for Christ (15); they are radically transformed. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new* (17). Many who claim to be Christians are no different from those who have no faith. **If we have no desire to please the Lord by obeying his word and seeking to lead a godly life, we have no reason to imagine that our Christianity is real.**

*Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*

The apostle Paul was a great persuader (cp. Acts 24:24–25; 26:28). He writes, ‘*Knowing, therefore, the terror (fear) of the Lord, we persuade men*’ (11). This does not refer to the day of judgment when unbelievers will stand before the Judge and tremble; it is a reference to the reverential fear of God that should be found in all believers. We should serve (or worship) God *with reverence and godly fear* (Hebrews 12:28). Persuasion is a vital element in the proclamation of the gospel and it is often absent in our evangelism. Paul was convinced that what he was proclaiming was true. There was an urgency in his message and he was aware that he was answerable to the Lord for all that he said and did (10).

Paul was obliged to defend his ministry because of the influence of false teachers at Corinth. This would have given the apostle much heartache. Many of these Corinthians had been converted through his ministry, but they showed little loyalty to him. He appeals to the Corinthians to speak up on behalf of himself and his fellow-workers. They were *well known to God* and he hoped that they were also *well known* in the consciences of the Corinthians. Surely, they needed no commendation to their conscience (12). Some may have been critical of Paul’s zeal, claiming that he was out of his mind (13; cp. Acts 26:24). His zeal was for God but his sober ministry was for the benefit of the Corinthians (13).

There was a Baptist pastor in a certain church in Wales during the 19th century. It is written of him that he ‘was a quiet spoken, cool man, wearing “kid gloves” as he spoke. He was so calm and logical that no man believed he was in earnest to persuade the ungodly, so he lost the church vote and resigned in 1862.’ **I ask each of my fellow-preachers who read these notes, ‘Are you a persuader, or are you deadly dull and unconvincing when you proclaim the word of God?’**

*We are to God the fragrance of Christ*

After three years in Ephesus Paul set out for Macedonia, passing through Troas (see map – page 6). God had opened a door for Paul to preach the gospel at Troas (12) but he was restless because Titus had not arrived as expected to bring news of the troubled situation at Corinth. He left Troas and crossed over into Macedonia, to meet Titus (13; cp. 7:5–7). Paul did return to Troas, however, after he had visited Macedonia and Corinth (Acts 20:6–7).

Paul thanks God *who always leads us to triumph in Christ* (14). He had in mind a Roman army victory procession where the captives were led through the streets of Rome. Incense was burned as a symbol of victory and those unable to see the procession were able to smell the fragrance of that victory. Paul saw himself as one of Christ’s captives displayed in the victory procession over Satan’s kingdom. His life was like incense spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ. He writes, *We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing* (15). This fragrance of Christ is an aroma of death to those who reject him, but to those who respond to the gospel, it is a fragrance of life. What an awesome responsibility! *Who is sufficient for these things?* (16; cp. 3:5–6). **Christian, if you are Christ’s captive, being led in triumph by him, your life will spread his fragrance to those around you.**

Paul affirms that unlike many (he may have had false teachers at Corinth in mind), he did not peddle the word of God. The Greek word translated ‘*peddling*’ (17) would have brought to mind a tavern keeper who watered down the wine that he served. Paul did not water down the word of God. He faithfully declared *the whole counsel of God* (cp. Acts 20:27). The gospel preacher has a message from God and is under his gaze as he speaks. Let us beware of those who corrupt this glorious message by watering it down.

*You are manifestly an epistle of Christ*

In the early church, believers were given *epistles of commendation* when they moved to another church (1; cp. Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1). This practice is still observed today in many of our churches when we are obliged to leave them through a change of job location or for some other valid reason. A letter is sent to the receiving church to commend us to them; this practice also demonstrates fellowship between churches. There are professing Christians who have refused to repent of gross sin but have been gladly received by another church. Such lack of discipline and order is an invitation to trouble.

Though Paul did have the commendation of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:23–29), his opponents at Corinth were questioning his credentials. The apostle asked, ‘*Do we begin again to commend ourselves?*’ (1). ‘Self-defence is almost impossible without self-commendation. St. Paul’s opponents made the former necessary, and then blamed him for the latter’ (Paul Barnett quoting another commentator: ‘THE MESSAGE OF 2 CORINTHIANS’ – IVP). Paul pointed out that he and his fellow-workers did not need letters of commendation to show to the Corinthians. God had used them to plant and to establish their church. They were his letter of commendation (2). He adds, ‘*You are manifestly an epistle of Christ*’ (3). They were a letter *written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God* on the heart.

