

**NOTES ON
PAUL'S LETTERS
TO THE
CORINTHIANS**



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FALSE AND TRUE WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 14: 1 to 19

1. *Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.*
2. *For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.*
3. *But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.*
4. *He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.*
5. *I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.*
6. *But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?*
7. *Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?*
8. *For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?*
9. *So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.*
10. *There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.*
11. *Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.*
12. *Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.*
13. *Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.*
14. *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.*
15. *What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*

16. *Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?*
17. *For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.*
18. *I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;*
19. *Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

This passage in Paul's letter is difficult for us in our day to understand because it deals in some detail with miraculous Christian experiences that passed away early in the Gospel Age with the deaths of the Apostles. Throughout this section of Paul's letter, he concentrated on **two spiritual gifts** and compared them with each other.

The first gift was **speaking in foreign languages**. This gift was common in the early Church, and it seems that it was a highly coveted gift. But it had dangers. It appears from Paul's words that people who possessed it were greatly admired, and this led to unwarranted pride in people who displayed the gift in Church services. The display of this gift also led some who were present, and heard the gift in action, to covet the gift as though it were more important than other spiritual gifts. Perhaps this was so because the gift of speaking in foreign languages was more ostentatious and drew more attention to those who displayed it in the eyes of other believers.

The second gift that Paul mentioned was the gift of **preaching**. Many translations speak of this second gift as prophecy, and this translation has caused some confusion, because the word prophecy has two main meanings: foretelling the future and preaching. It is clear from the context that Paul meant the latter meaning, namely preaching, that is, expounding the will of God and the Gospel message as the Lord Jesus proclaimed it. Paul declared that the gift of preaching the truth of the Gospel was superior to the gift of speaking in foreign languages, and proceeded to say why he thought so. He began by declaring that the foreign languages spoken were addressed to God and not men and women because ordinary human beings could not understand languages other than their own. When a believer made use of the gift of speaking in foreign languages, he or she may have been enriching his or her spiritual experience, but he or she would not be benefiting other believers because to them the language spoken would be unintelligible. On the other hand, the gift of preaching would provide messages which everyone could understand and which would be beneficial to all.

Paul continued by using some illustrations and analogies. He intended to go to the Corinthians, but if he went speaking in foreign languages, what use would that be? They would have had no idea what he was saying unless he explained what he meant, and told them in understandable language what God had told him about some prophetic words and also some important Christian teachings. He quoted the example of musical instruments, each of which produced its own musical sound so that the hearers knew which instrument was being played.

In particular, he said that if a trumpet (nowadays we would say a bugle) did not make a clear call to advance and engage in battle, no one would know what to do. There are many languages in the world, and if we met someone who spoke another language, we would not understand him or her, and he or she would not understand us.

Paul acknowledged the gift of speaking in foreign languages, and reminded the Corinthians that he spoke more foreign languages than any of them, but he insisted that to be of any value, any gift must benefit the whole congregation. Therefore, if the gift of speaking in foreign languages were to be used, it would be useless unless it were interpreted. If people were praying or singing, whether in the Spirit or not, they had to do so with understanding, that is, with their minds. They had to know what was happening, and all those present had to be able to understand what was said and done. And Paul's blunt conclusion was that it would be better to speak five words that could be understood than ten thousand words in an unknown language.

Some valuable truths emerge from this section. In verse 3 we read of the threefold aim of all true Christian preaching.

1. It must strive to **build up**, that is, to increase the believers' knowledge of Christian truth and help them in their endeavours to live the Christian life.
2. It must aim to **encourage**. Within Christian fellowship all members should find something to cheer them and give them resolve and strength for action. In Christian meetings and services, members may be humbled by being reminded that they are sinners, but if this happens, they should also be led to understand that God has promised them His grace and mercy, and is prepared to forgive and overlook failures and shortcomings, and if believers are sincere, God will accept them as His children and deal with them as though they were righteous, holy people.

3. The aim of preaching is also to **comfort**. In any group of Christian people there will be some who have been hurt by some event or events in their lives, and Christian preaching and fellowship should provide comfort and assurance to all who may have suffered and who may still be bearing in their hearts and minds the burden of sorrow and regret that only God, through Jesus, can take away by the eventual fulfilment of all the promises and blessings written in the sacred Scripture, which promises and blessings will be surely fulfilled and will never go by default, as the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write in chapter 61, verses 1 to 3; *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ... to comfort all that mourn ... to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ... "* (KJV). These prophetic words were fulfilled by the Lord Jesus as recorded in Luke 4:18-21, and remain to comfort all believers to this day and onward.

In verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul set down the background and substance of all his preaching.

(1) It came by a direct revelation from God. It affects us in the way that we cannot speak to others about Christian truth unless God has first spoken to us. We cannot at this time of the Gospel Age expect anything miraculous, but God has spoken to us in His word, and other committed believers have spoken to us of their understandings of Scriptural truths and how they have applied them in their lives. Such experiences have surely come from God because the truth contained in the Scriptures and the truth contained in the words of dedicated believers may be reasonably considered to have come from the Lord God. We ourselves cannot give rise to truth from our own thinking, but we can learn of Christian truth by study and by listening to committed Christians as they talk to us either in discussions, conversations, or from the platform. Christians can only transmit truth that has been revealed to them.

(2) Preaching may bring some special knowledge. We cannot be experts in everything or even in many things, but each of us has special knowledge of something, perhaps teaching, engineering, skills of trade such as carpentry or plumbing, skills with sewing and the making of garments and useful household articles, skills with baking and food preparation, to name a few.

In any case, the experiences of life have given something special to each one of us, and the most effective preaching is to give witness to what we have found to be true in applying Christian principles and values in our lives.

(3) Preaching must consist of proclaiming the truth. In the early Church, the first preaching was a simple proclamation of Christianity, the facts of Christ's life and His instructions to all believers. Paul stated the basic truths of Christianity in his words to Timothy, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time"* (1 Timothy 2:5,6; KJV).

(4) Preaching must be supported by teaching. We are all thinking people, and many committed Christians have made their commitment to Christ after asking many questions and becoming convinced that Christianity has the only acceptable answers to doubts and uncertainties about life and the future of the world, and the whole human race.

From the whole lengthy passage quoted at the beginning of this paper, two broad principles of Christian worship may be seen.

1. Worship should not be selfish

All that is done in worship should be done for the sake of all who take part. No individual has a right to direct Christian worship according to his or her personal preferences. Every member should strive for the good of the whole congregation, and the basic test of Christian worship should be that it will bring everyone nearer to one another and nearer to God through the Lord Jesus.

2. Worship should be understandable to all

The great aims of Christian worship are essentially the simple things, and the simplest language should become the noblest language. For those who have not had the benefits of higher education, the procedures and level of language in worship services should satisfy their minds and comfort their hearts, because only what our minds can grasp can bring strength and commitment to our lives.

THE RESULT OF FALSE AND TRUE WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 14: 20 to 25

20. *Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.*
21. *In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me", says the Lord.*
22. *Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.*
23. *Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?*
24. *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.*
25. *And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.*

In this passage, we see that Paul was still dealing with the matter of believers speaking in foreign languages during Church services and meetings. He began by telling the Corinthians to stop thinking and acting like children, and to think like mature people, but also be as innocent as very young children. It seems that Paul meant that the admiration given to people speaking in foreign languages was a kind of childish esteem given without mature and proper thought and consideration by adults who should have known better.

Paul then found an argument in the Old Testament. He referred to Isaiah 28:9-13, which reads as follows:

- 9 *"Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?*
- 10 *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little."*
- 11 *For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people,*

- 12 *To whom He said, "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest", and, "This is the refreshing"; yet they would not hear.*
- 13 *But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little", that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught.*

God through His prophet was warning the people. Isaiah had preached to them in Hebrew, their own language, but they did not listen. So, because of their disobedience, the Assyrians would come and conquer them and occupy their cities. Then the Israelites would have to listen to language that they did not understand. They would have to listen to the foreign language of their conquerors speaking to them unintelligibly, but not even that dreadful experience would make the unbelieving Israelites turn to God. Paul then directed his argument resulting from the book of Isaiah to the effect that foreign languages were meant for a hard-hearted and unbelieving people, and so were ineffective for them.

Then the Apostle introduced a very practical argument. If a stranger or an innocent enquirer came into a Church meeting where different members were speaking at the same time in different foreign languages, that person would think that the place was a mad-house. But if the truth of God were being seriously and intelligibly proclaimed in an orderly manner, then the result would be quite different. Newcomers would be brought face to face with God through the Christian message, and would come to realise that they were alienated from their Creator, but could come to Him in repentance through Jesus Christ, and qualify by faith for eternal life.

Verses 24 and 25 of 1Corinthians 14 give us a summary of what could happen when Christian truth is intelligibly proclaimed. There seem to be four important attainments.

1. Christian truth causes men and women to realise that they are sinners and alienated from God their Creator. They come to see what they really are and that their state of heart and mind makes them feel inadequate and insecure. The woman of Samaria is a case in point when she realised what Jesus had said to her. *"Come"* she said, *"and see a man who told me everything I have done!"* (John 4:29). The first result of hearing the message of God is often the realisation by men and women that they are sinners and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

2. Christian truth brings men and women under judgment. They see that they must acknowledge the fact of their unrighteousness and need for repentance in their living of life, with no regard for their eventual destiny, of simply seeking after pleasures of the flesh with no thought for the future. But on coming to God, they see that their lives can have a purpose now and in the future, and that purpose is a promise of service to God through Jesus Christ in the resurrection and redemption of the human race to be fulfilled in the future Kingdom of God.

3. The Christian message reveals to men and women the secrets of their own hearts. These secrets are not always the things we want to think about or bring to the surface of our sinful fallen minds. But the Christian message should compel us to be honest with ourselves and be humble enough to come in repentance to God through Jesus Christ, the only way, asking forgiveness and acceptance which we do not deserve, but which God will freely give us because of His mercy and grace, which are offered to us and to everyone who has sincere faith and commitment to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. When the Christian message is believed and understood, it should bring us to our knees before God. When we have done this literally, or figuratively in our minds, when we have approached God in our prayers and supplications, and acknowledged our helpless estate, and when we can say and pray only, "*God be merciful to me a sinner*" then we have qualified for acceptance by our loving Creator and are in line for His mercy and grace which we could never earn and do not in fact deserve.

The final test of our worship should be, does it make us experience the presence of God? We should feel in our worship service and studies that God through Jesus is listening to what we say, and searching our minds and hearts, knowing what is in them, and taking account of our poor efforts to serve and please Him in all that we say and in all that we do.

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

1 Corinthians 14: 26 to 33

26. *How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

27. *If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.*
28. *But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.*
29. *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.*
30. *But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.*
31. *For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.*
32. *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*
33. *For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

Paul brought this section of his letter to a close by giving some very practical advice. He wrote that anyone who was given a gift by God should be able to exercise that gift, but gave clear instructions that Church services should not become competitive or disorderly. Only two or three should exercise the gift of speaking in foreign languages, and should do so by turns and only if someone was present who could interpret what was said. If no interpreter was present, anyone who had the gift of speaking in foreign languages should remain silent. Everyone was able to preach the truth of the Gospel, but only two or three should do so by turns, and if someone in the congregation had the conviction that he or she had been given a special message by God, the one who was speaking must give way and let that person speak and give his or her special message. The person who was speaking could easily give way, because he or she should not claim to be carried away and unable to stop, for preachers should be able to control their own intention. There had to be freedom but not disorder. God is a God of peace and must always be worshipped in peace.

This section of Paul's letter has given us a good indication of the nature of early Church services. There must have been great freedom and informality in them. Two matters come to notice for us now in this latter period of the Gospel Age.

(1) The Church had no full-time or professional ministry as today's churches have. Certainly the Apostles stood out with special authority, but there was no full-time or professional ministry. It was open to anyone who had a gift to use that gift. As Bible students we do not agree with a salaried professional ministry, but it has happened that committed and dedicated believers have worked full-time in studying, proclaiming and publishing the message of life contained in the sacred Scriptures, and have depended on donations

to meet the necessities of life and the costs involved in publishing and distributing Scriptural truth. William Barclay has commented on page 158 of his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians' as follows; 'It is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can ever bring God's truth to men and women'.

(2) There must have been flexibility in the services as they were conducted in the early Church. Everything was informal enough to allow anyone who felt that they had a message to give, to be allowed to give it. It appears to us that people came to Church services with the intention of contributing to them; they did not come just to be passive listeners. This, of course, had its dangers, as it seems to have been the case in Corinth that there were some who were too fond of the limelight and the sound of their own voices. Nevertheless, the Church in those days was more or less the province of the ordinary Christian. It seems good to me that we as Christians should always be ready both to listen and to contribute in our Scriptural studies and group discussions, but always with propriety and good order.

TRADITIONS AND GOOD ORDER

1 Corinthians 14: 34 to 40

34. *Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.*
35. *And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*
36. *Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?*
37. *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.*
38. *But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*
39. *Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.*
40. *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

There seems to have been departures from traditional behaviour and customs of the time in the congregation at Corinth which Paul did not like. He wrote in the above passage that when God's people meet for worship, the women must not be allowed to speak. This matter needs a little more discussion.

In the ancient world and the world of Paul's day, the social place of women was low. Sophocles (496-406 BC) was a Greek tragic playwright who said, 'Silence confers grace upon a woman', and indeed women led very secluded lives in ancient Greece. The Jews had an even lower opinion of women, and there are many sayings of the Rabbis which belittle the place of women. 'As to teaching the law to a woman, one might as well teach her impiety.' 'To teach the law to a woman was to cast pearls before swine.' The Talmud (a collection of binding precepts of the oral law) lists among the plagues of the world 'the talkative and the inquisitive widow and the virgin who wastes her time in prayers'. It was even forbidden to speak to a woman on the street. 'One must not ask a service from a woman, or salute her' wrote the early Rabbis.

It was in such a society that Paul wrote this passage. He was probably thinking of the vice and the lack of morality in the city of Corinth, and considered that nothing must be done by the congregation to bring about even the slightest suspicion of impropriety.

The matter of women speaking or not speaking in church services is a matter of controversy among Bible students. Much has been written about this subject, so I will not digress to discuss the matter more fully, but will say only that I think it a mistake to take these words of Paul out of their context in 1 Corinthians 14 and make them apply universally to the Christian Church throughout the Gospel Age. To those who think otherwise, I must say that their insistence on women remaining silent must mean that women must not say anything at all, even in open Bible study classes or discussions. Further, what is to be made of Paul's statement that if women wanted to know something they had to ask their husbands at home? What if unmarried women had questions? What were they to do? Paul does not say.

Beginning with the ministry of the Lord Jesus, Christianity has brought about great improvements to the conditions and status of women, and Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*"

Paul wrote to the Corinthians with a certain sternness in the passage under consideration. The members of the Corinthian congregation were behaving in ways that did not conform to Christ's teaching. He asked them, in effect, what right did they have to act as they did? Were they the originators of the Christian Church? Did they have a

monopoly of the Gospel truth? They had received teachings from him and traditional godly conduct, and to such things they had to be obedient. It appears that some in the congregation were rebelling against his authority. He told them in no uncertain terms that the advice he gave them and the rules he laid down came to him from God and the Lord Jesus, and if any persons refused to understand them they must be left in ignorance.

And so Paul drew this issue to a close. He made it clear that he had no wish to stifle anyone's gift, but the main thing for which he strove was the good order of the Church. He laid down the principle that individuals who received gifts from God had to use them, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole congregation.

THE RESURRECTION CHAPTER

Preliminary Comments

The notes that have been presented for consideration in the previous papers on Paul's letters to the Corinthian congregation, and the further notes that will be presented in this paper, are intended to be helpful to independent Bible students who may or may not be affiliated with any established Christian group, or anyone for that matter who may be interested in reading and understanding the Bible.

The commentators and expositors which I have consulted in my endeavours to make clear to my Christian brethren, and whoever may look at my notes, have provided many helpful explanations and much valuable research designed to make clear the Apostle's messages and instructions to the early congregation at Corinth. Many of the learned commentators, however, have said that the Apostle's comments are often difficult to understand and follow. There are some passages in Paul's first letter that are certainly difficult, but many matters that are said to cause problems stem from the general understandings that human beings have an immortal soul, and that death means that people have become more alive than before and have passed to another life of glory which they had not experienced in their earthly lives.

Such beliefs as these can be shown to be untrue by careful study of the Scriptures. The Scriptures declare that death to human beings means returning to the dust from which our ancestor Adam was made in creation, because all human beings have come under God's judgment on Adam. The Scriptures also declare that at the time of death a person's thoughts perish, and that there is neither work, knowledge, nor wisdom, nor any device in the grave (Genesis 3:19; Psalm 146:4; Job 14:21; Ecclesiastes 9:4-6).

Since a person's body will return to dust after the breath of life is reclaimed by God who gave it (Psalm 104:29), it follows that the person does not exist after death. Death is a state of non-existence.

To understand more fully what death means involves some knowledge of what is meant by the soul. According to Genesis 2:7 in the KJV, Adam became a living soul when the breath of life was breathed into his newly-created body. The NIV has "... *the man became a living being*" able to think, feel and act. An examination of the Hebrew text shows that the term "*being*" is an interpretation of 'breathing creature' and that there is no justification for the introduction of the word 'soul', especially when it is inferred to be 'immortal soul'.

When Adam died his body returned to the dust of which it was composed. He, as a human being ceased to exist. There was no soul to live on and turn God's punishment of death into a lie.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:14, Adam was still dead, that is, he did not exist, when Jesus was killed. Isaiah 53:8 states prophetically that the Lord Jesus was *"cut off out of the land of the living"* and verses 10 and 12 say that He made His soul (KJV) or life (NIV) an offering for sin, and that He poured out His soul (KJV) or life (NIV) unto death. This means that His life was taken from Him when He was crucified for us and for every human being as an atonement for sin. God abandoned Him to a state of non-existence, which gives great depth to the meaning of the resurrection.

The Psalmist's prediction is quoted in Acts 2:27, which tells us that our Lord's soul (being) was not left in Hades, meaning the grave, the state or condition of death. Our Lord did not go immediately to Heaven when He died. He actually died and remained in that state of non-existence until God raised Him to life again on the third day after His death. Even then He did not go to Heaven, but remained on earth for forty days until His ascension.

To conclude these introductory comments, the soul as used in Scripture, means a sentient being which is produced by the union of body and breath. All the members of Adam's race have been, and are breathing creatures, that is, human beings, not souls. The term 'immortal soul' is a teaching and concept nowhere to be found in the Bible. The concept of the soul, and / or immortal soul, was introduced from pagan beliefs prior to the establishment of the monotheism of the Israelites. This whole matter is fully discussed and explained in three of our publications, 'The Dead - Where are They?', 'Everlasting Punishment', and 'Do the Dead Communicate?'. I intend to make further comments on the resurrection that God and Jesus have promised, as we encounter some of the misbeliefs and misunderstandings of the Apostle's inspired words.

The Resurrection of the Body

The resurrection of the human body is a teaching that continues to cause problems for many commentators because they approach the subject with belief in the immortality of the soul, that is, the belief that the human body is a dwelling place for a spirit that animates and controls the body, but leaves the body when the body dies and enables the indwelling soul to proceed to Heaven, leaving the mortal body to decay and return to dust. This belief and teaching is unacceptable because it contradicts the plain statements of Scripture to which I have already referred.

In the early Christian Church, there must have been two main ethnic backgrounds, for in all congregations there were Jews and Greeks. Firstly, there was the Jewish background. The Sadducees denied that there was any life after death at all. In the Old Testament there are not many passages that mention life after death, and not many references of a better life to come. But there are some. Job said, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - and not another"* (Job 19:25-27). In Psalm 145 David acknowledged his pleasure in the belief that he would praise the LORD forever. There are also a number of references to the glories of God's Kingdom to come, such as Isaiah 2:2-4; all of chapter 35; 60:1-3; 65:12:25; Jeremiah 31:15-17, to mention just some of the most significant Old Testament promises.

I am grateful to William Barclay for his comments on the Greek world, which I am quoting almost word for word. The Greek world was the second background in the early Christian Church. Historians and commentators have testified that the Greeks had a real fear of death. The great Greek dramatist Euripides wrote, 'Yet mortals, burdened with countless ills, still love life. They long for each coming day, glad to bear the things they know, rather than face death the unknown'. On the whole, the Greeks and that part of the world influenced by Greek thought, believed in the immortality of the soul, which for them involved the complete destruction of the body.

They had a proverb, 'The body is a tomb'. It was a Greek who said, 'I am a poor soul, shackled to a corpse'. The Roman writer Seneca (55 BC - 40 AD) said, no doubt influenced by Greek thought, 'It pleased me to enquire into the eternity of the soul - nay! to believe in it. I surrendered myself to that great hope'. But he also said, 'When the day shall come which shall part this mixture of divine and human, here, where I found it, I will leave my body, myself I will give back to the gods'.

The stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote, 'When God does not supply what is necessary, he is sounding the signal for retreat - he has opened the door and says to you; 'Come!' But whither? To nothing terrible, but to whence you came, to the things which are dear and kin to you, to the elements. What in you was fire shall go to fire, earth to earth, water to water.' Seneca also wrote about things at death 'being resolved into their ancient elements'. For Plato, 'the body is the antithesis of the soul, as the source of all weaknesses as opposed to what alone is capable of independence and goodness'.

We can see this best in the Stoic belief. To the Stoics, God was a fiery spirit, purer than anything on earth. What gave life was that a spark of this divine fire came and dwelt in a human body. When anyone died, the body simply dissolved into the elements of which it was made, but the divine spark returned to God and was absorbed in the divinity of which it was a part. This agrees with the scriptural truth of the body made from the dust and the breath of life being the divine spark.

For the Greeks, immortality lay precisely in getting rid of the body. For them, the resurrection of the body was unthinkable. Personal immortality did not really exist, because that which gave life was absorbed again in God, the source of all life.

Paul's comments were quite different. He told the Corinthians that in the resurrection, God will give each person a new body, but each person's individual personality and identity will be restored to what it was when each person died. To Christians, the body is not evil, but is an organism fearfully and wonderfully made. The Lord Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was made flesh, that is, transformed from a mighty spirit being into a human being of flesh and blood by the Lord God, with Whom nothing good is impossible (Luke 1:37; Matthew 19:26), but the identity of the Lord Jesus was retained and preserved, as the Scriptures have recorded.

JESUS DIED AND WAS RAISED TO LIFE

1 Corinthians 15: 1 to 11

1. *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,*
2. *By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.*
3. *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*
4. *And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,*
5. *And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*
6. *After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.*
7. *After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.*
8. *Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.*

9. *For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*
10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*
11. *Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

In the foregoing passage, Paul repeated the main items of the good news which he had first taken to the Corinthians. The news that Paul took was not news that he had invented, but news that had first been delivered to him, news of a risen Lord.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul said five things about the good news that he took to the Corinthians.

1. The good news was something which the Corinthians had received. The good news, that is, the Gospel, was not something which was invented or made up, rather the Gospel was and is a message that people cannot discover for themselves; it is something that is received. And herein lies the very significant and primary function of the Church. The Church is the repository and also the transmitter of the good news. Interested people learn of the good news from believing Christian people, and such inquirers become believers by the consistent reinforcement and encouragement from a fellowship of committed believers.

2. The good news was a new relationship with God in which the Corinthians stood. The first function of the good news was, and is, to give people stability in a changing world, and a world which is often indifferent to their circumstances and needs. The Gospel gives believers power to resist temptations. The Gospel helps believers to endure heartbreak or perhaps physical suffering without giving in or losing heart. The Gospel also helps people to stay upright on their feet, metaphorically as it were, in a world which sometimes contains obstacles or frustrations and slippery pathways or temptations. Moffatt's translation of Job 4:4 reads, "*Your words have kept men on their feet*". That is what belief in the Gospel can do.

3. The good news was a way of life in which the Corinthians were being saved. In the Greek original, the verb used is in the present tense, not the past. Some Greek scholars say that the correct translation of the passage is "*in which you are being saved*". This means that salvation grants the promise of eternal life to the believer, and we know that God will honour His promise, provided that the

believer continues to live a life consistent with continued faith and obedience to the commands given by God and the Lord Jesus. We all know that we, as fallen human beings, cannot fully achieve a life that is free from failings, faults and shortcomings, but forgiveness is promised by the Lord God if a believer continues to ask for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus, so that God accepts the believer because of his or her faith, and considers and deals with him or her as though he or she is a righteous person. Some Christians have tried to maintain the belief which says 'once saved always saved', but this cannot be sustained because it is possible for a believer to so neglect the promise of salvation in that he or she may fall away from commitment to Jesus' commands, and so not qualify for the promised inheritance, but that is a matter for the Lord's righteous judgment.

4. The message of the Gospel was, and is, a message that had and has to be held tenaciously. Things happen in life which we may not understand, problems and questions arise for which we sometimes do not have adequate answers or responses, and there may be times when life has dark places where there seems to be nothing else to do but to hold on. But faith that is tenaciously held will always be victorious, as the Apostle John wrote, *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"* (1 John 5:4).

5. The Gospel message was, and is, something that must not be held haphazardly or randomly. If faith is not firmly based in a person's mind it may not endure and may be lost. Faith must be fully thought out so that it becomes, as it were, second nature to us, and remains indelibly with us so that nothing can ever take it from us.

In Paul's list of appearances of the risen Lord, two are especially interesting.

(1) The appearance to Peter. In Mark's account of the resurrection, the messenger in the empty tomb was, *"Go, tell his disciples and Peter"* (Mark 16:7). In Luke 24:34 the disciples say: *"The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon"*.

It seems unexpected to us that one of the first appearances of the risen Lord was to Peter who had denied Him three times. We can only wonder at the love and grace of the Lord Jesus in coming to comfort and forgive him in the pain of his disloyalty to his Master, which caused him to realise the horror of his wrong-doing and which caused him to move away from those around him and to weep bitterly.

(2) The appearance to James. It is likely that the James mentioned is the brother of our Lord, that is, one of the family members of Joseph and Mary. It seems clear from the Gospel accounts that Jesus' earthly family did not understand Him and may have been hostile to Him. Mark 3:21 tells us that His family sought to restrain Him *"For they said, He is beside himself"*. John 7:5 tells us that his brothers did not believe in Him. We are told nothing else about Jesus' relationships with His earthly family when He was preparing Himself for His ministry and eventual atoning sacrifice. It may be inferred that James had treated the Lord Jesus with perhaps some contempt and disdain, and thought that Jesus was possibly deluded and carried away with visions of grandeur. But whatever the reason may have been, the Lord Jesus appeared to James to forgive him for whatever hurt James had expressed or done to the Lord Jesus while He remained with His earthly family. Jesus may have sought to bring peace of mind to James who had thought Jesus to be 'beside himself', and was numbered among those who did not believe in Him.

It is moving for us to contemplate that Jesus, in two of His first appearances after His resurrection, were to men who had hurt Him and who were deeply sorry for their words and actions.

Finally in this passage to the Corinthians we learn more of Paul's own character. It was the most precious event in Paul's life that Jesus had appeared to him also. That was the great moment and turning point in Paul's life, and verses 9 to 11 of 1 Corinthians 15 tell us more about him.

The verses tell us firstly of his complete humility. He said that he was the least of all the Apostles, and had been granted an office for which he was not worthy. It was by the grace of God and the power of the holy spirit that he had become what he was. He seemed to be accepting of a taunt made against him that he was a small man and by no means good looking (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul was so conscious of his own unworthiness that he seemed to have felt that no-one could say anything too bad about him. He did not resent the criticisms and taunts of others, but rather seemed to feel that he deserved them.

The verses referred secondly to the consciousness of his own worth. He was well aware that his labour and efforts were beyond those of anyone else. This was not a false modesty, because he always spoke not of what he was doing but of what Jesus had instructed him and what God had enabled him to do.

Thirdly, the verses of 1 Corinthians 15 tell us of Paul's sense of fellowship. He did not consider himself to be an isolated preacher with a unique message. He, along with the other apostles, preached the same Gospel. His greatness, which he denied but nevertheless undeniably existed, bound him and them in close Christian fellowship.

IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED

1 Corinthians 15: 12 to 19

12. *Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*
13. *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*
14. *And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*
15. *Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.*
16. *For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.*
17. *And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*
18. *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*
19. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

After writing to the Corinthians and setting out for them eye-witness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul then took up his attack on the opponents at Corinth who argued that dead people could not be raised to life again, and therefore the whole basis of the Christian faith would have been destroyed.

But the raising to life of Jesus Christ was and remains the essential basis of the Christian faith. Christ's resurrection is the proof of four major facts.

1. Because God is absolutely truthful, the power of the resurrection proves that truth is always stronger than falsehood. According to John 8:40 Jesus said to His enemies, *"Now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth"*. Jesus came to earth with the message that God is love and is the very essence and pinnacle of goodness, but His enemies eventually saw to it that He was put to death because they did not want to have their corrupt and evil deeds exposed by Jesus openly for all to see and know. If they had succeeded in destroying Him and obliterating His message, falsehood would have been seen to be stronger than truth and so it remains that the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate guarantee that truth cannot ever be overcome.

2. Similarly, the resurrection proves that good is stronger than evil because of God's absolute goodness. In John 8:44 Jesus is recorded as saying to those who opposed Him, *"You are of your father the devil"*. The forces of evil crucified Jesus, and if there had been no resurrection, those forces would have triumphed. If the resurrection had not taken place, then the principle that good is stronger than evil would have been nullified, and we could never be certain of that great and lasting truth.

3. The resurrection proves that love is stronger than hatred because God's love for Jesus overcame death and thus transcended the hatred which provoked the crucifixion. Jesus told us that His Father, God, is love, and so also is Jesus, for He said, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14:9). On the other hand, those who hated Jesus with great bitterness brought about His crucifixion, and if there had been no resurrection then it would have meant that human hatred had conquered the final proof that love is stronger than hatred.

4. The resurrection proves that life is stronger than death. God is the source of all life. He has life in Himself, and as the all-powerful Creator He will not allow death to mar that creation permanently. He has promised to destroy death. If Jesus had not been raised from death, it would have meant that death could have taken the best and loveliest life that ever lived and would have triumphed over it. The resurrection is the proof that life is stronger than death.

Paul insisted that if the resurrection of Jesus was not a fact, the whole Christian message was based on a lie, and that many thousands of believers had died trusting in a delusion, and that without the resurrection, the greatest values in life would have no guarantee. Paul said in effect that if the resurrection had not occurred, the foundation and the whole structure of the Christian faith would be destroyed.

THE FIRST FRUITS OF THOSE WHO SLEEP

1 Corinthians 15: 20 to 28

20. *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*
21. *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.*
22. *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

23. *But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.*
24. *Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.*
25. *For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.*
26. *The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.*
27. *For "He has put all things under His feet". But when He says "all things are put under Him", it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.*
28. *Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*

Christ is "*the first fruits of those who sleep*", meaning that Jesus Christ was and remains the first human being to be raised permanently from death, and His resurrection is the guarantee and assurance from the Lord God that He will in His own time and circumstances, raise human beings from death in His Kingdom to come. This general resurrection will then be a time of judgment which will last one thousand years, during which eternal life will be God's gift to everyone who will believe and obey Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. This promise of a "*new heavens and a new earth*", meaning a completely new world order, seems to me to be either neglected or not understood by the majority of scholars and commentators whose works I have consulted, in spite of the words in the Lord's prayer, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*". In any case, this matter is fully explained in our booklet 'The New Era', which is freely available on request.

William Barclay, in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians', explains that Paul, in speaking of Christ's resurrection as the "*first fruits*", was thinking in terms of the Jewish feast of the Passover. The Passover commemorated the original deliverance of the children of Israel from harsh bondage in Egypt, but it also became a great harvest festival.

The Passover festival occurred at the time when the barley harvest was due to be gathered in. The Law said, "*You shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall raise it*" (Leviticus 23:10,11). Some sheaves of barley must be reaped from a common field. They must not be taken from a garden or an orchard or from specially prepared soil. They must come from a typical field. When the barley was cut, it was brought to the Temple. There it was threshed with soft canes

so as not to bruise it. It was then dried over fire in a perforated pan so that every grain was touched by the fire. It was then exposed to the wind so that the chaff was blown away, and finally ground in a barley mill, and the flour was offered to God. That was what was meant by the first fruits.

It is important to note that all this had to be done before the newly-harvested barley could be bought and sold in shops, and before bread could be made from the new flour. The first fruits were a sign of the harvest to come, and the resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the resurrection of all believers and indeed all people which was, and still is, to come. And so it is that just as the new barley could not be used until the first fruits had been offered, so the new harvest of life could not come until Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Paul also mentioned that according to Genesis 3:1-19 death came into the world as the direct consequence and penalty of Adam's disobedience. Some commentators seem to have difficulty with Paul's statement in the passage quoted above, but it is surely true. Adam was the progenitor of the whole human race, and because of his disobedience to God's command, he became a sinner and unrighteous, and incurred the penalty of death as God had said would happen. And so it was that Adam, being unrighteous, could transmit only unrighteousness to his children, and they likewise could only pass on unrighteousness to their children.

The penalty of condemnation to death for disobedience remained, but with the coming of Christ to earth as a sinless human being, with the Lord God as His Heavenly Father, this condemnation was overcome. Christ was not disobedient, He was without sin, and death was conquered by His resurrection. Therefore, just as because of Adam everyone is under condemnation to death, so because of Christ everyone who believes into Him can, through Him, be freed from that condemnation. Because of Adam's disobedience all people will die. Because of Jesus' sacrifice He has been raised to use the power of God to bring all people back to life.

Our unity with Christ as believers is just as real as our unity with Adam, but our unity with Christ overcomes the evil consequence of the unity with Adam.

So we have two contrasting sets of facts. Firstly, there is Adam, disobedience and death, and secondly, there is Christ, righteousness and life. The righteousness that is ours is, of course, imputed, that is, reckoned; meaning that God in His mercy and grace is prepared

to consider us righteous and deal with us as though we were righteous because of our faith. This is a most wonderful and merciful gift from God, generally known as justification by faith, a teaching and belief that was lost to believers generally for centuries, because of a corrupt and wayward ecclesiastical regime, until the Reformation brought the gracious and merciful teaching to light once more.

And so it is that just as we are all implicated by the disobedience of the man who was first created, we are now included by faith in the victory of the one who has redeemed humanity, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has bought the whole human race by His redeeming sacrifice and resurrection. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and we are not our own because we have been bought with a price. This means that we belong to the Lord Jesus. He has purchased us and the whole human race by His sacrifice for atonement, the ransom price accepted by God as shown by His resurrection. And as a consequence of His complete obedience, He has been given all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18).

Paul also mentioned that according to Genesis 3:1-19 it was through Adam's sin that death came into the world as the direct consequence and penalty of Adam's disobedience. Some commentators seem to have difficulty with Paul's statement in the passage quoted above, but it is surely true. Adam was the progenitor of the whole human race, and because of his disobedience to God's command, he became a sinner and incurred the penalty of death as God had said would happen. And so it was that Adam, being a sinner, could transmit only unrighteousness to his children, and they likewise could only pass on unrighteousness to their children.

The Apostle concluded this passage of his letter with a prophetic vision of the end of the Kingdom Age. At this future time the Lord Jesus Christ will have used the power given to Him by His Heavenly Father to put down all rule and all authority and power until all enemies have been overcome. When this has been accomplished and the whole human race has believed and gained God's promise of eternal life, and even death itself has been destroyed, the Lord Jesus will deliver up the whole Kingdom to God and will Himself be willingly subject to God, so that God may be all in all, or as some translators say, so that God may be everything to everyone.

IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15: 29 to 34

29. *Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?*
30. *And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?*
31. *I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*
32. *If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*
33. *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*
34. *Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

The Apostle's words in this passage concerning believers being baptised for people who have died have raised problems for commentators and expositors, and still cause differences of interpretation. William Barclay in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians', on page 181 wrote that in the early Church there was vicarious baptism. If a person died who intended to follow the Lord Jesus but did not live to be baptised in water, then someone underwent baptism on behalf of that person. This practice arose from the mistaken belief that the ceremony of baptism was essential for salvation, and people who died unbaptised would be excluded from a heavenly inheritance. Fortunately this practice was discontinued as a clearer understanding of baptism came to be realised.

It may seem to be superfluous at this stage to point out that baptism for the Christian involves a change of mind and heart in turning away from worldly aims and aspirations, and making a new commitment to follow the Lord Jesus and God through Him, and to continue throughout the remainder of his or her life as a completely changed and reformed person. This change is referred to by the Lord Jesus as being "*born again*" (John 3:3-7).

This change of mind and heart for the believer is often referred to as the real or spiritual baptism. But in addition to this change of mind and heart, the Master has commanded His believing people to witness this change in their lives by a ceremony of immersion in water, as indicated in John 15:14. So there are two aspects to Christian baptism:

(1) the complete change of heart and mind which will gain everlasting life for the believer if maintained until death; and

(2) the ceremony of immersion in water, which provides a witness and testimony to the complete change in a believer's life. We should always remember that the second aspect is a ceremony, and ceremonies in themselves do not bring about salvation or eternal life.

Baptised For The Dead.

But all this does not make clear to us what the Apostle meant by being baptised for dead people. It seems to me that he may have had three things in mind.

1. The Apostle may have had in mind that the Scriptures recognise three classes of people described as dead. They are:

(a) Those whose earthly lives have ceased, so that they remain in the grave until such time as the Lord Jesus with the Father's authority will raise them to life again.

(b) Those who are alive but who are "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2:1). This class of people would include the whole human race, except those who have believed in the Lord Jesus and committed their lives to Him.

(c) Those who, after becoming believers, are described as being "*dead to sin*" as mentioned in Romans 6:10,11. Believers are made alive from the death state of living in trespasses and sins by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

The Apostles were 'dying daily' and "*standing in jeopardy every hour*" on behalf of the second and third classes mentioned above, firstly to bring those who were dead in trespasses and sins to the knowledge of the truth and to repentance and salvation, and secondly to build up and strengthen those who had become dead to sin by belief in the Lord Jesus. Therefore, looked at in this way, baptism for the dead would refer to the spiritual baptism, that is, the change of heart and mind, and the resolve to lay down one's life if necessary in God's service. The Apostle's point was that such devotion and service on the part of the Apostle and the believers who worked with him would have no benefit if this life were to be the end of their endeavours, and if there were to be no resurrection.

2. Rotherham's translation has this wording. *"Else what will they do, who are being immersed in behalf of the dead? If not at all are the dead to be raised, why are they even immersed in their behalf? Why are we also running into peril every hour? Day by day am I dying, yea! by the boasting of you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord? If, in human fashion, I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what to me the profit? If the dead are not to be raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' "* (1 Corinthians 15:29-32).

In the above translation I see two reasons for submitting to the spiritual baptism *"in their behalf"* and *"to me the profit"*. By the first reason *"in their behalf"* the Apostle referred to (a) his labours on behalf of the Church (Colossians 1:24-29), which would be to no avail if the Church members were not to be raised from the dead and; (b) to the prospect of himself and others, having been baptised in mind and heart and belonging to Christ, which prospect will, in the age to come, be offered to all the dead small and great with the expectation that they will live for ever, if they will believe and obey. This expectation would be fruitless if the dead were not to be raised (Revelation 20:12, 22:1,2,17).

In his lifetime, the Apostle fulfilled his ministry of the New Covenant, and looked forward to even more extended service in the Kingdom of God, which is still future even in our day.

3. The Apostle said, *"What will they do?"* and *"Why are we running into peril?"* The change from *"they"* to *"we"* has suggested to some commentators that there were certain people who claimed to be baptised on behalf of persons who had died. But, as far as the Apostle was concerned, he made no such claim, but he was certainly running into peril and even putting his life in danger for the sake of others. So if the dead were not to be raised, both unbelievers and Christians might as well adopt the heathen motto, 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die'.

The Apostle continued, as in the KJV, *"Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness and sin not"*. He meant to convey to the Corinthians that this life is not the end for everyone, because there is to be another life – a resurrection of the justified and the unjustified. He wanted them to make the most of their opportunities for salvation, because at that time the prospect might have seemed distant and perhaps the result might have seemed small, but in the resurrection, things will be entirely different and entirely certain and will be world-wide.

To conclude these comments on 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, I must mention one of the great motives of the Christian life. Paul asked, in effect, 'Why should a Christian accept the dangers of the Christian life if it is all to go for nothing?' He quoted his own experience. Every day he was in jeopardy of his life. Something terrible happened to him at Ephesus. He referred to this event in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, and said that in Ephesus he was in such dire peril that he despaired of life and seemed to have the sentence of death passed on him. The New Testament has no record of this, so I cannot comment on it any further. There were occasions when Paul's life was in serious danger, such as recorded in Acts 23, but that was in Jerusalem and not in Ephesus. In Ephesus Paul described his desperate situation to be like *"fighting wild animals"*. I do not think that Paul referred to wild animals such as lions and tigers, but to men who threatened him, and who were as savage in their desire to kill him as wild animals might have been. In any case, Paul brought home his lesson to the Corinthians by saying in effect 'to what purpose is all the peril and the suffering if there is no life beyond?'

People who think that this life is all we have, and that there is nothing to follow it may well say, 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'. The Scriptures quote some people who spoke like that. *"Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant"* (Isaiah 56:12). The preacher, who seemed to hold that death was extinction, wrote, *"There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil"* (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12; 5:18; 8:15 and 9:7). The Lord Jesus said in His parable of the rich fool, *"Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry"*. Jesus finished His parable by saying that the rich fool died, and *"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:16-21).

To sum up what Paul said to the Corinthians, if we take away the thought of a better life to come, this life loses its values. If we take away the idea that this life is a preparation for a better life to come, then this taking away loosens the bonds of honour and morality. We should not argue that people should be good and honourable without the thought of any reward, because the Lord God is described in Scripture as *"a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6). It is reasonable to expect some reward or benefit from honourable and unselfish actions as Christian people do, because the Lord God has established and stated this principle in His word. It is wrong to believe that this world is the only world and to live as if the things of this world are all that matter.

Paul insisted that the Corinthians must not associate with people who said that there was to be no resurrection, for this would be to risk contamination that could pollute life and destroy faith. To say that there is no resurrection is not a sign of superior knowledge, rather it is a sign of ignorance of God and His promises, which can never go by default.

RESULTS OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15: 35 to 49

35. *But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up?
And with what body do they come?"*
36. *Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.*
37. *And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be,
but mere grain -- perhaps wheat or some other grain.*
38. *But God gives it a body as He pleases,
and to each seed its own body.*
39. *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh
of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and
another of birds.*
40. *There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies;
but the glory of the celestial is one,
and the glory of the terrestrial is another.*
41. *There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon,
and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from
another star in glory.*
42. *So also is the resurrection of the dead.
The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.*
43. *It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.*
44. *It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.
There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*
45. *And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living
being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*
46. *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural,
and afterward the spiritual.*
47. *The first man was of the earth, made of dust;
the second Man is the Lord from heaven.*
48. *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of
dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are
heavenly.*
49. *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust,
we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

Before offering comments on the passage quoted above, it seems to me essential to understand what the Lord God and the Lord Jesus have told us in the sacred Scriptures concerning the promises made now in the Gospel Age to believers, which promises will take effect in the Kingdom of God in the future.

The Church in the Kingdom Age will consist of 144,000 true believers taken out by God from among the nations and peoples of the earth during the Gospel Age to be joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus to assist with the work of the blessing of all nations and all peoples of the earth in the age to come. These true believers will be raised to life again and changed into spirit beings in God's due time. The remainder of the human race will be resurrected as human beings to live forever, if believing and obedient to God's will, in the new heavens and new earth, that is, the new divine governmental and social arrangements as directed by God through the Lord Jesus (Psalm 115:16; Revelation 14:1-5; Acts 15:6-29; Romans 8:16-18; 2 Peter 3:13).

The reason for the brief summary given in the previous paragraph is that the commentators and expositors which I have consulted have not made clear that the future Kingdom of God will be an earthly kingdom for the benefit of the millions of the human race who have not heard of the Lord Jesus, as well as those who have chosen not to believe on Him in their lives on earth. The writers I have consulted have endeavoured to explain the Apostle's words, and have struggled with them because they believe and accept the teachings of the immortality of the soul and the Trinity, which are unscriptural and lead to confusion among Christian people.

But now we must turn to the passage from 1 Corinthians 15 as quoted above, and endeavour to interpret the Apostle's words. We should realise that the Apostle was commenting on matters about which very little is known. He was not talking about matters of fact, but matters of faith. He was doing the best that he could with human ideas and human words in his answer to the question, 'How will the dead be raised to life? What kind of bodies will they have?'

Paul's answer contains three basic principles:

1. He began with the analogy of a seed. A seed is placed in the ground and seems to die, but in the course of time the seed rises again, but with a very different appearance from that which was placed in the ground. In his analogy Paul showed that there can be a beginning, then a complete change and final difference, but yet continuity. The seed is buried and changed, and when it rises again there is a great difference in its appearance, but it is still the same plant. So our earthly bodies will die and decay, and the individual person will be raised with a very different body, but will still be the same person. So we will be taken by death, changed at resurrection but will still be the same individual person.

2. In the world that we know there is not just one kind of body or flesh. All animals, birds and fish have different bodies and different kinds of flesh created by God for the parts that each of them will play in the creation. This being the case, it is reasonable for us to believe that God will give us a body suitable for the resurrected life, for which we will qualify by faith and obedience, when He may choose to do so.

3. In life there is development. Adam was the first man and was made from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). But the Lord Jesus, described in Scripture as the second man (1 Corinthians 15:47), although He was flesh and blood, was miraculously transformed by God from a mighty spirit being, and later given the Holy Spirit without measure (John 8:34). And so it is that under the old life, we are like Adam, suffering the same condemnation, the sentence of death. But under the new life we are one with Christ and are promised that we will share in His work as His joint heirs (Romans 8:16-39). It is certainly true that we have a physical body now, but it is also true that one day we will have a spiritual body which we cannot earn and do not deserve, but which God will graciously give us if we remain faithful unto death.

Throughout this section, Paul said very little about what that new spiritual body will be like, but it will be a spiritual body and will be suited to our needs and we will be like Christ. In verses 42 to 44 of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul drew four contrasts which tell us something of our future state.

(1) Our present body is corruptible and will perish and decay, but the future body will be incorruptible and will never perish or decay. In this world *"change and decay are all around"*, but in the life to come there will be a permanence in which things of beauty will not change and will remain for ever.

(2) The present body is in dishonour, but the future body will be in glory. Paul probably meant that in this life dishonour can arise because of our bodily feelings and passions, but in the life to come, our bodies will no longer be the servants of passion and impulse, but will be instruments of service to God. There is surely no greater honour than that.

(3) The present body is in weakness, but the future body will be in power. We are limited in this life because of the limitations of our bodies and minds. Sometimes we may find this disappointing because our physical constitution makes it impossible to do what we may wish to do, and make plans which we cannot bring to fruition.

But in the life to come such limitations will be no more. In this life, we are encompassed by weakness, but in the new life we will be given power.

(4) The present body is a natural fleshly body, but the future body will be the body of a spirit being. Perhaps Paul had in mind that now we are only imperfect vessels and instruments for the Spirit; but in the life to come the Spirit will fill us and employ us in ways that cannot happen now. We will be able to worship and serve, as well as experience love in ways that now we can scarcely imagine.

THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED INCORRUPTIBLE

1 Corinthians 15: 50 to 58

50. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.*
51. *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed --*
52. *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*
53. *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*
54. *So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*
55. *"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"*
56. *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*
57. *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
58. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

We must bear in mind that Paul continued to deal with spiritual matters that had been revealed to him. We must read his words as we ought to read great literature, and not dissect and analyse them as we would a scientific treatise. Paul proceeded in a series of steps until he reached his conclusion.

1. Paul insisted that as we are we are not fit to inherit the Kingdom of God. We may manage well enough to deal with life in this order of things, but in the life to come we would not be satisfactory in our present condition. We need to be changed before we can enter into a higher form of life in the Kingdom of God.

2. The change is to occur at the last trumpet, said Paul. We know from the Revelation prophecies that in the Gospel Age there were to be seven trumpets. These trumpets form part of the visions given to John, and are symbolic of notable epochs in the experience of Christians and Christendom generally in the centuries to follow the giving of the visions to John. This whole issue is dealt with in detail in the book 'The Few and the Many' in chapter 7 (pages 174 to 240). Suffice it to say for now that the Scripture does not tell us when the seventh trumpet would sound, but the timing seems to indicate that the trumpet will sound close to the end of the Gospel Age, when the work of gathering out the true Church will be completed.

It is believed by many diligent students of the Scriptures that the timing of this change of believers from this life to the next, which will "*happen suddenly quicker than the blink of an eye*" (CEV), can be understood from the combining of Daniel 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 14:13 with 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. This understanding is more fully explained in the book 'Notes on the Book of Daniel' pages 315 to 317, and takes us to the present time and into the future. The book is available free to any who may wish to pursue this matter further.

3. Paul declared that no-one should fear the change that was prophesied. Many have feared death because of the fear of the unknown, and for some this fear has come from the awareness of sin. But Jesus came to abolish the fear of sin and death. He came to tell us that God is not a stern judge but merciful and gracious, and is our Heavenly Father. Jesus gave to all of us the victory over death, and banished fear to all believers in the wonder of God's love.

(4) At the end of the chapter, Paul became, as he always did, very practical. He ended by saying, as in the KJV, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*".

PAUL'S PRACTICAL PLANS

1 Corinthians 16: 1 to 12

1. *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:*
2. *On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*
3. *And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*
4. *But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.*
5. *Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).*
6. *And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.*
7. *For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.*
8. *But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.*
9. *For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*
10. *And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.*
11. *Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.*
12. *Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.*

With chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle made a sudden change from confirming details of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the consequences of this world-changing event, and from the benefits that will follow for believers in God's promise to them through the Lord Jesus, to practical matters concerned with everyday life and the administration of the Church.

Paul began this section by dealing with the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. That was an undertaking that was very close to Paul's heart, as we learn from Galatians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; Romans 15:25 and Acts 24:17. The collection must have meant two important things to Paul. It was a way of demonstrating the unity of the Church, and a way of teaching Christians scattered abroad that they were not simply members of a local congregation, but members

of a widespread Church, and so had obligations to brethren in other cities and countries. It was also a way of bringing about the practical obligations of Christianity, and putting into effect the teachings of the Lord Jesus on the virtue of love.

In his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians' William Barclay pointed out that Paul used nine different words to describe this collection.

(1) In the passage under consideration he called it a 'logia', which means an extra collection. A logia was not a payment which had to be paid such as a tax, but something which was an extra piece of giving. It seems that Paul had the following thoughts in mind.

It is not enough for Christians to pay what has to be paid. They ought to be generous and ready to give and donate money within their means to worthy causes and be ready to show kindness and love even to those who may be in opposition to Christianity and religious faith, as the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:38-48.

(2) Sometimes Paul called such a collection a 'charis' (1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:4). A 'charis' means a gift freely given. It is something given, however small, from love and from the heart. Paul did not lay down an amount which each Corinthian ought to give, but told them to give as much as their prosperity would permit, and that all giving must be guided by the heart.

(3) Sometimes Paul used the word 'koinonia' (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Romans 15:6). 'Koinonia' means fellowship, and the essence of fellowship is sharing. Christian fellowship should not be unduly possessive but should regard possessions as things to be shared with others. The issue should not be 'What can I keep?' but 'What can I give?'

(4) At other times Paul used the word 'diakonia' (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12,13). 'Diakonia' means practical Christian service, and it is from its related word 'diakonos' that we derive our English word deacon. In this connection it sometimes happens that the limitations of our lives prevent us from rendering personal service, so we give money to work for us with people and places where we cannot go.

(5) In one instance Paul used the word 'hadrotēs' which means abundance (2 Corinthians 8:20). In that passage Paul spoke of the messengers of the Church who accompanied him to guarantee that he did not misuse the abundance that was entrusted to him. Paul, of course, would not have desired an abundance for himself, being

content with what he could earn with the work of his hands and the sweat of his brow. But he was always glad when he had an abundance to give away to those who were in need.

(6) At times, Paul used the word 'eulogia' which means bounty or a generous gift (2 Corinthians 9:5). This is a kind of true giving which Christians are most willing and glad to give without any grudging or a reluctant sense of duty.

(7) Sometimes Paul used the word 'leitourgia' (2 Corinthians 9:12). A 'leitourgia' was originally a service to the state which was voluntarily given. Christian giving is something which should be volunteered, and should be accepted by believers as a privilege to help the household of God in some way.

(8) Once Paul spoke of the collection for needy saints as 'eleemosune' (Acts 24:17). This word is the Greek word for alms. The act of almsgiving was so central to the Jewish idea of religion that the Jews used the same word to mean both alms-giving and righteousness. The Jews would have said, 'How can people show that they are good except by being generous?'

(9) Finally, Paul used the word 'prospora' (Acts 24:17). 'Prospora' is the word used for an offering and a sacrifice. That which is given to someone in need is really a sacrifice to God. The best of sacrifice to the Lord God is the sacrifice of a penitent heart, and next to that is the kindness which is shown to a brother or sister in trouble, whatever that trouble may be.

At the end of this section, Paul commended two of his helpers. The first was Timothy, who was a young man. The situation in Corinth was difficult enough for Paul with all his experience and wisdom, but it would be very much more difficult for Timothy. Paul's recommendation was that the Corinthians must respect the young man Timothy for the sake of the work that he was doing. The second helper was Apollos, and Apollos has emerged from this passage as a man of genuine wisdom. At the beginning of Paul's letter we learnt that there was a group in Corinth who had attached themselves to Apollos or at least to his name. Apollos was aware of that, and it seems that he wished to stay away from Corinth in case that group would try to make him their leader and cause a faction within the Church. Apollos was evidently wise enough to realise that when there was a danger that the Corinthian congregation might be disrupted by factions, it would be wiser for him to stay away for the time being.

CLOSING WORDS AND GREETINGS

1 Corinthians 16: 13 to 24

13. *Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.*
14. *Let all that you do be done with love.*
15. *I urge you, brethren -- you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints --*
16. *That you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labours with us.*
17. *I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.*
18. *For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.*
19. *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*
20. *All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*
21. *The salutation with my own hand -- Paul's.*
22. *If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!*
23. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*
24. *My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

The practical and ordinary nature of this passage tells us something of the day-to-day life of the early Church. To Paul in Ephesus there had come Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achiacus, and they took to him first-hand information of what was happening in Corinth. Stephanas was commended by Paul because of his service to the Church, and it was a fact that in those times, willing and devoted service was the beginning of official office. People became leaders in the Church, not so much by appointment, but by the fact that their lives and their work brought to them the respect of others who were willing to respect and trust them.

Verses 19 and 20 contain a number of greetings. Aquila and Priscilla feature prominently. These two people, man and wife, are found in Paul's letter and in the book of Acts. They were Jews, and like Paul, were tent-makers. Originally they settled in Rome, but in AD 49 or 50, the Roman Emperor Claudius issued a decree banishing all Jews from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla made their way to Corinth where they were met by Paul (Acts 18:22). From Corinth they went to Ephesus, from which city Paul sent their greetings to their former associates in Corinth. From Romans 16:3 we learn that they returned to Rome and settled there again.

There is something most noteworthy about Aquila and Priscilla. In those early days there were no church buildings. It is a fact that it was not until the third century that we hear about a church building. The small congregations met in private homes, and wherever Aquila and Priscilla went, their home became a place for the congregation to meet and worship. When they were in Rome, Paul sent greetings to them and to the Christians meeting in their house (Romans 16:3-5). When Paul wrote from Ephesus he sent greetings from them and from the congregation that met in their home. Aquila and Priscilla were two of those wonderful people who made their homes centres of Christian light and love because of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and travellers always found a place of peace and rest where Aquila and Priscilla lived.

In verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 16, Paul said, "*Greet each other with a holy kiss*". The kiss of peace was a warm and loving greeting in the early Church. It was apparently given at the end of a prayer before a service or at the conclusion of a service. It was an act of Christian love and affection, and a sign that peace was enjoyed by those who met together.

The greeting of a holy kiss has to a large extent passed from meetings of Christians for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was liable to abuse and to misinterpretation by those who wished to criticise and find fault with Christian communities. Secondly the greeting faded away because church meetings became less and less a fellowship of believers. When congregations grew larger in numbers, close friendship and intimacy were lost, and the kiss of peace was lost with greater numbers coming together knowing little or nothing of one another.

And so, at the end of his letter, Paul sent his own autograph of greeting on the last page of that letter, which someone had written for him at his dictation. He warned the Corinthians against anyone who does not love the Lord Jesus. And he wrote in Aramaic the phrase "*Maran-atha*" (verse 22) which probably means 'The Lord is at hand'. It is somewhat surprising to find an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek-speaking Church. According to William Barclay, the explanation is that the Aramaic phrase had become something of a password in the early Church, and Christians identified one another by it in a language that unbelievers could not understand.

The last two things that Paul sent to the congregation at Corinth were the grace of Christ and his own love. He had occasion to warn and rebuke the members of the Church at Corinth, and at times to be righteously angry with them, but his last greeting is his love to all of them who acknowledge their allegiance to Christ Jesus.

PAUL'S SECOND RECORDED LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Introduction

The opening greeting of the letter states that it was addressed to the Church in Corinth and to the Christians throughout Achaia, the Roman province consisting of all the territory of Greece south of Macedonia. The evidence available indicates that the year 55 AD is a reasonable estimate for the date of the writing of this letter. From 1 Corinthians 16:5-8 it can be concluded that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Pentecost in the spring of AD 55, and that 2 Corinthians was written later that same year before the onset of winter. 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 7:5 indicate that it was written from Macedonia.

The structure of the letter relates primarily to Paul's promised third visit to Corinth. The letter consists of three main sections.

1. Paul explained the reasons for his change of itinerary - (chapters 1-7).
2. He encouraged the Corinthians to complete the collection for the saints in Jerusalem in preparation for his arrival - (chapters 8 and 9).
3. He emphasised the certainty of his coming, his authenticity as an apostle and his readiness as an apostle to exercise discipline if necessary - (chapters 10 to 13).

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1: 1 to 7

1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all 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 tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*
5. *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.*

6. *Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*
7. *And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.*

In this early section of Paul's second letter, there is a kind of summary of some experiences of Christian life.

1. Paul wrote as one who knew trouble, to others who were in trouble. The word Paul used for "*trouble*" is 'thlipsis', a word that is translated "*affliction*" in some versions. This Greek word 'thlipsis' always describes actual physical pressure on someone, such as in the ancient law of England when in certain circumstances heavy weights were forcibly placed on people to make them plead innocent or guilty when they refused to do so, the weights being so heavy that people being on trial were sometimes actually crushed to death.

In the early years of Christianity, many of those who chose to become Christians knew they were choosing to face trouble. The trouble might consist of abandonment by their own family, hostility from unbelievers and persecution from official powers. Even nowadays it can be costly to be a committed and dedicated Christian, and many have found that true Christianity really involves accepting one's suffering.

2. The answer to suffering as a Christian involves endurance. The Greek word for endurance is 'hupomone', a word that means not simply accepting trouble and putting up with it, but actually conquering it and achieving victory over it. As gold emerges purer from the fire, so the Christian can emerge finer and stronger from hard days and troubling experiences through the love and comfort of God and the Lord Jesus.

3. And so it is that we are not left to face trial and endurance alone, because we experience the comfort, strength and guidance from God. Between verses 3 and 7 in the passage under consideration, the noun comfort or the verb to comfort occurs nine times. Comfort in the New Testament always remains true to its basic root meaning derived from the Latin 'fortis', meaning brave. Christian comfort brings courage to enable us to cope with whatever experiences life may bring to us. Paul was quite sure that God did not send him tasks or experiences without giving him the strength and power to deal with them.

Paul said that any suffering which may occur in a Christian's life is really sharing in the sufferings of Christ, because to suffer for Christ is really a privilege, as recorded in Acts 5:41 when the Apostles, after being beaten by order of the Jewish leaders, rejoiced *"that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"*.

4. The result of all this is that we as believers gain the experience and the power to comfort others who are encountering trouble. Paul claimed that the things that happened to him, and the comfort he received, made him able to be a source of comfort to others. It was said of Jesus that, because He Himself was tested by what He suffered, He is able to help those who are being tested (Hebrews 2:18). And it is worthwhile for us when we experience suffering and sorrow, if that suffering and sorrow will enable us to help others who are undergoing similar trials in their lives.

PAUL'S TRUST IN GOD

2 Corinthians 1: 8 to 11

8. *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*
9. *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,*
10. *Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,*
11. *You also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.*

There is no information at all about this terrible experience which happened to Paul in Ephesus. We remember that in Acts 23, when Paul was brought before the Jewish council, there arose a great dissension so that the Roman chief captain feared that Paul might be pulled in pieces by the multitude, and commanded the soldiers to go down and take Paul by force from among them and bring him into the castle (Acts 23:1-11).

But in the passage quoted above, we have no record of what happened to Paul in Ephesus, an event in which Paul was in such danger that he believed he was going to die. How he was delivered we are not told, but Paul saw that from the whole terrifying experience, God had delivered him, and that he realised he should always depend on God completely, and we should learn that it may sometimes need a

time or an event of great adversity to show us how much we need God's comfort.

The outcome was that Paul continued in his missionary work with an unshakeable confidence in God. He knew that because God brought him through that terrible experience, He could bring him through anything. We may be reminded of the Psalmist's words, "*For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling*" (Psalm 116:8).

The confidence of Christians in God is not just theory and speculation, it is a matter of fact and experience. They know what God has done for them and they have no fears about the future.