The life of every Christian is a letter from Christ to a needy and lost world, known and read of all men (2). **What kind of message is your life bearing to those around you? Can the handwriting of God be seen in your life?**

*Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,  
In every part with praise,  
That my whole being may proclaim  
Thy being and thy ways.*

(Horatius Bonar)

*Therefore we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to him*

When we think of heaven and all that Christ has done for us, we should not only lift up our hearts in praise to God, but also seek to please him. Paul writes, ‘*Therefore we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to him*’ (9). What is your ambition in your Christian life? Is it to be well pleasing to your Lord and Saviour?

Paul also gives another reason for living to please Christ. He knew that *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* and give an account (10; cp. Romans 14:12). He did not fear condemnation (*there is ... no condemnation to those who are in Christ* – Romans 8:1), but evaluation. He did not fear loss of salvation (the true believer cannot be lost) but loss of commendation. We will have to give an account of our work (or lack of it) to Christ.

Have the words *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* gripped you? ***We must all appear*** ... Phil Arthur writes, ‘Here is a sobering reminder to all believers that our actions matter. The “things done in the body” will never contribute a single ounce to our salvation, but they will show just what my claim to be a saved man is worth’ (STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS pages 109–110).

Are you living to indulge yourself on the passing pleasures and material things of this world? Are you a passenger in your church rather than a willing worker for Christ? If this is true of you, how dare you be so complacent when your precious Saviour died a terrible death to save you? Where is your love for Christ? Do you not fear the shame of being exposed as lazy and self-indulgent at the judgment seat of Christ? **Is it your aim to be well pleasing to Christ?**

How we need to lead our lives in the light of eternity! How we need to give God our best in whatever work he has given us to do, even in the smallest tasks.

*Absent from the body .... present with the Lord*

When *we walk by faith, not by sight* (7) we see everything in its right perspective. Paul writes, *‘We are confident, yes well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord’* (8). The Greek word translated *‘confident’* means to be of good courage. The word is also used in verse 6. *‘Absent’* carries the idea in the Greek of being away from one’s own people, whereas *‘present’* means being among our own people. Death does part us from our own here on earth, but we will immediately be at home with our own people in heaven.

If we are absent from the body in heaven, what do we make of the Scriptures that teach that we will have a new body like that of Christ? If we die before Jesus comes again, we do not immediately have these ‘resurrection bodies’. They will be given to us at the return of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:51–57; Philippians 3:20–21).

Margaret Clarkson, who died in 2008, suffered great pain throughout her life. She displayed great faith and trust in the Lord and her books are very helpful and encouraging. She also wrote many hymns and poems. In yesterday’s notes, we quoted a verse from her lovely hymn, ‘In resurrection bodies like Jesus’ very own’ which describes the resurrection body. You will find the hymn in Phil Arthur’s *STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS* pages 109–110.

Do you have a longing to be at home with the Lord in Heaven? **We have a glorious future in Christ; let us worship and praise God!**

*My Father’s house on high,  
Home of my soul, how near  
At times to faith’s foreseeing eye  
Thy golden gates appear.  
Ah! Then my Spirit faints  
To reach the land I love,  
The bright inheritance of saints,  
Jerusalem above.*

(James Montgomery)

*Ministers of the new covenant*

The apostle goes on to write of the sufficiency (competence) of his fellow-workers and himself as *ministers of the new covenant* (4–6). Their success at Corinth did not come through their own gifts or abilities but what God had done through them (5).

It is almost certain that some of Paul’s opponents at Corinth were Judaizers who gloried in the old covenant. For this reason, he contrasts the difference between the old and the new covenants in these verses:

- The old covenant was a *ministry of the letter* (or ‘the law’; Romans 7:6), the new, a *ministry of the Spirit* (6).
- The old covenant was a *ministry of death*, the new, a *ministry of life* (6–7).
- The old covenant was a *ministry of condemnation*, the new, a *ministry of righteousness* (9).

How does *‘the letter’* (the law) kill and bring death? The law demands perfect obedience to God and it cannot offer life because no man or woman can live up to God’s holy standards (Romans 3:23; Galatians 3:21). The law exposes our sin and pronounces us guilty before God (Romans 3:19–20; Galatians 3:10).

When Moses was given the law, his face shone with glory, but it was a passing glory like that of the old covenant (7; cp. Exodus 34:29–35). The new covenant has a greater glory than the old (9–10). The law, written on stone, condemns us but in the new covenant, Christ’s perfect righteousness is put to our account so that we are no longer condemned. He is our righteousness and in him we have eternal life (5:21; cp. Romans 5:21; 8:1–3). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is *more glorious* than that of the law because in it he writes God’s law not on tablets of stone but in our hearts (3; Hebrews 10:15–16). Moreover, God has put his Spirit within our hearts to enable us to obey him (Ezekiel 36:27).