Finally, Paul asked for the prayers of the Corinthians, and we should not be ashamed to ask for the prayers of all the brethren. We may have little to give our brethren of this world's goods, but we can give them the love and support of our prayers, and tell them that we are doing so.

PAUL'S CLEAR CONSCIENCE

2 Corinthians 1: 12 to 14

12. *For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.*
13. *For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end*
14. *(as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

In this passage we begin to learn of accusations that the Corinthians were making against Paul, and the slanders with which some of them were trying to damage his reputation.

They must have been saying that there was more in Paul's conduct than was apparent. His answer was that he had lived in the holiness and purity of Godliness. There were no hidden actions in Paul's life. The word used by Paul for purity is 'eilekrineia', and the meaning is very interesting. It signifies something which can be held up to the sun and looked at with the sun shining through it. The word seems to

mean that those people whose actions will bear the light of day are happy, and who, like Paul, have nothing in their lives to hide.

There must have been some who were attributing hidden motives to Paul. His answer was that his whole conduct was dominated by the grace of God. There were no hidden motives in Paul's life. Perhaps, being by nature, fallen children of Adam, we may at times do things with mixed motives, such as prudence, prestige or making us look good in the eyes of others, but we must always keep in mind that God sees and understands our intentions. Purity of action is difficult enough, but purity of motive is still more difficult. However, such purity can be ours by faith if our old self has been subdued, and we are guided by the Holy Spirit and the example set by Jesus for all believers.

There were those who said that Paul, in his letters, did not quite mean what he said. Paul's answer was that there were no hidden meanings in his words. We should always mean what we say, but sometimes we may say something because we think it might be an acceptable thing to say, or just to be agreeable, or even to get us out of trouble. We should always keep in mind the words of James, *"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body"* (James 3:2), and *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation"* (James 5:12).

In Paul's life there were no hidden actions, no hidden motives and no hidden meanings. That is conduct we should all strive to emulate.

GOD AND JESUS CAN ALWAYS BE TRUSTED

2 Corinthians 1: 15 to 22

15. *And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit --*
16. *To pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea.*
17. *Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?*
18. *But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.*
19. *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us -- by me, Silvanus, and Timothy -- was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.*
20. *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*
21. *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,*
22. *Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

It seems that behind these words of Paul there was another accusation and slander against him from his enemies and detractors. Paul had said that he would visit the Corinthians, but the situation in Corinth had become so bad that he postponed his visit so as not to give them pain, as we will see in verse 23 of 2 Corinthians 1. It seems then that his enemies had immediately accused him of making empty promises, perhaps with a misleading intention, and Paul was alleged to be one who could not be pinned down to a definite yes or no. That in itself was bad enough, but his enemies went on to argue that if Paul's promises could not be trusted, could his messages from God about which he told them be trusted? Paul's response briefly was that we can always rely on God and that there is no wavering in Jesus between yes and no.

Then he summarised the matter by saying "*Jesus Christ the Son of God is always 'Yes' and never 'No' "*" (CEV). By this I think Paul meant that Jesus came to earth as a human being as God had promised. God, Who loved the world and its people so much, gave His Son to fulfil the many promises of blessing, deliverance and redemption that He made, and this supreme gift enables us and all believers to be certain that the LORD God will fulfil all the promises that He has ever

made, especially the promises of His Kingdom, the resurrection of all the dead, and eternal life to everyone who will believe and obey. God's Son Jesus is His guarantee that the greatest and the least of all His promises are true and will never go by default.

It is unfortunately true that some in Corinth were slandering Paul. But the fact remains, the trustworthiness of the messenger affects the trustworthiness of the message. If people cannot trust the preacher of God's message, they will not trust the message that the preacher proclaimed. But we know that Paul set a great example of Christian fortitude and self-denial, and answered adverse criticisms and slanders by a combination of word and deed that no-one could deny.

Paul said two things in this passage.

1. It is through Jesus that we say 'Amen' to the promises of God. It is our privilege and custom to finish our prayers by saying, 'Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen'. 'Amen' means 'So let it be'. And we should regard this as a great truth which expresses our sure belief that because Jesus came and delivered us from our unrighteousness, we can offer our prayers to God with every confidence, for Jesus is the guarantee, the certain 'Yes' of God, that our prayers will be heard and that God will respond according to His will and according to our best interest, which He knows and understands.

2. In verse 22 of the passage quoted, Paul wrote about what the KJV calls the "*earnest of the Spirit*". The word in Greek is 'arrabon'. The meaning of an 'arrabon' was the first instalment of a payment, paid as a guarantee that the balance of the payment would follow. When Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit as an 'arrabon' given to us by God, he meant that the life we live with the help of the Holy Spirit is the first instalment of the life we will be given in God's Kingdom, and the guarantee that the fullness of that future life will one day be given to us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's pledge of greater things to come.

PAUL'S SORROWFUL REBUKE

2 Corinthians 1:23 to 2:4

23. *Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.*

24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*

- 2:1. *But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.*
2. *For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?*
3. *And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all.*
4. *For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.*

We learn from this deeply-moving passage that the situation in Corinth had gone from bad to worse. The congregation was torn with party divisions, and there were some who denied Paul's authority. Paul sought to put an end to these troubles and paid a quick visit to Corinth, but that visit had only made matters worse, which nearly broke Paul's heart. As a consequence, the Apostle sent the Corinthians a severe letter of rebuke which he wrote with a heavy heart and his eyes full of tears. It was for this very reason that Paul did not fulfil his promise to visit them again, because as things were, such a visit would only have hurt him and them.

Behind this passage we gain an understanding of the heaviness of Paul's heart when he had to deal severely with those he had come to love.

Firstly, he was unwilling to use severity and rebuke, and used them only when he was driven to use them because he could see there was nothing else to do. There are people who are always ready to find fault and to criticise adversely, but Paul was not like that. He wanted to praise his followers and be joyful with them and not rebuke them, because a rebuke may have resulted in resentment, especially if it was severely given, and if a rebuke was given more than once or even repeatedly, it may well have lost its desired effect. Paul was well aware that true Christians should always look for things to praise and not for things to condemn.

Secondly, when Paul did rebuke, he did so in love. He did not speak merely to hurt. Paul did not rebuke to cause pain, he rebuked to restore and bring about joy. For Christians, like ourselves, when we find it necessary to rebuke, it should be done in a loving and discreet way.

Thirdly, when Paul rebuked, he was not overbearing. There is a danger into which preachers and teachers sometimes fall, and that is the danger of coming to think that their duty is to compel others to think exactly as they do, and if others do not see things as they see them, they must be wrong. The duty of Christian preachers and teachers is to make matters clear, and encourage others to think for themselves. As for Paul, he knew that he must not be overbearing, but he also had to discipline and guide as God's chosen Apostle.

Fourthly, we understand that Paul was reluctant to rebuke; he wanted to see the best in others and be joyful about the promises given by God to believers, but nevertheless he did rebuke when he saw it was necessary to do so. It may be the case that we as Christians may refrain from rebuke because of mistaken kindness or because of the desire to avoid trouble. But we should always be guided by love and the ultimate good of others, and if we are to so guided, we will know when it would be wise to speak and when it would *be wise to be silent*.

PARDON FOR A SINNER

2 Corinthians 2: 5 to 11

5. *But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent -- not to be too severe.*
6. *This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man,*
7. *So that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.*
8. *Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.*
9. *For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.*
10. *Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ,*
11. *Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

The above passage indicates some of the trouble and unhappiness in the Corinthian congregation. Evidently, when Paul had visited Corinth, there was one member of the congregation who had personally insulted Paul, and Paul had insisted that he had to be disciplined. It seems that the majority of the Corinthian congregation had come to see that the conduct of this man had hurt Paul and injured the good name of the whole Church. Disciplinary action had been taken, but some felt that it had not been severe enough, and they wanted to impose even more punishment.

But Paul wrote that enough had been done, and the man was sorry. To discipline him further would do more harm than good. It might simply drive the man to despair, and offer Satan an opportunity to take hold of the man and cause him to lose the benefits that Christ had to offer to believers. Paul's gracious attitude was, and is, a great example of Christian conduct in the face of insult and injury. We are not told who the offender was. All that we know is what we can infer from Paul's words.

Paul did not take the matter personally, but was concerned most of all with the good discipline and peace of the Church. Paul's motive in taking disciplinary action was not vengeful but corrective. His aim was to help the man stand up, not to knock him down. To judge him by the standard of Christian love demonstrated that the Christian duty is not to coerce people into submission, but to inspire them to goodness.

Paul insisted that punishment or disciplinary action must not drive anyone to despair or cause them to lose heart. The wrong treatment may well push a person into Satan's clutches, and too much severity may drive people from the Church and what should be its comforting fellowship. And it is good to understand that a correction carried out in a sympathetic way may well bring people into the fellowship of the Church and not drive them away.

Punishment should be carried out to encourage rather than discourage. As Christians, we should show that we believe in a person who may have gone astray, and such corrective action as we may consider advisable is intended to be of help and comfort, as the hymn, in a spiritual sense, so movingly tells us:

*"Perverse and foolish oft I strayed;
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home rejoicing brought me."*

IN THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 2: 12 to 17

12. *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord,*
13. *I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.*
14. *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.*
15. *For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.*
16. *To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?*
17. *For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

Paul had gone to Troas to preach the good news about Christ, and found that it was full of promise for evangelism, but he could not stay because Titus was not there, and therefore he could not know from him what was happening in Corinth. So he went to meet Titus, leaving the other followers in Troas, and set off to Macedonia. Then followed his words of victory and triumph that God had made it possible for him and his helpers through Christ to spread the news of the Gospel everywhere they went.

It is difficult to see what Paul meant in verses 14, 15 and 16 by perfume which had a sweet smell to some but a bad smell to others. William Barclay in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians' has an explanation of what was probably in Paul's mind when he wrote of being led in the triumph of Christ. In Paul's mind was the picture of a Roman Triumph, and his vision of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honour which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph, and to qualify for it, the Roman general had to satisfy certain conditions. He had to have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign had to be completely finished, the region pacified, and the victorious troops brought home. At least 5,000 of the enemy must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster avoided or an attack repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign enemy and not in a civil war.

In a Roman Triumph the procession in honour of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the Senate. Then came the trumpeters. Behind them came those carrying the spoils taken from the conquered land. Of particular interest to us as believers was the conquering of Jerusalem under Titus, when the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shewbread, and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Next in the Triumph came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. These were followed by a white bull for the sacrifice that would be made. Walking behind all these were the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, who would be imprisoned and probably executed immediately. Then came the officers who attended the magistrates, the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres, and the priests swinging their censers with sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After all these various components of the procession came the victorious general himself. He was dressed in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre topped with the Roman eagle, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family, and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting 'Io triumphe!', their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets which were all decorated and garlanded, surrounded by the cheering crowds, the whole spectacle was a tremendous and memorable experience, and one which might happen only once or twice in a person's lifetime.

In his twenty or more years of evangelising and preaching the Gospel throughout much of the Roman Empire, Paul may have witnessed one or more of these spectacular Roman Triumphs, and he may have had such a memory of them that he had transferred in his mind the imagery to Christ proceeding in triumph through the world in the Kingdom Age, with the Apostles and believers in the conquering procession. It would be a triumph the Apostle Paul was certain that nothing could prevent or stop.

As has been said, in the Roman procession there were the priests swinging the censers full of incense. To the victors, the perfume of the censers would be the perfume of triumph, joy and life, but to the captives who walked a short distance ahead, the perfume would have been the perfume of death, reminding them of their past defeat and their coming execution. Thus it may be that Paul might have been thinking of himself and his brethren preaching the Gospel of the triumphant Christ. To those who would accept the Gospel it would be the perfume of life and joy, but to those who refused it, it would be the perfume of death and the loss of eternal life.

In any case there was one thing of which Paul was certain, and that was, and is, that nothing can possibly defeat Christ, Who has been given by the Lord God all power in heaven and earth. Paul was not pessimistic, because he knew in his mind and heart the unconquerable majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, in the passage quoted above, there is a note of unhappiness. Some said, in those early days, that Paul was not fit to preach the Gospel message. Others said things that were even worse, that he was using the message as a means of making money for himself. But Paul maintained that he was working and preaching from sincere and pure motives. The word he used for purity was 'eilikrineia', a word describing something that can bear the test of being held up to the light of the sun, and looked at with the sun shining through it. He meant, of course, that his actions and preaching were such that would stand up to the closest inspection, and that his words and actions would be seen as transparently honest and not ambiguous, and that the bearers of the Gospel message had only the purest motives and nothing dishonest or impure to hide.

Paul's message was from God and the Lord Jesus, and whatever he said and whatever he did had the approval and blessing of both the Lord God and His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

EACH TRUE CHRISTIAN IS A LETTER OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 3: 1 to 3

1. *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?*
2. *You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;*
3. *Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.*

Behind this passage is the custom that was common in the ancient world, the custom of sending letters of commendation with a person. When someone was going to a community that did not know him or her, and he or she did not know members of that community, a friend who knew someone in that community would give the person who was going a letter of commendation by way of introduction and as a testimonial.

There is an example of this in the New Testament in Romans 16, in which Paul has written a letter of commendation to introduce Phoebe, a member of the congregation at Cenchrea, to members of the congregation at Rome.

In those early days, such letters of commendation were necessary in the Christian Church. Lucian, a second-century unbeliever and satirist, pointed out in writing that any charlatan or deceiver could make a fortune out of Christians because they were so trusting and so easily imposed upon.

Some of the previous sentences in Paul's second letter seem to read as though he was giving himself a testimonial, but also declared that he had no need of commendation because the Corinthians were his testimonial. Their change in character and life were the only commendation that he needed.

Paul continued by making the claim that every member of the Corinthian congregation was, in fact, a letter of Christ. The Lord Jesus had written His message on the Corinthians through His servant Paul, not with ink on papyrus or letters carved on tablets of stone as the ten commandments were, but on human hearts. There is a great truth here: every individual Christian is, or should be, an open letter for Jesus Christ. Every true Christian is really an advertisement for Christianity, that is to say, the honour of the Lord Jesus should be on display in His followers. People will tend to judge Christ and Christianity by Christians and the lives they lead. We as Christians should go out into the world as open letters and advertisements for Christ and His Church.

I cannot help reflecting here that in my chosen profession of teaching, from which I retired many years ago, the Latin motto of my teaching college was 'Non Omnis Moriar' which translates as 'shall not wholly die', meaning that the influence of teachers on their pupils does not depend on words in ink on paper that will fade and die, but on principles, morals and memories that teachers will impress on their students and will continue to influence people of future generations as they learn to cope adequately with the issues of life that confront them.

THE GLORY THAT SURPASSES

2 Corinthians 3: 4 to 11

4. *And we have such trust through Christ toward God.*
5. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,*
6. *Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the 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, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,*
8. *How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?*
9. *For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.*
10. *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.*
11. *For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.*

There are two parts to this passage. The passage begins with Paul perhaps having in mind his previous statement that the Corinthians were living letters of Christ produced under his ministry, so he may have been indulging in a little self-praise. He hastened to add that whatever he had done was not his own work but the work of God. It is God Who had made him adequate for the task that was his.

In this connection, William Barclay, in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians', mentioned Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of the novel 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' written in 1852. The novel sold more than 300,000 copies in the USA in one year, and the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy ranked it among the great achievements of the human mind. The novel certainly did more than any other single thing to advance the freedom of the slaves in the USA.

But Harriet Beecher Stowe refused to take any credit for what she had written. She said, 'I, the author of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'? No indeed. I could not control the story, it wrote itself. The Lord wrote it, and I was but the humblest instrument in his hand. It all came to me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in words. To him alone be the praise!' She said that her ability to do the work came from God.

It was the same with Paul. Paul said *"To God be the glory!"* He did not think of himself as being adequate for any task, he thought only of God as making him adequate. He was not afraid to take on any challenge because he did not have to do it alone. He always did it with God to help him.

The second part of the passage from 2 Corinthians 3 deals with the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants. A covenant, often referred to in these later times as a contract, means an agreement between two people, or perhaps two parties, by means of which the two enter into a specified relationship on more or less equal terms. But in the biblical usage of the term, it is God Who is the prime mover Who approaches men and women to offer them a relationship on conditions which they could neither initiate nor alter, but only accept or reject.

The word Paul used for new, when he spoke of the New Covenant, is the same word as Jesus used. In Greek there are two words for new. First there is 'neos', which means new in point of time. Second there is 'kainos', which means both new in point of time, and also new in quality. If something is 'kainos', then a new element has been brought into the situation. It is 'kainos' that both Jesus and Paul used of the New Covenant, the significance being that the New Covenant is not only new in point of time, but is also quite different in kind from the Old Covenant, and produces a totally different kind of relationship between the Lord God and human beings.

Let us now consider the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant was based on a written document, as we see in Exodus 24:1-8. Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people, and the people agreed to it. The New Covenant, however, is not based on a written document, but is based on the power of the Holy Spirit in believers' minds and hearts. A written document is something external, but the Spirit is able to change people's hearts. People under the written code, while trying to obey it, may wish to disobey it, but it is not so under the influence of the Spirit. When the Spirit comes into believers' hearts, believers do not wish to disobey or break the code because they have been changed. A written code can be changed, but the people will still be the same, whereas only the Spirit can change human nature.

The Old Covenant produced a legal relationship between the Lord God and human beings. The Jewish people were required to keep every detail of the Old Covenant. Not one jot or tittle was to be disobeyed, and life was the promised reward to the doer of the Law (Leviticus 18:5, Ezekiel 20:11; Galatians 3:12). The reward for obedience was life, and the penalty of disobedience was divine punishment, individually and nationally (Leviticus 23:29,30; 26:14-20). But the Jews were fallen human beings, descended from Adam, therefore unable to keep the Law perfectly.

The Old Covenant was really a condemning relationship because it killed certain things.

- (a) It killed hope. There was no hope that people could keep it, and was such a relationship that resulted only in frustration to everyone who came under it.
- (b) It killed life. Everyone who came under its terms could achieve only condemnation, and condemnation meant death.
- (c) It killed strength. The Old Covenant told people what to do, but could not help them to do all that was necessary.

The New Covenant is quite different.

- (a) It is a relationship of love. It came into existence because of God's love for the world. He created it and the human race that lived in it.
- (b) It is a relationship between a father and his children. Although men and women are still law-breakers, no matter how disobedient they might be, they are the sons and daughters of God with forgiveness freely available.
- (c) It changes people's lives by changing their hearts, not by imposing a new code of laws for them to obey.
- (d) It not only tells people what to do, but gives them the strength and desire to do it. With its requirements it brings power.

Paul continued to contrast the two covenants. The Old Covenant was certainly born in glory. When Moses came down from the mountain with the ten commandments, the basic code of the Old Covenant, his face shone with such splendour and brightness that the people could not look at it (Exodus 24:30). That splendour was a passing feature which did not last. The New Covenant, on the other hand, the new relationship which the Lord Jesus makes possible between human beings and God, has a greater splendour that will never fade because it offers forgiveness and removes condemnation.

But the Jews, a stiff-necked and gainsaying people (Exodus 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:6,13; Romans 10:31), preferred the Old Covenant and rejected the New Covenant, the new relationship in Christ. The Old Covenant was "*holy and just and good*" (Romans 7:12), but it was only a stage upon the way to salvation and life. The Apostle wrote that "*the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (Galatians 3:24). The Jews as a whole refused to accept Christ and the New Covenant, and so, as a nation, have excluded themselves from God's gracious blessings, and have, because of their continued disobedience, rejected the original promises made to them.

THE COVERING WHICH HIDES THE TRUTH

2 Corinthians 3: 12 to 18

12. *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech --*
13. *Unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.*
14. *But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.*
15. *But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.*
16. *Nevertheless when one 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 by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Paul began this next section by referring to Moses coming down from the mountain with his face shining so brightly that no-one could continue to look at it.

1. Paul thought back to Exodus 34:33. According to the RSV, Moses covered his face when he had finished speaking to the people, not while he was speaking, as in the KJV. It seems that Paul took this to mean that Moses covered his face so that the people would not see the slow fading of the glory that was formerly there. Paul's thought was that the glory of the Old Covenant was a fading one. It was destined to be superseded as something incomplete or inadequate and was replaced by something that is complete and designed to suit

human needs. The revelation that came by Moses was holy, just and good, but was only partial, whereas the revelation that came through Jesus Christ is full and final.

2. The idea of the covering or veil next occupied Paul's mind, and he referred to it in different ways. He said that when the Jews listened to readings from the Old Testament, a veil over their eyes prevented them from seeing the real and intended meaning of what was being read. They ought to have seen that the readings were leading them to Jesus Christ, but the veil prevented them from seeing that. We today should take care that we do not allow our eyes to be veiled when we read the Scriptures, and so fail to see the true and intended meaning.

- (a) It is conceivable that our eyes may sometimes be veiled by prejudice. Sometimes we may consult the Scripture to find support for our own preconceived ideas, rather than to find the truth that the Lord has caused to be written for us.
- (b) Our eyes may be veiled by wishful thinking. We may find only what we want to find, and pass over or neglect what we do not want to consider. We may for example find delight in the love and mercy of God, but pass over references to His displeasure and judgment.
- (c) Our eyes may be veiled by fragmentary thinking, that is, by not taking the Bible as a whole. It is easy to read and quote texts that may suit our purpose or our private theories, and neglect or put to one side other texts that seem inconvenient or difficult. In other words, we must consider the whole message, and read the Scriptures in the light of Jesus Christ.

3. The veil which kept the Jews from seeing the real meaning of Scripture also came between them and God.

- (a) Sometimes the veil leads to disobedience and alienates the person from God. God responds to the pure in heart, and does not tolerate persistent disobedience.
- (b) Sometimes the veil leads to an unteachable spirit. Some people do not wish to be corrected and do not wish to go on learning. God has allowed us to have freedom of choice, but if we insist on our own way as the only way, we cannot learn from Him.

4. Paul continued by saying that we see the glory of the Lord without a covering or a veil, and thus are changed from glory into glory. It is not easy to see what meaning Paul intended here. It may be that he was thinking that, if we continue to think about and consider Christ, we may well reflect Him in our lives. His image will be seen in us, not perfectly, of course, but sufficiently evident to our brethren and others with whom we come in contact, to be noticeable and hopefully inspiring.

Paul finished this section by saying that *"the Lord's Spirit makes us more and more like our glorious Lord"* (verse 18; CEV). In the Christian life, the work of the Spirit and the work of the risen Lord are one and the same. The strength and guidance we receive come from both the Spirit and our faith in the risen Lord. The Apostle also said *"the Lord's Spirit sets us free"* (verse 17, CEV). He had in mind that when people's obedience to God is controlled by a code of laws, they are really slaves. But when people's obedience is conditioned by the operation of the Spirit in their hearts, they have no other desire than to serve God, because it is not law that binds them but love, and even the most menial tasks we have to do for Him are a privilege, because we do them for Him Whom we love and respect.

PAUL SPOKE THE TRUTH

2 Corinthians 4: 1 to 6

1. *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.*
2. *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*
3. *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,*
4. *Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*
5. *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.*
6. *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

In this passage, Paul wrote about four different kinds of people.

1. At first he wrote about himself. He said that he had not given up on the great task that had been given to him. Two things had kept him devoted to his task. Firstly there was continuing awareness of the task God had given him. Persons who are conscious of great tasks which they believe they can perform can do amazing things. Such a task that comes to mind is the great work of music, known as 'The Messiah' by George Frederick Handel. The whole work was composed and written in twenty-two days, during which time, Handel would scarcely allow himself to eat or sleep, indicating to us lesser mortals that a great task can bring strength to the doer. Secondly, there was with Paul the memory of mercy received. He once made havoc of God's Church, persecuting it with fanaticism and fury, but God had mercy on him through the Lord Jesus, and had chosen and redeemed him, showing him grace, mercy and love.

2. Next Paul, by implication, responded to those who had opposed him and had said slanderous things about him. Evidently Paul's enemies had said that he had used underhand methods which had to be kept secret, and that he adulterated and corrupted the message of the Gospel. Paul replied that he spoke only the truth and that he could always be trusted. It is a comfort to remember that if our own motives are ever misinterpreted, our actions misunderstood and our words twisted away from their real and intended meaning, that these very things happened to the Apostle.

3. Paul wrote next of those who had refused to accept the Gospel. He insisted that he proclaimed the Gospel in such a way that anyone with a conscience should have acknowledged its claim and its appeal. But in spite of this, some people remained deaf to its appeal and blind to its glorious message of salvation. Paul said something about them that seems difficult for some to understand. He said that the god of this world has blinded their minds so that they cannot believe. Throughout the Scriptures, we are told that in this world and in our experiences of life, there is a power of evil with which we must deal. Sometimes that power is called Satan, and sometimes the devil. In John's Gospel, Jesus spoke of the ruler of this world and of his defeat (John 12:31; 14:30 and 16:11). In Ephesians 2:2 Paul wrote of *"the prince of the power of the air"*, and in the Corinthian passage quoted above, he wrote of *"the god who rules this world"*. Even in the Lord's prayer there is a reference to this evil power, and probably the words in Matthew 6:13 should be rendered as *"Deliver us from the evil one"* as it is in the NKJV. Suffice it to say at this stage that the Christian believer is given the strength and the power to overcome Satan's influence, as James 4:7 tells us, *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you"*.

So what Paul said is that those who cannot accept the good news of Jesus Christ are those who have given themselves over to the evil of this world to such an extent that they cannot hear or respond to God's invitation. God has not abandoned them, but by their conduct they have closed their minds and hearts to Him.

4. Paul finally said something about the Lord Jesus. He said that in Jesus we see what God is like. Jesus Himself said, *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). When Paul preached, he did not say 'Look at me' but 'Look at Jesus Christ'. In Him, Paul said, you will see the glory of God which came to earth in a form that everyone can readily understand.

OUR TREASURE IN CLAY VESSELS

2 Corinthians 3: 7 to 15

7. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*
8. *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*
9. *Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -*

10. *Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*
11. *For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*
12. *So then death is working in us, but life in you.*
13. *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,*
14. *Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.*
15. *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

Paul in this passage expressed the thought that however great the Christian glory may be in our hearts and minds, we remain mortal and the victims of circumstance, subject to the chances and the changes of human life, with our bodies likely to be vulnerable to aches and pain as the years pass and our age increases. We are like people who have precious treasure stored in earthen vessels or clay jars as expressed in the passage above. As mortal human beings, we are surrounded by weakness, although Christ has surrounded us with glory. The weakness is ours but the glory is God's, and we are completely dependent on Him through the Lord Jesus. Paul continued to describe the Christian life, in which our weakness is combined with God's glory.

He did so in a number of paradoxes, that is, statements which seem contradictory or absurd, but which nevertheless express a truth.

1. We are under pressure at every point but are not hemmed in without hope of escape. We cannot be in such tight circumstances that there is no way out. It is characteristic of Christians that even if we are physically confined in a difficult environment, or find ourselves in some restricting situation, there is always a way of respite for the spirit to the spaciousness of communion with God through Jesus Christ.

2. We may be persecuted by people who oppose us, but will not be abandoned by God. A most noticeable thing about Christian martyrs is that in their most difficult situations they had their most reassuring times with Christ. When Joan of Arc was abandoned by those who should have stood by her, she said, 'It is better to be alone with God. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength, I will dare and dare and dare until I die'. The psalmist also

wrote, *"If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up"* (Psalm 27:10). Nothing can alter the loyalty of the Lord God.

3. We may be at our wits' end but not at our hope's end. There are times when we as Christians do not know what should be done, but should not doubt that something will be done. There may be times when we cannot see clearly where life is going, but we do not doubt that God will see that the eventual outcome will emerge and be positive and helpful in ways that we might not have expected.

There could be times in our lives when as Christians we have to learn the hardest lesson of all, the very lesson that Jesus had to learn at Gethsemane, how to accept with meekness what we cannot withstand or understand. In short, we may be at times at our wits' end, but we cannot be at our hope's end while we have Jesus' example and the Holy Spirit with us.

4. We are knocked down but not knocked out. The remarkable characteristic of Christians is that we do not fail or fall totally, but that every time we do fail or fall we get up again. From time to time we may be overcome, but we are not defeated. We may lose battles, but in the end we will not lose the war.

So after he wrote about the great paradoxes of the Christian life, Paul continued to reveal the secret of his own life, and to give the reasons by which he was able to do and endure as he did.

Paul was well aware that to share the evangelical life of Jesus also meant to share the risks. Those who wish to live as a Christian must be ready to suffer for Him. He remembered all he could of the power of God Who raised Jesus from death.

He spoke as he did with such courage and such disregard for personal safety because he believed that, even if he died, the power of God Who raised Jesus Christ from death could and would also raise him. He was certain that a power which was sufficient for life and greater than death was also available to him (1 Timothy 1:12).

He bore everything in the conviction that, through his sufferings and trials, others were being led into the light and love of God. Paul could endure and go through all that happened to him because he knew that it was not for nothing. He knew it was to bring others to Jesus, and such an aim should also be with us who are endeavouring to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

THE SECRET OF ENDURANCE

2 Corinthians 4: 16 to 18

16. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*
17. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*
18. *While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

In this short passage, Paul set out the secret of spiritual endurance.

Throughout our lives, our physical strength fades away, but all through life it ought to happen that our minds and our spiritual strengths should keep growing and developing. From the physical point of view life seems to be a slow descent that leads to the death of the body; but from a spiritual point of view life is really an ascent leading up to the presence of God and the Lord Jesus in the heavenly places. We should not fear the passing of the years, because they bring us nearer and nearer to God through Jesus Christ.

Paul was convinced that anything he had to suffer in this world would be as nothing compared to the glory that he would enjoy in the next. He was certain that earth's sufferings will be forgotten in the glories of the promised Kingdom to come. We should note that in the Gospels, whenever Jesus foretold His death, He always foretold His resurrection, revealing to us that all who suffer for Christ will share in His glory.

Our minds must always be fixed on the things that are unseen and not on the things that are seen. The things that are seen, the things of this world, have their day and pass out of existence, but the things that are unseen, the things of heaven, last forever.

If people think and concern themselves only with the things that are visible, they are bound to look at life that way. But we as Christians, know that there is another and much better way. In Hebrews 11:27 it is said of Moses that "*He persevered as though he saw him who is invisible*". We should also persevere because we see by faith things that are invisible, and prospects that are yet to come, because God has so promised, and what He has promised, He is able to and will perform, and nothing can hinder or prevent from happening all that God has promised.

EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY BODIES

2 Corinthians 5:1 to 10

1. *For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*
2. *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,*
3. *If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.*
4. *For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.*
5. *Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*
6. *So we are always confident, 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 confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*
9. *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.*
10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

There is a significant progression of thought in this passage.

1. Paul was saying that it would be a joy to him to leave his human body and exchange it for a new spirit body. He described his human body as a tent, a temporary dwelling place for his identity.

It was mentioned in an earlier paper that early Greek and Roman thinkers despised the human body and likened it to a burden and even a tomb and sometimes rather oddly as a corpse. This thinking, it seems, to some extent entered Jewish thought, as we see in the Apocrypha in the book of Wisdom, or more fully 'The Wisdom of Solomon' in chapter 9 verse 15, "*For a perishable body weighs down the soul and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind*".

There is, however, a difference as far as Paul was concerned. He was not looking for some kind of Nirvana with the peace of extinction, nor some kind of absorption in the divine, nor some kind of freedom with a disembodied spirit. He was waiting for the day of the resurrection when God would give him a new body, a spiritual body,

the form of a spirit being, in which he would be able to serve and praise God in the heavenly realm. Paul saw eternity, not as a release into permanent inactivity, but for him to have a body in which his service would be complete and of continuing value.

2. But for all his looking forward to the life to come, Paul did not despise this life. He said we should be cheerful because now in this life we have the Holy Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit is the 'arrabon' of the life to come. In comments on the first chapter of 2 Corinthians it was said that the Greek word 'arrabon' meant the first instalment of a payment paid as a guarantee that full payment was to follow. What Paul meant by his use of the word 'arrabon' was that the kind of life we live with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit is the first instalment of life in heaven, and the guarantee that the fullness and joy of that heavenly existence will some day be granted to us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's pledge of greater things to come. It was Paul's conviction that even now Christians can enjoy the foretaste of life everlasting. So Christians should not despise their lives in this world because they see by faith a reflection of the glorious life to come.

3. There is a note of sternness when Paul said, *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"*. The CEV has, *"Christ will judge each of us for the good or bad that we do while living in these bodies"*.

These statements make it sound as though, at the end of a believer's life, there will be a kind of hearing or trial, resulting in a final judgment being given concerning the future status of the believer. On the basis of Scripture, these translations seem to convey a wrong impression, because the judgment of believers takes place in their lifetime on earth after they have believed in the Lord Jesus as their Mediator and their only means of access to the Lord God and committed their lives to follow Christ. The following are my reasons, based on relevant Scriptures, for this understanding.

(a) The Apostle Peter wrote, *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?"* (1 Peter 4:17).

(b) The Lord God has committed all judgment to His Son, the Lord Jesus, as we are told in John 5:22, *"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son"*.

(c) The Apostle Peter in chapter 4, verses 2-5, has shown that it is necessary when one becomes a Christian, to change his or her manner of life, and not live according to his or her former conduct.

That is what Peter meant in Acts 3:19 when he was speaking to the Jews, *"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted"*. The Jews were told to be sorry for what they had done in crucifying the Lord of life, and were exhorted to accept Jesus Christ and follow Him and turn away from their former attitudes and practices.

(d) As far as we are concerned, the responsibility rests on us to do God's will through faith in Jesus Christ, according to what is plainly set out in the holy Scriptures. Our attitudes and practices will be known to our great judge, the Lord Jesus, and He will judge righteously in determining whether or not we have made our calling and election sure, as we are told in 2 Peter 1:10.

(e) The judgment at the house of God began in the Apostles' day when the Lord Jesus was given all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), including His position as Head of God's house, that is, His Church of believers.

(f) We are now in this life before the judgment seat of Christ our Saviour. He has saved us, and continues to guide us as we live our lives, because nothing in our lives will be missed or overlooked because *"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4:13). This means that even our inmost thoughts are taken into account, *meaning* our 'hearts' as the Scripture has recorded; *"For with the heart man believeth"* (Romans 10:10); *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"* (Matthew 12:34); *"Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee"* (Luke 19:22).

In addition, the Lord Jesus said, *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"* (Matthew 12:35-37).

(g) But we must try to fulfil our responsibilities. We should examine, judge and correct ourselves, our thoughts, our actions and our words, *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged"* (1 Corinthians 11:31). We should remain changed in heart and mind and as much as possible in words and actions, so that we will be ready for that future change at the resurrection for which we look and desire, when we shall be like Him and see Him as He is, as we are told in 1 John 3:2.

NEWNESS OF LIFE

2 Corinthians 5: 11 to 19

11. *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.*
12. *For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.*
13. *For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.*
14. *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;*
15. *And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*
16. *Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.*
17. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*
18. *Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,*
19. *That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

In the above passage, Paul was endeavouring to persuade the Corinthians of his sincerity and pure motives. His conscience was clear, but his enemies had cast suspicion on him, and he wished to demonstrate his sincerity to the Corinthian brethren. He had no selfish motives simply to vindicate himself, but rather to defend the impact of his Christian message, because if his sincerity was questioned, his message of Christ and salvation would have been damaged. A message will always involve the character and motives of the messenger, and that is why any preacher or teacher of the Christian message must be beyond suspicion. In our Christian work we must avoid any appearance of evil or selfish motives, so that the message we bring will be seen as genuine and designed to help people to come to Christ and the salvation He offers to all who will listen and believe.

Paul insisted in the above passage that in all his conduct there had been only one motive, which was to serve God through the Lord Jesus, by helping the Corinthians. More than once Paul was thought to be out of his mind, as when Festus said "*Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad*" (Acts 26:24). Paul suffered the same misunderstanding as Jesus did when He was said to be "*beside himself*" in Mark 3:21. It is sometimes the lot of the Christian to be thought of as crazy or deluded by people who are either ignorant or indifferent or both. If people follow the Christian path of kindness, forgiveness, and loyalty to the Master, there will always be worldly-wise people who will call them deluded or misguided. Paul knew that there was a time for calm, sensible conduct, and he also knew that there was a time for the behaviour which to worldly people seemed foolish and even crazy. Paul was prepared to follow either path for the sake of Christ and for the salvation of others.

Paul emphasised the motive that is the driving force of the whole Christian life - Christ died for all. Paul often wrote that the Christian is "*in Christ*", or emulating His character, meaning that the old self of the Christian died and a new person arose, as if newly created by God. In this newness of life, Christians have taken on a new set of standards, and should no longer follow things that the world holds dear. There was a time when Paul had judged Christ by human standards, and had set out to eliminate the Christian faith from the world, but God and Jesus stopped him, and set him on an entirely new mission. The One he had sought to discredit is the One he came to acknowledge as his Saviour and the Saviour of the world, and the One who had led him to the friendship and true service of God which he had longed for all his life, and finally was miraculously led to it by God and the Lord Jesus.

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:20 to 6:2

20. *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

21. *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

6:1. *We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.*

2. *For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you."
Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

In the above passage, it says "*we are ambassadors for Christ*". The word that Paul used is 'presbeutes', an important word which has two uses, and which corresponds with the Latin word 'legatus' as used by the Roman power in those times.

The first use of 'presbeutes' and 'legatus' applied to Roman provinces which were of two kinds. One kind of province was under the direct control of the Senate, while the other kind of province was under the direct control of the Emperor. The distinction was made on this basis. Provinces which were peaceful and had no troops stationed in them were senatorial provinces, while provinces which were turbulent and troublesome and had troops stationed in them were imperial provinces. In the imperial provinces the administrator who was in control on behalf of the Emperor was the 'legatus', or as in Greek, the 'presbeutes'. So the word describes a man who had a direct commission from the Emperor, and Paul used the same word of himself as having been commissioned by Jesus Christ for the work of establishing and directing the work of God's church.

The second use of both 'presbeutes' and 'legatus' is very interesting. When the Roman Senate decided that a country should become a province, they sent to it ten 'legati' or 'presbeutai' as envoys who, along with the victorious general, arranged the terms of peace with the conquered people, determined the boundaries of the new province, drew up a constitution for the new administration, and then returned to submit everything to the Senate for ratification of all that they had done. The envoys and the victorious general were thus responsible for bringing others into the Roman Empire.

And so it was that Paul thought of himself and his helpers such as Timothy, Titus, Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos as the ones who brought others into God's Church, who therefore became members of the Church and also members of the divine family through Jesus Christ.

As has already been said, the word Paul used of himself and his helpers was the Greek word 'presbeutai' which is translated as ambassadors in most versions of the Scriptures. The position of ambassador is a particularly responsible one, both in the world at large, and in the Christian Church. Ambassadors of any nation live in a foreign country among people who speak a different language and who may follow a different way of life.

Christians are really in this situation because they live in the world and take part in the life and work of the world, but they are citizens of Christ's Kingdom actually strangers living in the world, because the aims and pursuits of the world are quite different from the aims and directions of Christians, who must be different, because their aim is to be like Christ and to live in accordance with His requirements as ambassadors for Him.

Ambassadors in the world speak for their own country. An Australian ambassador speaks on behalf of Australians. There are times when Christians have to speak for Christ, and in the decision-making and counsels of the world, it should be that the message of Christians speaking for Christ in the human situation is delivered for everyone to hear.

The honour of a country is in its ambassador's hands, and countries tend to be judged by their ambassadors whose words are listened to and whose deeds are watched. The ambassador's duty is to deliver a definite message and carry out a definite policy. He is obliged to watch opportunities, study characters and look for expedients when necessary, so that he may place before his hearers the position his country wishes him to do in a form that will be acceptable to the environment in which he is stationed. It is the responsibility of ambassadors to commend their countries to those among whose people they have been appointed to live and work.

And herein lies the Christian's responsibility. The honour of the Lord Jesus and His Church are in the hands of each one of us. By our words and actions we can help to make others think favourably of our Church and of our Master, the Lord Jesus. It should be unthinkable that we should fail in this duty.

We must note Paul's message: "Be reconciled to God". The Scriptures do not speak of God being reconciled to men and women, but always of men and women being reconciled to God. The whole process of salvation began with Him. We know that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to redeem and deliver the world, that is, the whole human race, and make it possible for everyone to gain everlasting life. The Lord God is not estranged from human beings, they are estranged from Him. The message from God, the message which Paul preached, is really an appeal from a loving Father to his estranged children to come to Him, the God of love, through the Lord Jesus Christ Who suffered, died, and shed His blood so that it has become possible for all who will believe and obey to live in peace, harmony and security for ever in the Kingdom to come.

Paul begged his hearers not to accept the offer of God's grace, meaning His favour, to no purpose, that Paul's hearers and all who believe may have as an undeserved free gift. From Paul's earnest entreaty we must understand that it would be possible for someone to consider God's gracious and merciful offer and reject it. If this should happen to someone, it would certainly be a tragedy, because it would probably mean rejection of the offer of eternal life and the pleasures promised by God in His Kingdom. But we must leave such a possible situation in the hands of God and the Lord Jesus.