**Let us meditate on our privileges as those who share in the new covenant and let us rejoice in our great God and Saviour.**

*When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*

The ministry of the new covenant is a ministry of hope. The glory of the new covenant is not a passing glory like that of the old and having this hope enabled Paul to speak boldly (6,12). He again turns our thoughts to Moses and shows that the veil over the prophet's face was a symbol of Israel's blindness when they read the Old Testament (13–15). The Scriptures point us to the Lord Jesus, but a veil still lies on the hearts of the Jews as they read them. It is also true that all who are lost and perishing, whether Jew or Gentile, have a veil on their minds and their understanding is darkened (4:3–4; Ephesians 4:18).

*When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away* (16). The Holy Spirit so works in our lives that the Bible becomes a new book to us and we see everything in a different way. We may use the most powerful and convincing arguments in seeking to persuade sinners of the truth of the gospel but meet with little success. The reason is that there is a veil over their minds. **Christian, how you should rejoice that the Lord has removed the veil from you!** You now see the Lord Jesus as the glorious Son of God and as the only Saviour.

When one turns to the Lord, the heart is set free from the power of Satan and sin. *The glorious liberty of the children of God* (Romans 8:21) becomes a reality in our lives. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (17). Moses' face shone when the law was given but now all believers may gaze with the eye of faith on *the glory of the Lord* (18). Derek Prime writes, 'Looking is a way of becoming. As we contemplate the Lord Jesus, a glorious miracle takes place: we become like him in character. Our lives are intended to become brighter and more attractive as we become more like him (v.18). Becoming like him, we reflect his glory' (LET'S STUDY 2 CORINTHIANS, page 40). We should reflect the likeness of Christ in our lives, being transformed to be more like our wonderful Saviour through the power of the Holy Spirit (18).

*Our earthly house, this tent ... In this we groan*

The discouragements spoken of in chapter 4 should not cause us to lose heart because of the things that *we know* concerning the state of the Christian after death (1,6). We may fear the process of dying and the parting from our loved-ones, but death should hold no terror for the Christian.

*We know* that our bodies, described as *our earthly house, this tent* (1) and *our outward man* (4:16), will be destroyed by death unless we are alive at the second coming of Christ, (hence the 'if' in verse 1). Tents are very flimsy when compared to buildings of brick or solid stone. When a Christian dies, he leaves his 'tent' behind. Our bodies are frail and this should make us *groan* and desire to be with the Lord in heaven (2,4; cp. Romans 8:23). Our bodies are subject to suffering and the ravages of decay in the aging process.

We also know that though our bodies are destined for destruction, they will be replaced by something far more wonderful – *our habitation which is from heaven* (1–2). Our resurrection bodies will be wonderful! When the Lord Jesus comes again, *he will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body* (Philippians 3:20–21).

*O resurrection body, young, radiant, vibrant, free,  
with powers unthought, undreamed of — how rich your joys will be!  
Through endless years to marvel, design, create, explore,  
in resurrection wonder to worship, serve, adore!*

(Margaret Clarkson)

Mortality is *swallowed up by life* when we die (4). The Lord Jesus is preparing a home for us (John 14:2) and God is preparing us for heaven by giving us the Holy Spirit *as a guarantee* (5; same word translated 'deposit' in 1:22). We have become *a new creation* in Christ through the work of the Spirit (17) and he continues to work in us to prepare us for heaven. **How often do you think about heaven? How often do you lift up your heart in praise to God for saving you from your sin and for giving you eternal life?**



*We do not look at the things which are seen*

Paul was encouraged to persevere because of what God was doing through him (1–15) and in understanding what God was doing in him (16–18). There are a number of contrasts in verses 16 to 18:

<i>Our outward man</i>	—	<i>the inward man.</i>
<i>Light affliction</i>	—	<i>weight of glory.</i>
<i>The things which are seen</i>	—	<i>the things which are not seen.</i>
<i>Temporary</i>	—	<i>eternal.</i>

We are painfully aware of physical weakness and decay as we grow older but we must not lose heart. *Our outward man* is our body (not to be confused with *the old man* which is our old, sinful nature – Ephesians 4:22–24). Though the body is perishing, the inward man (the soul) is being renewed day by day (16). The longer we live as Christians, the stronger we should become in our souls which are of far greater value than the body (Mark 8:36–37). Our affliction (pressure) is light and passing when compared with the *exceeding and eternal weight of glory* which awaits us (17 – the Hebrew word for *glory* carries the idea of ‘weight’). Our poor, decaying bodies will be raised and glorified when Jesus comes again (Philippians 3:20–21).

**What do you look at when your faith is tried?** If you want to be encouraged, you must use the eye of faith so that you *do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen* (18). It is by faith that we see God who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). When a Christian walks ‘*by faith, not by sight*’ (5:7) he can say, ‘*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*’ (Romans 8:18).