TROUBLES OVERCOME

2 Corinthians 6:3 to 10

3. *We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.*
4. *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses,*
5. *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings;*
6. *By purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love,*
7. *By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*
8. *By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true;*
9. *As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed;*
10. *As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

In all the chances and changes of life, Paul had one main concern, which was to show himself as a sincere and profitable minister of Jesus Christ. He began with the word 'hupomone', which is translated in most versions as endurance. But in Greek, the word means more than mere endurance. It means the frame of mind which describes the ability to bear things in such a way as to convert tribulation into strength and victory in the Lord's work, which quality I will call victorious endurance.

Paul continued by drawing attention to three groups, each containing three items, in which victorious endurance is practised.

1. Internal conflicts of the Christian life

(a) A lot of tribulations. The word Paul used is 'thlipsis', which means primarily emotional pressure which weighs down the heart, and combined with crushing disappointments, tends to make life hard to bear. But victorious endurance can cope with all of them for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

(b) Needs, by which Paul meant the inescapable burdens of life, which must be borne, burdens such as sorrow over happenings in life, which cannot be changed, and death of loved ones. The word Paul used was 'anagke', which means literally the necessities of life, all of which can be faced courageously by faithful Christian believers.

(c) Distresses. The word Paul used was 'stenochoria', which means literally to be caught in too narrow a space, such as an army which might find itself trapped in a narrow rocky passage without space to manoeuvre or escape; or a ship caught in a storm without the possibility riding it out or running before it. There could be times in our lives when we might feel confined and hemmed in, but victorious endurance makes us trust in the power of the Lord God to deliver us and provide a way of escape.

2. External tribulations of life

(a) Stripes. For Paul, the Christian life meant not only spiritual suffering but physical suffering as well. It is true that if in former times Christians had not been ready to be tortured and exposed to wild beasts, Christianity might not have survived. Even today in some countries Christians face the likelihood of physical persecution, and many have been prepared to face up to it and continue to persevere in faith. The second century theologian Tertullian said, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'.

(b) Imprisonments. As far as we know, Paul was in prison seven times as Clement of Rome wrote. We know also from the book of Acts that Paul was in prison in Philippi, Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome. We also know from history that Christians have been imprisoned from the first century to the twenty-first. There have always been some who prefer to abandon their liberty rather than abandon their faith.

(c) Tumults. Time and time again we have read of Christians facing not only the sternness of the law, but the violence of the mob, as was the case with John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, and the Quaker, George Foxe. The mob has often been the enemy of Christianity, but nowadays it is not so much mob violence but the mockery and the contempt of unbelievers against which Christians must stand.

3. There is the effort of the Christian life

(a) Labours. The word Paul used is 'kopos', which means toil to the point of great weariness or even exhaustion, the kind of toil which may take all that we can give of body, mind and spirit in working for God.

(b) Sleeplessness. Some nights would have been spent in situations of danger or discomfort enough to make sleep impossible. Paul was always ready to be the unsleeping and wide-awake messenger of truth.

(c) Fastings. Here Paul did not mean ritual fastings, but the times he went without food for the sake of the work for the Church. He was always prepared to go hungry rather than neglect the commitment he was given to preach the word of God and the Lord Jesus.

Paul then turned away from writing of trials and tribulations to his own God-given equipment for the Christian life, and retained the same arrangement of three groups of three items.

1. The qualities of the mind given by God

(a) Purity, the word Paul used is 'hagnotes' which means the careful avoidance of all sins, the service of the honour of God, a high degree of prudence, and freedom from every stain of flesh and spirit.

(b) Knowledge. Knowledge of this kind has been defined as 'knowledge of the things that must be done', meaning knowledge that led not to idleness or relaxation, but to Christian action.

(c) Longsuffering. In the New Testament, the Greek word 'makrothumia' usually means patience with people, the ability to bear with them even when we think they are wrong and yet they still remain stubborn. Patience is the quality found in people who may concede a point, but will not be vanquished or defeated in the long run to gain and retain understanding and a sensible outcome.

2. The God-given qualities of heart

(a) Kindness. The Greek word for kindness is 'chrestotes', an important New Testament word, and the opposite of severity. One commentator, quoted by William Barclay, described it as 'the sympathetic kindliness or sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain'. It is the quality of people who think far more of others than of themselves.

(b) The Holy Spirit. Paul knew that he was dependent on the Holy Spirit for continued assistance in his work. But the phrase he used may have meant a spirit of holiness rather than the Holy Spirit, and may have meant that Paul's main motive was holy, and that his work was directed primarily and solely to the honour and service of God.

(c) Sincere love. Here the word Paul used was 'agape', an important New Testament word meaning the greatest benevolence. It means that spirit which does not seek anything but the other person's good.

3. The God-given equipment

for the work of preaching the Gospel.

(a) The declaration of the truth. Paul knew that Jesus had given him the Gospel to proclaim, and the strength and ability to proclaim it.

(b) The power of God. This was everything to Paul and the only power he had. Paul did not say, 'I did this', but 'God enabled me to do this'.

(c) The armour of righteousness. Paul said that God had given him the power to attack and fulfil his task, and the power to defend himself from distracting temptations.

Paul's Closing Thoughts

Paul then completed this lyrical passage with a series of contrasts. He began with being honoured or dishonoured. The word he used for 'dishonoured' is 'atimia' a word which usually means 'loss of rights as a citizen', and what he meant was that he may have lost all the rights

and privileges which the world could offer, but that he remained a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Paul then said there were both evil reports and good reports, that is, he was criticised and sometimes hated, but his reputation with God was sure. He always told the truth even though some wrongly and completely unjustly called him an impostor. He was unknown to unbelievers but well known to those to whom he had brought Christ. Paul said he seemed to be dying, but was still alive, that is, he was in constant danger and often faced death, but by the grace of God he was still alive. He was chastened and yet not killed. Things happened to him that might have crushed some people, but they did not crush Paul's spirit. He said he was sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, and no matter what happened to him he still remained joyful. He was poor, but made many people rich in faith and hope, and although he owned nothing, he said that everything was his. Paul was penniless, but he could and did enrich men and women with the Gospel, and, being Christ's chosen Apostle, he had everything that mattered in this world and the next.

PAUL'S LOVE FOR THE CORINTHIANS.

2 Corinthians 6: 11 to 13

11. *O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.*
12. *You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.*
13. *Now in return for the same(I speak as to children), you also be open.*

2 Corinthians 7: 2 to 4

2. *Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.*
3. *I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.*
4. *Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.*

In combining the two passages above and omitting for the present the passage from 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1, I have benefited from William Barclay's comments on pages 258 to 260 in his book 'The Letters to the Corinthians'. The reasons will become clear when we consider Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1 in the pages that follow.

In the above passages, Paul wrote words of true love for his brethren. Past breaches had healed, quarrels had been made up and love had prevailed. The words that have been translated as "*our heart is wide open*" mean literally 'our heart is enlarged'. It seems that Paul meant that His affection had increased.

I consider it desirable to draw attention to the old English translation of 2 Corinthians 6:12 as it appears, because it sounds odd to us in today's modern English. The verse is translated in the King James Version as "*Ye are not straitened in us, but you are straitened in your own bowels*". The Greek word translated 'bowels' is 'splagchna', and means literally the upper internal organs of the human body; the heart, the liver and the lungs. In these organs, the seat of the emotions was supposed to lie. Indeed we often tend to feel the source of love in the heart, which is really a physical organ, and it certainly is a common human tendency to describe strong emotion as heart-felt. The meaning of heart in Scripture signifies inmost thoughts and emotions, as we see in the following passages. "*For with the heart man*

believeth" (Romans 10:10); *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"* (Matthew 12:34); *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things"* (the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12:35).

Paul made a series of claims in the above passage. He wrote that he had not corrupted anyone, he had not wronged anyone and had not taken advantage of anyone. It seems that Paul had in mind that the only thing worse than sinning oneself is the teaching or inducing another person to sin. It would be a terrible thing in God's sight to introduce and influence a younger or weaker person to indulge in wrongdoing. It was Paul's clear claim that his guidance and influence had always been to the rightful and best ways and directions.

Paul finished the passage by telling the Corinthians how complete his comfort was and how overflowing his joy was even though there were troubles all around him. He said, in effect, that human relationships are very important in life. If we are happy with our family and our brethren, we can face up to misfortune or opposition from the outside world. As we read in the book of Proverbs, *"Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it"* (Proverbs 15:17).

DO NOT JOIN WITH UNBELIEVERS

2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1

14. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.
For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?
And what communion has light with darkness?*
 15. *And what accord has Christ with Belial?
Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?*
 16. *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?
For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:
"I will dwell in them and walk among them.
I will be their God, And they shall be My people."*
 17. *Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate,
says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."*
 18. *"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and
daughters, says the LORD Almighty."*
- 7:1. *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse
ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting
holiness in the fear of God.*

We will now consider the verses that were previously omitted. They are rather stern and do not sit well with the gladness and joy of the verses which precede and follow the passage quoted above.

In an earlier paper, attention was drawn to the fact that Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians earlier than the letter designated as 1 Corinthians in the Bible. In the RSV in 1 Corinthians 5:9 it is recorded that Paul said, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men". It may be that this original letter is entirely lost, or it may be that the passage quoted above constitutes a section of that original letter. It could be the case that, when Paul's letters were being collected from various locations, some sheets of papyrus could have been misplaced. It was not until about AD 90 that Paul's letters were collected, and by that time it was likely that no-one knew the correct order of the papyrus sheets. Be that as it may, the passages quoted above would fit well with the letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9.

There are Old Testament references here that Paul may have had in mind. He said, as recorded in the NIV, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). In Deuteronomy 22:10 it is written, "You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together". Also in Leviticus 19:19 it is commanded, "Do not mate different kinds of animals". The lesson is that certain unions or combinations are incompatible and the items concerned should not be brought together, so Paul applied this to the Christian situation by saying that it would be impossible for the purity of the Christian to combine in any way with the pollution of an idol-worshipping unbeliever.

When Paul said, in effect, 'What has the temple of God to do with idols?' he may have been thinking of King Manasseh bringing an image into the temple of God (2 Kings 21:1-9), and later of King Josiah destroying such evil things (2 Kings 23:3 and onwards), or perhaps such abominations as described in Ezekiel 8:3 to 18. There were times when people, who should have known better, tried to associate the temple of God with idol-worship, and the consequences had been terrible.

This passage is really a command to believers not to fellowship with unbelievers. Paul was telling the Corinthians to keep themselves free from contamination by the world around them. He may have been thinking of the word of God that came to Abraham saying "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house" (Genesis 12:1), and a similar warning that came to Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:12-14). From these Scriptural commands we should learn by extension that there

are things in the world with which Christians must not associate themselves, because that is the strong exhortation that Paul was conveying to the Corinthians.

As we look back on the early days of Christianity, we may not realise or appreciate the many forms of separation that were caused to people who first accepted the Christian call.

1. Acceptance of the Christian life often meant that a person, frequently a man, had to give up his trade. Stone masons could no longer build shrines to pagan gods; tailors could no longer make garments for priests of pagan gods; soldiers could no longer acknowledge Caesar as their god. Time and time again in the early Church, the problem came to people to choose between their occupation and their loyalty to Jesus Christ. And so it was in the early Church that many Christians had to leave their employment.

As far as we are concerned in this twenty-first century, we must decide for ourselves if the employment we wish to undertake will be compatible with our Christian calling and our witness to the Master and to the Lord God through Him.

2. The Christian calling often meant that early Christians had to give up social life. In the ancient world, many feasts were held in the temple of a god. An invitation to a feast would state 'I invite you to dine with me at the table of our god'. Such a feast would begin and end with a cup of wine dedicated to the gods. Christians could not share in such practices and so had to forsake the social fellowship that had previously meant so much to them, a constraint that still applies in slightly different circumstances today.

3. Dedication to Christianity often meant giving up family ties. If a wife became a Christian, her husband might drive her from his house. If a husband became a Christian, his wife might leave him. Sons and daughters who became Christians might find their homes were forbidden to them. For many it became a fact of life that belief in Jesus Christ did not bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34), and that some men and women had to be prepared to love Him more than their nearest and dearest. They had to be prepared to leave even their homes and families. Becoming a Christian has had some hard aspects for some, but it will always remain true that there are certain things it is not possible to do and also be a Christian, and there are certain situations and circumstances from which a Christian must depart.

When we look closely at Paul's references to Scripture, some of his words as recorded are not always exact quotations. In the passages considered in this paper, Paul quoted from a number of Scriptures, none quoted exactly, from Leviticus 26:11,12; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 37:27 and 2 Samuel 7:14. If we wonder about this we should remember that in Paul's day there were no books, and records were written on papyrus rolls. An historical record such as Acts would have been written on a roll about 10.6 metres (thirty-five feet) long, a most unwieldy thing. There were no chapter divisions; they were inserted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, in the thirteenth century. There were no verse divisions; they were inserted by Stephanus, the Parisian printer, in the sixteenth century. Finally, there was no such thing as a concordance until the sixteenth century. The fact that such helps and assistance were not available to Paul meant that he had to quote from memory, so as long as he got the substance right, the exact wording did not affect the truth of his message. It was not the letter of Scripture, so much as the truth of the Scriptural references that Paul made, which mattered to him and also to his readers.

SORROW AND JOY

2 Corinthians 7: 5 to 16

5. *For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.*
6. *Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,*
7. *And not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.*
8. *For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.*
9. *Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.*
10. *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*
11. *For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*
12. *Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.*
13. *Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly 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 am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true.*
15. *And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.*
16. *Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.*

As we read this section of Paul's letter, we are reminded of the concern he expressed earlier in the second chapter, verses 12 and 13. In that earlier section, Paul wrote that he had had to rest in Troas

because he did not know of the situation in Corinth, and had set out to Macedonia to meet Titus and learn from him how things were in Corinth. The circumstances were as follows. Things had gone seriously wrong in Corinth, and, in an attempt to put matters right, Paul had paid a flying visit to Corinth, but his visit only made things worse, which left him virtually broken-hearted. After the failure of his visit, Paul sent Titus to the Corinthians with a very severe letter to them. The situation so troubled him that he was unable to stay in Troas, although there was much there that he could have done. So he set out to meet Titus to get news from him as quickly as possible. He met Titus somewhere in Macedonia, and learnt to his great joy that the trouble in Corinth was over, the divisions were healed, and that all was well. That is the background of events concerning which Paul wrote the passage quoted above.

The words Paul wrote tell us a great deal about his manner and method of rebuke.

(1) He was quite clear and determined when the time came that he considered it necessary to give a rebuke. He seemed to know there were times when it would be unfruitful to try to make peace which would end up only with trouble because dangerous situations need to be dealt with swiftly, decisively and firmly. The situation calls to mind the necessity for parents to exercise discipline when family situations need firm control and guidance from time to time. Trouble, if dealt with wisely and at the right time, can be prevented from growing and getting out of hand.

(2) It seems clear, when we read of the tremendous work that Paul did, and all that he wrote, that he did not want to rebuke. He rebuked only when he felt compelled to do so, and took no pleasure in taking brethren to task. We all know that there are some people who seem to enjoy making others feel uncomfortable and we are sometimes taken aback by their candid and insensitive comments, but Paul was not like that. His rebukes were given unwillingly because he saw no alternatives, and they were always based on his love for the brethren.

(3) Paul's intention in giving a rebuke was to encourage people to be what they ought to be. In rebuking the Corinthians, he wanted them to see how deeply concerned he was for them, in spite of their disobedience and trouble-making. He wanted to encourage them to eradicate evil and wrongdoing and to make good Christian qualities grow and develop.

The passage quoted at the beginning of this paper tells us of three great human joys.

1. There is the joy of reconciliation, the healed divisions and the settled quarrels. We all know that if differences occur between ourselves and those we love, there is great relief and happiness when these differences are resolved and we are together again in mind and spirit with our loved ones. If people maintain bitterness and division, they succeed only in hurting themselves as much as they may hurt others.

2. There is the joy of seeing someone we love and trust whose actions justify our love. Paul gave Titus a good reference, and Titus had gone to Corinth to face a very difficult situation. Paul was overjoyed that Titus had justified his confidence in him, and had proved his words to be true. As far as we are concerned, it is a great joy to us to see our sons and daughters and brethren do well in the faith and in life, and justify our faith and our hopes in them.

3. There is the joy of seeing someone we love welcomed and well treated. Kindness shown to those we love can often move us more deeply than kindness shown to us. And what is true of us is true of God. We can best show our love of God by loving one another, and the kindness that we ourselves do to our brethren, we do to the Lord Jesus and to God through Him, as illustrated in Jesus' parable (Matthew 25:34-40).

The passage under consideration draws our attention to one of the most important distinctions in life, the distinction between godly and worldly sorrow.

(1) Godly sorrow is the sorrow felt when the perpetrator sees the wrong in what was done and in whatever consequences that followed. People feeling Godly sorrow see the evil in what was done, and are determined not to do it again. They seek God's grace for forgiveness and atonement for the wrong-doing. Godly sorrow produces true repentance, and true repentance demonstrates Godly sorrow by its actions. The Corinthians proved their repentance by doing as much as they could to mend the deplorable situation that their conduct had caused, and they had worked hard to atone for the misconduct and mend their former ways.

(2) Worldly sorrow, on the other hand, is not sincere sorrow in many aspects, because it is not sorrow for misconduct or for hurting others, but resentment in being found out. If the perpetrator had the chance to do the same thing again and escape the consequences, then he or she would do it.

GENEROUS GIVING

2 Corinthians 8: 1 to 15

1. *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:*
2. *That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.*
3. *For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,*
4. *Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*
5. *And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.*
6. *So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.*
7. *But as you abound in everything -- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us -- see that you abound in this grace also.*
8. *I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.*
9. *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.*
10. *And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago;*
11. *But now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.*
12. *For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.*
13. *For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;*
14. *But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack -- that there may be equality.*
15. *As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

One of the projects that was close to Paul's heart was the collection of money that he was organising for the congregation at Jerusalem. That congregation was really the first congregation formed, and all the other congregations looked up to it. But it was poor, and it was Paul's desire to help it. So in the passage quoted above, Paul reminded the Corinthians that it was their Christian duty to give money to the congregation at Jerusalem, and to give generously from whatever they had.

He used five arguments to appeal to them to give generously.

(1) He referred to the generosity of the Macedonian Churches. They were poor and had problems, but they gave all that they had, more than could have been expected. It is not always those who are wealthy or at least comfortably well off who are generous. Often it is those who have the least to give who are the ones who are the most ready to give. There is a saying that 'it is the poor who help the poor' because they know what poverty is like.

(2) Paul quoted the example of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus' sacrifice really began in heaven, when He agreed to leave His heavenly glory and come to earth as a human being to be despised, rejected, shockingly ill-treated and finally put to death by crucifixion to redeem the human race. So Paul's challenge to Christians was, and still is, that in view of the Lord Jesus' supreme generosity, how can you possibly hold back?

(3) Paul reminded the Corinthians of their own past record. Many had prospered and done well, and were in a position to give generously, so they should do so and set a good example to their brethren and the world around them.

(4) Paul emphasised the need to convert sympathy and feelings of pity into positive action. Feelings of sympathy and pity are not enough. They must result in firm and positive action, for, as we often say, 'actions speak louder than words'.

(5) Paul reminded the Corinthians that life often evens things up. Sometimes it happens that generosity to others results in generosity being returned to the giver, if not in goods and material things, then in words or actions that express appreciation.

Paul said a fine thing about the Macedonians. He said that they gave themselves, and so they did. Two of these stand out, Aristarchus and Epaphroditus.

Aristarchus was with Paul in his journey to Rome (Acts 27:2), and to do so he must have made a great decision. Paul was under arrest and on his way to trial before the Emperor, and the only way Aristarchus could have accompanied him was by enrolling himself as Paul's slave. So Aristarchus gave of himself in the fullest sense.

Then there was Epaphroditus. When Paul was in prison in his later life, Epaphroditus went to him with a gift from Philippi, and there in prison he became seriously ill and nearly died. Paul said of him, "*he came close to death for the work of Christ*" (Philippians 2:26-30).

Personal giving, the giving of oneself whether in part or in full, is the highest kind of giving, and it is the kind of giving of which the Lord Jesus is the supreme example.

Paul concluded this section from 2 Corinthians 8:15 with a quotation from Exodus 16:18 which tells us how, when the Israelites gathered manna in the wilderness, whether little or much, it was sufficient for their needs.

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

2 Corinthians 8: 16 to 24

16. *But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.*
17. *For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.*
18. *And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches,*
19. *And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind,*
20. *Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us --*
21. *Providing honourable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*
22. *And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.*
23. *If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.*
24. *Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.*

The advice in the passage quoted above is very practical. Paul knew he had enemies and critics who would be ready to find fault with him. He realised only too well that there would be many who would not hesitate to accuse him of taking some of the money he had collected for the saints at Jerusalem and putting it to his own use. So he ensured that there would be others who would accompany him on his journey to Jerusalem. He wrote of two brothers who would accompany Titus, but did not tell us who they were. One of them, who was well-known in every congregation, has been thought to be Luke.

What the great Apostle meant in the context of his message was that he wished to make it abundantly clear to everyone concerned, that in the matter of the money to be sent to Jerusalem, he was above suspicion.

CHEERFUL GIVERS

2 Corinthians 9: 1 to 5

1. *Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;*
2. *For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.*
3. *Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;*
4. *Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.*
5. *Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.*

There is a distinctly human touch in this passage. Paul was dealing with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He had been encouraging the Corinthians to be generous by quoting the example of the Macedonians as he did in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, but at the same time encouraging the Macedonians by quoting the Corinthians. He seemed to be somewhat afraid that the Corinthians might let him down. This is typical of Paul's greatness of heart. He did not criticise adversely one congregation to another, but praised one to another. We should follow that example and speak kindly of other brethren who may or may not worship with us, and not criticise them adversely.

In this connection there are at least four ways in which a gift may be given.

1. It may be given out of a sense of duty, that is, in a sense of something we feel we ought to do rather than in a spirit of goodwill and kindness.
2. A gift may be given with a feeling of self-satisfaction, meaning we may think more of the pleasant feelings we get by giving a gift rather than the feelings of the person who receives our gift. There is some selfishness in this, that is, we may think more of our own satisfaction than the feelings of the person who receives our gift.

3. A gift may be given from a desire of prestige. The gift given is made to glorify the giver, to make him or her to be seen and praised by others, which is contrary to the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:1-4. *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly."*

4. The proper way for a Christian to give is from the compulsion of love. Christians should give from love and a sense of compassion, from a desire to give, that a believer cannot turn from or ignore. This is in fact God's way, Who so loved the world that He gave His Son to save it (John 3:16).

Paul's great desire was that the gift of the Corinthians should be ready and not have to be collected at the last moment. The finest gifts made are those that are made before they are requested. We should always keep in mind that, despite the truth that we are still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God knows our hearts and minds and knows our prayers even before we say them. And so it is that we should be to one another as God has been and always remains to us.

GENEROSITY

2 Corinthians 9: 6 to 15

9. *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*
7. *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*
8. *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*
9. *As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.'*
10. *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,*
11. *While you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.*

12. *For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,*
13. *While, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,*
14. *And by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.*
15. *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*

The passage above gives us an outline of generous giving.

1. Paul insisted that no-one loses by being generous. The New Testament is a practical book, and one of its features is the motive of reward, as we find in Hebrews 11:6: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him"*.

The New Testament message does not say that goodness is all to no purpose, and does not overlook the fact that something quite wonderful enters into the lives of men and women who come to God through Jesus Christ, and strive to live in accordance with God's wishes. But the rewards that the New Testament envisages are not material nor worldly wealth, but the spiritual wealth of the heart and mind. So what can Christians who are generous expect to receive?

(a) They will be rich in love, and generosity can outweigh many of the faults and failings that all of us experience. People will always prefer the sympathetic manner, and they will overlook faults in givers and remember generousities.

(b) They will be rich in friends. In Proverbs 18:24 it is written that *"A man that has friends must show himself friendly"* (KJV). Those who are friendly and sympathetic will always find that others become friendly and sympathetic to them.

(c) They will be rich in help. Sometimes we may need the help of other believers which will be readily given, especially if we have been helpful ourselves to others.

(d) They will be rich towards God. Jesus taught that what we do to help and strengthen others we do for God, and we can have no greater reward than that, as we consider the prophetic words spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:34-40, in particular *"inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"*.

Paul also insisted in this context that it is the happy giver whom God loves, and in Deuteronomy 15:10 which says, when generosity to the poor is mentioned, "*Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so*". Paul quoted in this context from Psalm 112:3 and 9, verses which he had taken to be a description of one who is good and generous. He scatters his seed, that is, he sows it not sparingly but generously; he gives to the poor, and his action is to his eternal credit and joy.

Paul further insisted that God can give us both the substance to give and the spirit in which to give it. In verse 8 he spoke of the all-sufficiency which God gives. The word he used is 'autarkeia', which really means independence, the state of someone who has not amassed possessions but rather has eliminated needs. It describes someone who has learnt to be content with very little of worldly goods. From that we can learn that we should not want so much for ourselves that there is nothing left to give to others.

It is God Who can give us the spirit with which to give. God can put into our hearts the love which is the basis and essence of the generous spirit.

Moreover, in this passage Paul did more. When we examine his thought we see that he clearly implied that giving does wonderful things for three different types of recipient.

2. Giving does something for others.

(a) It relieves their need, and can often help them maintain their faith and trust.

(b) It can restore people's faith in human nature. If it so happens that sometimes when people are in great need, then a gift may show them that love and kindness have not deserted them.

(c) It can make them thank God because it brings our love and also God's love into the lives of others.

3. Giving does something for ourselves.

(a) It confirms that our Christianity means something. For the Corinthians this was especially important. The Jerusalem congregation was almost entirely Jewish, and there was a tendency for them to regard Gentiles with suspicion, and to doubt that Christianity could be for Gentiles at all. The very fact of the gift from mainly Gentile congregations should have convinced the Jerusalem congregation of the reality of Gentile Christianity.

(b) Giving wins both the love and the prayer of others. Fellowship is precious, and generosity is a real step on the way to union with other believers.

4. Giving does something for the Lord God. People see our good deeds and thus may be led to glorify God, causing prayers of thanksgiving to rise up to Him, Who gives us all good things. If it so happened that we could turn some people's hearts to God by generous giving, then that would be something that we could do to bring joy to Him.

Finally, Paul turned the thoughts of the Corinthians to the gift of God in Jesus Christ, a wonderful gift which can never be exhausted and can never be fully told or fully grasped by our finite minds. So he said to the Corinthians, in effect, 'Can you who have been so generously treated by God, be anything else but generous to one another?'

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON CHAPTERS 10 TO 13.

There is a distinct change after chapter 9 of Paul's letter. Up to the end of chapter 9 everything was reported as if all was well. The split had been healed and the quarrel had ended. Chapters 8 and 9 dealt with the collection for the congregation at Jerusalem, and as that matter had been dealt with, we might expect that Paul would have finished his letter. But instead we find four chapters that are the saddest and most painful chapters that Paul wrote, and it makes us wonder how they got there.

Twice in 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote of a severe letter that he had written, a letter so severe that he seemed to regret having written it (2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8). That description does not fit 1 Corinthians at all, so we are left with two alternatives. Either the severe letter has been lost entirely, or it is to be found (or at least part of it) in 2 Corinthians chapters 10 to 13. Many scholars think that chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians are really the severe letter, and when Paul's letters were being collected and pieced together in about 90 AD, chapters 10 to 13 were included as part of Paul's second letter by mistake.

It seems reasonable for us today to believe that chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians are the severe letter, or at least part of it, which it hurt Paul so deeply to write. The severe letter was written in an endeavour to put things right in a situation which the congregation at Corinth broke Paul's heart.

PAUL BEGAN TO ANSWER HIS CRITICS

2 Corinthians 10: 1 to 6

1. *Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.*
2. *But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of 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 carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,*

5. *Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,*
6. *And being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

At the beginning of this passage, Paul used two words which set the whole tone that Paul sought to convey. The words in the Daily Study Bible are rendered as the 'gentleness' and 'sweet reasonableness' of Christ. The Greek word rendered gentleness is 'preutes', a word defined by Aristotle as the mid-point of being too angry and not angry at all. The word describes the quality of those who are able to control themselves so that they are angry only at the right time and not at the wrong time. The word also describes those who are not angry over personal wrongs they may experience, but are capable of anger when they see others unjustly wronged. By using that word, Paul meant that he was not carried away by personal anger but was speaking and writing with the strong gentleness of Jesus Himself.

The word rendered 'sweet reasonableness' in the Daily Study Bible is the Greek word 'epieikeia', which was defined by the Greeks themselves as that which is just, and even better than just. There are times when justice should not insist on the letter of the law, but should allow a higher quality enter into our decisions. The person who has 'epieikeia' is one who knows that the Christian standard is not always based on justice but love. By using this word, Paul meant that he was not going to insist on his rights and the letter of the law, but was going to deal with the situation in Corinth with the love of Christ, the love which transcends even the purest justice.

And so it is that we have come to a section of this letter that is difficult to understand because we have only Paul's responses, and have not been told what the charges were which the Corinthians had made against him. We have to work them out as best we can from the responses which Paul made.

Firstly, it seems that the Corinthians had charged Paul with being stern and direct when he was not face to face with them, but weak when he was actually present with them. They meant that when he was absent he wrote things that he did not have the courage to say when he was present with them. Paul made clear that he would not write anything that he was not prepared to say.

Secondly, it seems that the Corinthians had charged Paul with acting from purely human motives. Paul answered that both his conduct and his power came from God. He was a human being and subject to all the limitations of the flesh, but God was always his guide and his strength. However, Paul made matters difficult for us, his readers, by using the Greek word 'sarx' for flesh in two different senses. He used it firstly in the ordinary sense of the human body, that is, in the physical sense of living and moving about with other people in everyday life. But he also used it as that part of human nature which enables sin to enter into the Christian life, that is, the essential human weakness that can happen, which may lead to life without God. He said that we do not walk according to the flesh, meaning that Christians should not allow themselves to be dominated by human motives, but should be guided by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Apostle then continued to make two important points.

1. He said that he was able to deal with and destroy the clever assertions of human wisdom and human pride. There is a simplicity which is a weightier argument than the most elaborate human cleverness. In the last analysis, it is not cleverness which is most effective but simple sincerity.

2. Paul wrote of bringing every intention into captivity to Christ. Jesus has an amazing way of changing wrong beliefs and attitudes in people into those which will promote Christian living and witnessing. If we come in belief and repentance to Him, He will receive us and make of us new creatures, and will enable us to make better use of ourselves than we could have done without Him.

PAUL CONTINUED TO ANSWER HIS CRITICS

2 Corinthians 10: 7 to 18

7. *Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.*
8. *For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed --*
9. *Lest I seem to terrify you by letters.*
10. *'For his letters', they say, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'*

11. *Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.*
12. *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*
13. *We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us -- a sphere which especially includes you.*
14. *For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;*
15. *Not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labours, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,*
16. *To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.*
17. *But 'he who glories, let him glory in the LORD'.*
18. *For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.*

Paul continued to answer his critics, and again we are faced with the same problem. We have been given only one side of the argument, and can work out only what Paul's critics were saying from Paul's replies to them.

It seems that some of Paul's opponents claimed that he did not belong to Christ in the same way as they did. This seems to be extraordinary to us, but Paul's critics may have been reminding him of once being a determined persecutor of the Church, which they had not been, and perhaps they might have claimed special knowledge and even special holiness which made them look down on Paul and exalt themselves in their own opinion as superior to Paul in the sight of God. If this was the case, then some further comment is necessary. Any so-called religion that causes people to look down on others and consider themselves better than others is not a true religion, and certainly not a Christian fellowship of believers. The attitude of looking down on others is really evidence of pride, an attitude of which the Lord God specifically disapproves (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). There can be no better definition of the Christian Church than that it is a fellowship of forgiven sinners. We all should realise that it is to such a fellowship that we belong, and as such there is no room for pride or arrogance in considering ourselves better than others or looking down on others as inferior to ourselves.

Next it would seem that some of the Corinthians had taunted Paul about his appearance. They said that his physical presence was weak and that he was not a good speaker. We do not know what Paul looked like, but a description of his personal appearance has come down to us from a very early book, quoted by William Barclay in his book on the Corinthian letters (page 288), called 'The Acts of Paul and Thecla' dating back to about 200 AD. This book described Paul as 'a man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and with nose somewhat hooked, full of grace, for sometimes he appeared like a man and sometimes he has the face of an angel'. The whole is not an impressive picture, and it may well be the case that the Corinthians were not slow to draw attention to it. We may well comment that the Corinthians were guilty of discourtesy and disrespect by taunting Paul about his personal appearance.

It seems that the Corinthians accused Paul of making boastful claims to authority in a sphere in which he had no jurisdiction. They appear to have said that Paul might be showing his authority in other congregations but he could not do so in Corinth. Paul's response was that Corinth was well within his sphere because he was the first person to bring them the good news of Jesus Christ and their prospects in the work of the Kingdom of God. No-one had as great a claim to exercise authority in the congregation of Corinth as Paul, who, under God, had been its founder.

Paul then levelled a charge against the Corinthians. He said in effect that he would not seek to compare himself with others who were giving themselves references of good character. He pointed out that the Corinthians were giving themselves good references only because their standard of comparison was with one another. We may well think that we are as good as the next person, but we really ought not to think like that. The point is that our proper standard for comparison is the Lord Jesus Christ, and when we measure ourselves by Him, there is no place for any pride whatsoever in ourselves. But in Him and through Him we are forgiven and have access to the Heavenly Father and acceptance by Him as His children, and there is no honour as great as this.

As we come to the close of this section of Paul's letter, there is an indication of what was in Paul's mind. He wanted to get matters straightened out and resolved in Corinth, firstly because he wanted to leave it in a condition that was peaceful and harmonious, and secondly because he wished fervently to press on to regions beyond

where no-one had yet carried the news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and the future prospect of the Kingdom of God, including the contribution that believers, by God's grace and mercy, will be appointed to make in that future Kingdom.

THE DANGER OF SEDUCTION

2 Corinthians 11: 1 to 6

1. *Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly and indeed you do bear with me.*
2. *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*
3. *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*
4. *For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you put up with it well.*
5. *For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.*
6. *Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.*

Throughout this section, Paul had to adopt measures that were distasteful to him. He had to emphasise his authority, give praise to himself and keep comparing himself with those who were seeking to entice the Corinthian congregation from the Christian way, and he did not enjoy the whole experience at all. He felt he had to apologise every time he was forced to speak and write as he did, because he was not a man who stood on his dignity and turned aside. Paul knew that it was not his dignity and honour that were in question, but the dignity and honour of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He began by bringing forward a picture from Jewish marriage customs. The idea of Israel as the bride of God is common in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 54:55 it is written, "*Your Maker is your husband*" and in Isaiah it is also written, "*As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you*" (Isaiah 62:5). So it seems that it was natural for Paul to use the comparison of marriage and to think of the Church as the bride of Christ.

At a Jewish wedding, there were two people called the friends of the bridegroom, one supporting the bridegroom and the other the bride. They had many duties. Their main task was to act as intermediaries between the bride and the bridegroom. They carried the invitation to the guests, but they had one special responsibility which was

guaranteeing the chastity of the bride. That seems to be what was in Paul's mind here. In the marriage of Jesus Christ and the Church, Paul was the friend of the bridegroom. It was his responsibility to guarantee the chastity of the bride, so that he would do all that he could to keep the Corinthian congregation pure and a fit bride for Jesus Christ.

Paul feared that the Corinthian congregation was being enticed away from Christ. It seems that there were some in Corinth who were preaching their own version of Christianity and claiming that it was superior to Paul's. These people regarded themselves as special people, and Paul called them, as recorded in the Daily Study Bible, super-apostles. Paul wrote that the Corinthians were listening attentively to them instead of listening attentively to him. He followed by drawing the contrast between these false apostles and himself. He wrote that he was untrained in speaking, and the word he used was 'idiotes'. The word really means those who had no professional or technical training. We nowadays would refer to them as laymen or lay women. Paul said that these false but arrogant apostles may have been better orators than he was, and may have had better professional qualifications, but the fact remained that, although he may have been unskilled in oratory, he knew what he was talking about because he knew the real Christ from experience and revelation, as he went on to tell his readers and us.

FALSE APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 11: 7 to 15

7. *Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?*
8. *I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.*
9. *And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.*
10. *As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.*
11. *Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!*
12. *But what I do, I will continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.*
13. *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.*

14. *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*
15. *Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

Paul was once again dealing with a charge that had been made against him. This time the charge is clear to us. It had troubled the minds of the Corinthian congregation members that Paul had refused to accept any support from them at all. When he was in need it was the Philippian congregation who had helped him (Philippians 4:10-18).

We may wonder why Paul could maintain his attitude of independence in regard to the Corinthian congregation, but would accept gifts from the Philippian congregation. He was not being inconsistent, as the reason was a very practical one. As far as we know, Paul did not accept a gift from the congregation at Philippi while he worked and remained there. But when he moved on, he remained independent and under no obligation anyone. He was free to take what the love of the Philippians chose to give him, because he was under no obligation to them for his support and care after he left them. And so it would have been impossible for Paul while he remained in Corinth to receive support from the Corinthian congregation and at the same time maintain the independence which the situation demanded of him. Paul was not being inconsistent, he was only being wise.

But why were the Corinthians so annoyed about Paul's refusal to accept help from them? Firstly, according to the Greek way of thinking at that time, it was beneath a free man's dignity to work as a labourer, that is, to do manual work with his hands. Paul was working as a missionary in Corinth, preaching and teaching, so the Corinthians expected Paul to receive help from them, and did not understand Paul's position and point of view. Secondly, in the Greek world in those days, teachers were supposed to make money from teaching, and many did so, some to a great extent. Every town was entitled to grant complete exemption from all civic burdens and taxes to practising teachers of rhetoric and literature. Paul's chosen independence was something that the Corinthians could not understand.

The false apostles who came among the Corinthians also made charges against Paul for his independence. They were ready and willing to take support and certainly did so, and made the claim that the fact that they took support was proof that they were really apostles. The false apostles also maintained that Paul refused to take anything

because his teaching was not worth anything. However, it seems that they were afraid that people would see through their actions and claims, and wanted to drag Paul down to their level of acquisitiveness so that his independence would not be seen as a contrast to their greed.

Paul did not hesitate to accuse these false apostles as masquerading as apostles of Jesus Christ. He was probably aware of the Jewish legend referred to by William Barclay that Satan had once masqueraded as an angel who sang praises to God, and appeared in this false guise to Eve who saw him and was deceived and induced to disobey God and so ate of the forbidden fruit.

However, we should always be observant and do as the Scriptures tell us, namely, watch and pray (Mark 14:38; Luke 21:36; 1 Peter 4:7).

Consequences For Us

We should consider ourselves fortunate that we have the written word of God which we are called upon to use to discern ungodly behaviour and wrongdoing. The early Christian congregations which did not have the written word were exhorted to accept the gospel message through the preaching by the true apostles, whereas we must study the Bible in order to identify those who preach false doctrine, and who may be regarded as the false apostles of the present day, whether they preach another religion or secular beliefs or no religion at all.

The great Apostle accused the false apostles as claiming to be apostles of Christ, having only a form or pretence of godliness but without any proper knowledge of the truth, which may be a warning to believers down through the age, and may indicate how they are to be guided in avoiding the teachings of any false apostles.

It is an immeasurable advantage to us to have the Bible to inform and guide us, and although it is only once that we have been instructed to *“prove all things”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and to be diligent in *“rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15), it remains our duty as believers to hold fast to the sacred Scriptures, and if necessary defend them against the gainsayers, and continue to draw attention to the Kingdom of God, during which He has promised He will one day rule in righteousness over the whole earth, and bring to the whole human race the prospect of eternal life when there will be no more death.

THE CREDENTIALS OF AN APOSTLE

2 Corinthians 11: 16 to 33

16. *I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.*
17. *What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.*
18. *Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.*
19. *For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!*
20. *For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.*
21. *To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold -I speak foolishly - I am bold also.*
22. *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.*
23. *Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool - I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*
24. *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.*
25. *Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was ship-wrecked, a night and a day I have been in the deep.*
26. *In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*
27. *In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -*
28. *Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*
29. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*
30. *If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.*
31. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever, knows that I am not lying.*
32. *In Damascus, the governor, under Aretas the King, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to apprehend me,*
33. *But I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.*

In this passage, it is evident that Paul, against his will, was forced to produce his credentials as an apostle. He appeared to think that the whole procedure was folly, but for the sake of the Gospel message it had to be done. His opponents were Jewish teachers who claimed to have a message and an authority which was greater than Paul's. He wrote of them with a few forthright statements when he mentioned what the Corinthians were willing to accept and put up with as a result of the behaviour of the Jewish teachers.

Firstly, Paul wrote that the Jewish teachers reduced the Corinthians to abject slavery. The Jewish teachers were endeavouring to persuade the Corinthians to submit to circumcision and all the constraining rules and regulations of the Jewish law, thus abandoning the wonderful liberty of the gospel of grace.

Secondly, the Jewish leaders were attempting to devour (that is, eat down; Strong's #2719) the Corinthian believers. Jewish Rabbis were known to be shamelessly grasping. They maintained that a Rabbi must not take money for teaching but must gain support by the work of his hands. They also taught that it was work of the greatest merit to support a Rabbi, and that persons who did so made sure that God would reward them.