*Help me to walk aright,  
More by faith, less by sight;  
Lead me with heavenly light;  
Teach me thy way!*

(B. Mansell Ramsey)

*We do not lose heart*

There are a number of things in the Christian ministry which may bring discouragement to the servant of God. Paul twice states in this chapter, ‘*We do not lose heart*’ (1,16). Some of the things which could have disheartened the apostle are mentioned these verses:

- The difficulty of gospel work because *the god of this age* (Satan) had blinded the minds of sinners so that they would not believe or receive his message (4). There is a veil over the minds of Gentiles as well as Jews (3–4; cp. 3:14–16).
- Physical weakness and danger (10,16–17).
- Opposition to his ministry (8–10). Paul had spent eighteen months in Corinth where he had suffered persecution (Acts 18:1–17). He had worked to keep himself and had endured much weariness and toil (11:9,27). The church was later infiltrated by false teachers who preached *another Jesus ... a different gospel* (11:3–4). A good work was being spoiled.

What encouraged Paul to persevere and not lose heart?

- He knew the mercy of God in his life (1).
- He was privileged to be a minister of the new covenant (1; cp. 3:6). This is a ministry of the Holy Spirit (3:8), of righteousness (3:9) and of reconciliation (5:18).
- He was privileged to preach the gospel of the glory of Christ (4).
- He trusted in the almighty, sovereign God *who commanded light to shine out of darkness* (6; Genesis 1:2–3). The same God is able to shine into the dark hearts of sinners to give *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (6).
- Suffering does not last for ever, but glory and heaven do (16–18).

**Have you been losing heart in your Christian life or in your work for the Lord? Oh, persevere! The Lord knows what he is doing with you and with his work.**

*We have renounced the hidden things of shame*

In the world of business and politics it is often claimed that a person's personal life has no bearing on his ability to do the job. This fallacy has been exposed by the corruption of some in banking and business whose greed has led to economic problems that have affected us all. We have also suffered through politicians who have been deceitful and dishonest in their personal lives and in government.

**If honesty is needed in business and politics, how much more it is required in the work of God! Preachers and church leaders must be godly and sincere in every aspect of their lives.** Our character has a vital bearing on our work for the Lord. Paul writes concerning himself and his fellow-workers of what they had renounced and what they preached: *'Since we have this ministry ... we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness ...'* (2). The apostle and his fellow-workers want the Corinthians to understand the difference between them and the false teachers in Corinth. Phil Arthur comments that Paul 'was wonderfully transparent ... He was a man completely without pretence. What you saw was what you got. Paul understood that God desires "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6). Do we?' (STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS – 2 CORINTHIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED, page 89).

Paul also affirms that they had not handled *the Word of God deceitfully* (2). They had not tampered with the Old Testament Scriptures, mixing error with truth. They had not diluted the message of Christ and his gospel. They were obliged to commend themselves because of the accusations of false teachers, but they did this *'in the sight of God.'*

They also preached Christ Jesus the Lord: *'We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake'* (5). Jesus was their Lord but they also considered themselves as servants of the church in Corinth for the sake of Jesus Christ. Do we not only own Jesus as our Lord but also seek to be servants of his people?

*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*

Do you feel weak or inadequate in your work for the Lord? Be encouraged because Paul felt just the same but God greatly used him. Weakness is a recurring theme in this letter (see 1:8; 10:10; 12:7–10) and the apostle takes it up again in verse 7: *'We have this treasure in earthen vessels'* ('jars of clay,' ESV). *This treasure*, this glorious gospel ministry of giving *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (6) was entrusted to someone who was as fragile as a clay pot. Think of that! Paul felt pressure from every direction because of this ministry; he knew perplexity and disappointment, persecution and being struck down (probably depression). How bleak it all would be except for the *'but not's'* in verses 8 and 9 ('yet not' and 'but not' are identical in the Greek). — *'We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed'* (8–9). Oh, the excellence of God's power in jars of clay (7)!

What does Paul mean by *carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus* (10)? It is his suffering as a Christian described in the verses quoted above and elsewhere in this letter (1:8–9; 6:3–10; 11:23–29). Jesus calls on all who would follow him to deny themselves and to take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23). **There is a price to pay when we die to our own self interests (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:31) and we have to be prepared for persecution in various forms.** There is also great gain however! When *'the dying of the Lord Jesus'* is seen in us, so also is *the life of Jesus*.

The death principle working in Paul and his fellow workers brought life to the Corinthians (10–12). In verse 13, Paul quotes from Psalm 116 which is a psalm of rejoicing for deliverance from death. The apostle was confident that God the Father, who raised the Lord Jesus from the grave, would also raise him, his companions and the Corinthians (14). In dying a thousand deaths however, *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:36–37).