Thirdly, the Jewish leaders behaved arrogantly and, in effect, lorded it over the Corinthians. They demanded respect greater than that given to parents, and actually claimed that, if a person's father and teacher were both captured by bandits, the teacher must be ransomed first, and the father next, if possible.

Fourthly, the Apostle made the surprising statement that the Jewish leaders struck the Corinthians on the face. It is highly unlikely that this statement would be meant literally, as was the case when Paul was struck literally when he appeared before the Sanhedrin as we read in Acts 23:2. The statement probably meant insulting behaviour, because the Corinthians had come to the somewhat surprising stage of seeing in the insolence of the Jewish teachers, some sort of guarantee of their apostolic authority.

The false teachers made three claims which Paul maintained also belonged to him.

1. They claimed to be Hebrews.

This word was especially used by the Jews who spoke their ancient Hebrew language in its Aramaic form which was used in the time of Paul. At that time, there were Jews scattered all over the known world, particularly in Alexandria where they numbered over one million. Many of the Jews of the dispersion had forgotten their original language and spoke Greek, and the Jews of Palestine who had preserved their original language looked down on them. Paul's opponents evidently looked down on Paul saying that he was one of those Greek-speaking Jews. But Paul had not forgotten the language of his ancestors, so that his opponents could not claim any superiority on that account.

2. They claimed to be Israelites.

This word described Jews as God's chosen people. The fundamental sentence of the Jewish faith with which every synagogue service began was, "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). In all probability, Paul's opponents were saying that Paul did not live in Palestine. He lived away from the chosen people in Greek surroundings in Cilicia. But Paul pointed out that he was a pure Israelite of the lineage of the people of God, so that his opponents could not claim any superiority on that point.

3. They claimed to be descendants of Abraham.

What Paul's opponents meant was that they were Abraham's direct descendants and therefore heirs to the great promise that God had made to him (Genesis 12:1-3). They also claimed, at least by implication, that Paul did not have the pure descent that they had. The Apostle emphatically denied this claim as he wrote in Philippians 3:5 and 6; indicating that his opponents had no claim to superiority whatever in this claim that they made.

Paul next set out his credentials as an apostle, and did so by putting forward the catalogue of his sufferings for Christ. His credentials were his scars, which no servant or minister of Christ could match or even come near. When we read the catalogue of all that Paul endured, we realise that we have not learnt very much about him from the book of Acts. When Paul wrote this letter he was in Ephesus, which means that we have reached only as far as chapter nineteen in the book of Acts. If we try to check Paul's catalogue of endurance against the information in Acts, we find that not even one quarter of it is there. We find in Paul's catalogue that with respect to his sufferings he was an even greater apostle than we at first thought, because Acts merely skims the surface of what he did and what he endured.

From Paul's detailed catalogue, we will comment on three main items.

1. Paul wrote that of the Jews he received forty stripes less one five times. This was a Jewish punishment, and the Jewish law laid down the regulations for such scourging (Deuteronomy 25:1-3). The maximum penalty was forty lashes and on no account must that number be exceeded, or the scourger himself would be subject to scourging. Therefore the scourge always stopped at thirty-nine, and the scourging was known as 'the forty less one'. The detailed regulations for scourging are in the Mishnah, that book being the volume in which the Jewish traditional law was codified.

The scourging was so severe that it was liable to kill a man, and some did die as a result of the punishment. If a victim did die during the scourging, the scourge was not considered culpable, but if the scourger exceeded the prescribed number of strokes, even by only one stroke, and the victim died, the scourger was considered culpable and had to escape into exile to avoid being scourged himself. This severe punishment was what Paul suffered five times.

2. Paul wrote that he was beaten with rods three times. This was a Roman punishment carried out by lictors (attendants of the magistrates), who were equipped with rods of birch wood with which the victim was beaten. Paul should not have been subjected to this punishment because under Roman law it was a crime to scourge a Roman citizen, and Paul was a citizen of Rome by birth (Acts 22:23-29). But these beatings were suffered by Paul on three occasions, probably because of the violence of the mobs and the weakness of the magistrates.

3. Time and again Paul wrote of the dangers of his travels. It is certainly true that because of Roman rule and law, the roads and the sea were safer than they had been previously, but they were nevertheless still dangerous. In those times, people generally did not like to travel by sea, as shipwrecks were prone to occur in bad weather, and Paul himself wrote that he had been a victim of shipwreck and was adrift at sea for a night and a day. As for the roads, bandits were ever present. Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher (50-130 AD), wrote, 'A man has heard that the road is infected by robbers. He does not dare to venture on it alone, but waits for company - a legate, or a quaestor, or a proconsul - and joining him he passes safely on the roads'. But there was no official company for Paul. Seneca, a Roman philosopher (5 BC-65 AD) wrote, 'Think, any day a robber might cut your throat'. It was a common occurrence for a traveller to be caught and held for ransom. Paul was certainly a committed and an adventurous man in his work for the Lord Jesus.

In addition to all this, there was Paul's care of all the congregations. This care, which fell heavily on him, was more than the burden of daily administration of the early Christian communities, it was the burden of the sorrows and troubles of the early Christian believers which Paul bore in his heart and mind as he strove to minister to so many early believers struggling to live and work by Christian standards which were based on the love and compassion as taught by the Lord Jesus.

This passage in 2 Corinthians 11 ends rather surprisingly. Paul suddenly mentioned his escape from Damascus as outlined in Acts 9:23-25. It is a fact of history that the wall of Damascus was wide enough for a carriage to be driven along it, and many dwellings overhung the wall, and it must have been that Paul was let down from one of these houses that overhung the wall. But why did Paul mention this event here? The only reason that I can suggest is that this escape from Damascus remained clearly in Paul's memory. He had become accustomed in his evangelising to face his enemies and endure whatever humiliation and punishment they may have imposed on him as he continued with his missionary work. But early in his Christian calling, shortly after his conversion to serve as a chosen vessel by the risen Christ, he fled from his enemies and did not remain to face them and witness for Christ without fear or regard for the consequences as he subsequently and consistently did.

PAUL'S THORN AND GOD'S GRACE

2 Corinthians 12: 1 to 10

1. *It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come 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 whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven.*
3. *And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -*
4. *How he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*
5. *Of such a one I will boast, yet of myself will not boast, except in my infirmities.*
6. *For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I forbear, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.*
7. *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*
8. *Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*
9. *And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". Therefore most gladly I will boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*
10. *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

As Christian believers, we should read this passage with great sympathy and compassion because Paul opened his heart to his readers, telling them and us of his glory and his pain. Against his will he continued to set out his credentials, and he told of an experience at which we can only wonder and which we cannot really comprehend. He seemed to stand outside himself and look at himself. He wrote, *"I know a man in Christ"*. That man was, of course, Paul himself, but he could look back at the man who had had that amazing experience with a kind of detached wonderment. We cannot even guess what happened to Paul, and so do not need to form theories about the number of heavens because of the fact that he wrote of the third

heaven. I can only suggest that Paul saw a spiritual vision of great ecstasy given to him by God, and that vision would remain in his memory and help to sustain him in all that he would suffer and endure in his ministry, and the trials that he would undergo in preaching the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to gainsaying Jews and scoffing pagan unbelievers.

The Paradise that Paul mentioned really meant a garden. The word 'Paradise' comes from a Persian word which means a walled garden. William Barclay told us in his book on Corinthians (page 304) that when a Persian king wished to confer a special honour on someone, he made him 'a companion of the garden', and gave that person the right to walk in the royal garden with him in close companionship. Thus it may be that in the vision God gave to Paul, the Almighty may have given him the experience of coming into close relationship with Him, a vision that would help to sustain him in all that he would have to endure in his missionary work.

But after this experience of heavenly glory came what Paul called "*the thorn in the flesh*". The Apostle did not tell his readers and us precisely what that thorn was, and for centuries much speculation has occurred concerning the identity and nature of this "*thorn*". The word translated by "*thorn*" is the Greek word 'skolops' [Strong's #4647, prickle), but, as William Barclay points out, the word would be more correctly rendered as 'stake'. In earlier more barbaric times, criminals were sometimes impaled on a sharp stake, and William Barclay suggests that Paul's problem was probably some painful affliction of his body, about which he prayed urgently to the Lord three times for it to be taken away.

Many explanations of Paul's "*thorn*" have been offered by Christian thinkers during the Gospel Age, and William Barclay lists them in his book on Corinthians in pages 304 to 306.

1. It may have been spiritual temptations to shirk his duties as an apostle, and the troubles of conscience when temptations may have prevailed over his intentions, and interfered for a time with his missionary work. This view was put forward by John Calvin, the sixteenth century reformer.
2. The "*thorn*" may have meant the opposition and persecution which Paul had to face, and the constant battle with those who tried to undo his work. That was Martin Luther's view.

3. The "*thorn*" has been taken to mean sexual temptations. Monks and hermits deliberately shut themselves up in their monasteries and cells and had the greatest difficulty in taming their sexual desire. They strove to eliminate their sexual desire, but it continued to prey on their minds. They held that Paul must have been like that.

4. It has been suggested that the "*thorn*" was Paul's physical appearance, based on the words "*his bodily presence is weak*" in 2 Corinthians 10:10. But this suggestion does not account for the intermittent nature of the problem, which fact did not keep him entirely from his work.

5. A further suggestion is epilepsy. This an affliction which can be painful and recurrent, but between attacks sufferers can go on with their lives. Epilepsy can produce visions and trances, and Paul experienced these. In the ancient world, the affliction was attributed to demons, and when people came across an epileptic, they spat to ward off the demon. The Greek word for epilepsy means literally 'you did not spit at me'. But such a suggestion has consequences which are not really acceptable because it would mean that Paul's visions were epileptic trances. It is beyond belief that Paul's records of visions and exhortations which have benefited Christians for centuries, and continue to do so today, were due to epileptic attacks.

6. The oldest of all theories is that Paul suffered from severe headaches, perhaps even attacks of migraine. The early Christian fathers Tertullian and Jerome both believed that Paul suffered from severe headaches.

7. William Barclay wrote that the most likely thing from which Paul suffered was a virulent malarial fever which prevailed along the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. This fever caused extremely painful headaches, so painful that it has been described as reaching the extreme point of human endurance. This extreme pain deserves the description of a thorn in the flesh and even of a stake in the flesh, a condition that Paul would have to contend with all the time. William Barclay may well be right, but I think the Scriptures will guide us to an answer that seems to me to be the most likely one.

8. Paul suffered from eye trouble which may have caused him to suffer also from headaches. After the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, he was blinded (Acts 9:9), and it may be that after his sight was restored by Ananias, his eyes did not fully recover. Paul said of the Galatians that they would have plucked out their eyes and would have given them to him (Galatians 4:15). At the

end of his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote, "*See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand*"(Galatians 6:11). Evidently Paul was describing the large letters he was writing, which are often characteristic of people who can hardly see, even with the help of spectacles. On the basis of these Scriptures, it seems to me that eye trouble, combined with severe headaches, constituted the "*thorn in the flesh*" which Paul had to endure.

The Apostle prayed three times that the "*thorn*" might be taken from him, but God's answer was "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9; NIV). So God did not remove Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" but gave him sufficient grace to bear it.

Therefore let us now consider briefly from Paul's life some of the things for which God's grace was sufficient.

(1) It was sufficient for him to endure physical weariness, and also enabled him to continue constantly with his ministry work. Paul's toils may remind us of John Wesley. John Wesley preached some 42,000 sermons, and travelled at least 4,500 miles (6900 kilometres) a year. He rode on horseback 60-70 miles (96 to 112 kilometres) a day and preached an average of three sermons a day. He seemed not to tire of preaching, writing and travelling. And neither did Paul.

(2) It was sufficient for him to endure physical pain, and enabled him to endure the catalogue of sufferings that he outlined in chapter eleven.

(3) It was sufficient for him to endure opposition. All his life, Paul encountered opposition, but he did not give in. No amount of opposition could break him or make him turn back.

(4) It made him able to face slander. Misinterpretation and misjudgement are always hard to face and deal with, but Paul was able to endure adverse criticism and respond fully and clearly to it, without any animosity. Paul did not take offence with what some people may have thought of him, but he was always anxious about what God thought of him.

It is the glory of the Gospel of Christ that we in our weakness may experience God's all-sufficient grace to continue to live the Christian life and respond positively, kindly and generously to whatever trials and difficulties we may from time to time encounter.

PAUL'S DEFENCE DRAWS TO A CLOSE

2 Corinthians 12: 11 to 18

11. *I have become a fool in boasting, you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.*
12. *Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.*
13. *For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!*
14. *Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*
15. *And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your Souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.*
16. *But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.*
17. *Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you?*
18. *I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?*

This passage, in which Paul was coming near to the end of his defence, seems to me to read like the words of a man who has made a great effort and now feels weary. He spoke once more with displeasure of his having to justify himself and his actions, but this course of action had to be taken up and followed through. It was not a major matter that he personally should be discredited, but that his Gospel should be rendered ineffective was something that he could not possibly allow.

Firstly, Paul claimed that he was in every way as good an apostle as his opponents were with their claims to be super-apostles. His claim was based on one thing, which was the effectiveness of his ministry. When John the Baptist sent messengers to the Lord Jesus to ask Him if he was really the promised one or whether they had to look for another, Jesus' answer was, "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard*" (Luke 7:22).

When Paul wanted to guarantee the reality of the Gospel which he preached in Corinth, he gave a list of sins and sinners and then added with devastating effect, *"And this is what some of you used to be"* (1 Corinthians 6:11). Effectiveness is the proof of reality. The reality of a church does not lie in the splendour of its buildings or the elaborate nature of services with impressive clerical garb and vestments, procedures in its services with bowing and genuflecting and swinging of censers containing burning incense, nor in the size and wealth of its congregations, but in the evidence of changed lives. If there are no changed lives, the essential element of reality is missing. The standard by which Paul would have his apostleship judged was its ability to bring the life-changing grace of Jesus Christ to men and women.

Secondly, it must have been a continual source of annoyance for the Corinthians that Paul would not accept anything from them, because time and again he returned to that matter. In verse 14 of 2 Corinthians 12 he wrote, *"For I do not seek yours but you"*. True Christian evangelism does not seek money or material things, but the minds and hearts of people who will turn to Christ with minds and hearts changed from worldly aspirations to belief and trust in Christ and through Him to God our heavenly Father. This is what Paul wanted, lives of men and women changed to faith in Jesus Christ to make them new creatures, as he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Thirdly, it seems possible that the Corinthians had one last charge against Paul. They could not say that he had taken any money from them, nor had he taken any advantage of them. They seem to have implied or hinted, however, that some of the money collected for the poor of Jerusalem had somehow been taken by Titus and Paul's other messenger, and Paul might have received some of it. There is no evidence whatever for this charge, and it is not openly stated. Paul's mention of this matter may have indicated to his brethren that he was aware of the existence of such a malicious charge, and that is why he has defended Titus and the unnamed brother who went with him to deliver the money to the poor brethren in Jerusalem.

PAUL'S FEARS ABOUT HIS INTENDED VISIT

2 Corinthians 12: 19 to 21

19. *Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification.*

- 20 *For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as you do not wish lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults;*
21. *Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and licentiousness which they have practised.*

As Paul neared the end of his defence, it may be concluded that he was very concerned about what people thought of him. This is not the case because, if we have read his words to the Corinthians carefully, he was not really concerned about what people thought about him, but what God thought about him. So what Paul wrote ought not to be misconstrued as an attempt to win the approval of his readers. Paul's main aim was for him to be right with God, no matter what people may have thought or said about him.

He then moved on to writing of the visit he intended to pay to the Corinthians. He said that he feared he would find them as he would not wish them to be, because if that should happen, they would certainly find him to be what they would not wish him to be. These words seem to indicate that he felt he might need to take stern measures, and if so, he would not hesitate to take appropriate action. He then went on to identify serious faults of conduct which he hoped he might not find, but which he feared he might find in Corinth.

The first possible fault was contentions, sometimes translated as strife. The Greek word is 'eris', a word relating to battles, rivalry and competition, also discord about place and prestige, characteristic of people who have forgotten to humble themselves before God and the Lord Jesus.

The second possible fault was jealousy or envy, from the Greek word 'zelos'. This would mean the desire to have what does not belong to us combined with a spirit that grudges to others the possession of anything denied to us.

The third possible fault was outbursts of anger, the Greek word being 'thumoi'. This does not mean justifiable anger such as the Lord Jesus felt with the hard-hearted Jewish leaders as recorded in Mark 3:5 when He healed the man with a withered hand. The word means sudden outbursts of passionate anger which are contrary to proper Christian conduct by people who should be able to control themselves better.

The fourth fault was the factious spirit or as the NKJV translates the word, selfish ambitions. The Greek word is 'eritheia', a word which denotes taking action with no regard for proper service, but for everything a person can get out of doing work for only what he or she can selfishly get out of it or for herself or himself.

The fifth fault consisted of slanderings and whisperings, the Greek words being 'katalalaia' and 'psithurismai', translated in the NKJV as backbitings and whisperings. The first word describes open verbal attacks and verbal insults and abuse given in public. This is much the same as what we mean by slander today, false and defamatory statements which are injurious to a person's or an organisation's reputation. The second word means malicious gossip, slanderous and denigrating words whispered to someone in private and passed on as a spicy or disreputable secret. The first kind of slander can be dealt with because it is a public attack, but the second is insidious and stealthy and which avoids confrontation because its source is unknown.

The sixth fault was conceits from the Greek word 'phusioseis'. The meaning here seems to refer to people who promote their own importance and draw attention to themselves and the work they do instead of giving glory and thanks to God and the Lord Jesus Who have enabled people to speak and act as they do.

Disorder, translated as tumults in the NKJV, was the seventh fault. The Greek word is 'akatastariai', which means uproar, disorder and anarchy. Such things should not occur in a Christian community because it should be a community of fellowship and togetherness in God and the Lord Jesus, where unity and harmony should always prevail.

Then there were sins of which some Corinthians may not have repented. There was uncleanness, the eighth fault. The Greek word is 'akatharsia', and means everything that would make someone unfit to worship God, because the word means full involvement with the ways of the world which are contrary to the love and ways of God and what He requires of us.

The ninth fault was fornication. The Greek word is 'porneia'. We should remember that in Corinthian society, fornication and adultery were not thought to be wrong, and people indulged in them whenever they wished. Christian morality and the sanctity of marriage had to be taught to them and they needed to change their lives and conform with the morality and teachings of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God.

The tenth fault was licentiousness, the Greek word being 'aselgeia', a word which is difficult to translate. It means wanton insolence which knows no restraint and has no sense of common decencies, and will dare and do anything to get what is wanted in shameless disregard of God and of other human beings.

After these misgivings, which Paul hoped he might not find, he moved on to his final farewell messages and benediction.

A WARNING, A WISH, A HOPE AND A BLESSING

2 Corinthians 13: 1 to 14

1. *This will be the third time I am coming to you. By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.*
2. *I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare -*
3. *Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak towards you, but mighty in you.*
4. *For though he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God towards you.*
5. *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified.*
6. *But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.*
7. *Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear to be approved, but that you should do what is honourable, though we may seem disqualified.*
8. *For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*
9. *For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.*
10. *Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.*
11. *Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, 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 communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

In this final chapter, Paul finished with four messages.

1. He finished with a warning. He was going to Corinth again, and what would be said would be witnessed and established, and not left in vagueness to be altered and misrepresented. In other words, Paul was foreshadowing a show-down in which harmful deeds, practices and words would not be allowed to continue, and there would be a time to face trouble and deal with it and leave a record for all to read.

2. He finished with a wish. It was Paul's fervent wish that the Corinthians would do what was right so that he would not need to rebuke them and exert his authority. He wanted to build people up, not knock them down; to encourage them, not destroy them. Such discipline that he might have to exert was always aimed at lifting people up and preventing them from falling.

3. He finished with a hope. In fact the Apostle had three hopes for the Corinthians.

- (a) He hoped that they would go onwards to perfection, that is, that they would be justified, accepted as righteous, by faith. To achieve and maintain this standing with God by faith and through Jesus Christ, they must strive every day and continue to progress and not slip back.
- (b) He hoped that they would listen to the exhortations that he gave to them, that they would listen to his advice and follow Jesus Christ's teachings that he brought to them.
- (c) He hoped that they would live in agreement and in peace, and learn to live and continue in love for one another as God would want them to do.

4. He finished with a blessing. After the severity, the struggle and the debate came the benediction. One of the best ways to be reconciled to people and make peace with them is to pray for them and wish them well in the Christian walk.

And so we leave the troubled story of Paul and his labours with the Corinthian congregation, bearing in mind his benediction wishing that the love, grace and peace of God and Jesus Christ be with them all.