

# THE AFFIRMATION PRINCIPLE

## 2nd Corinthians

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "Second Corinthians," by G. Coleman Luck
- "Be Encouraged," by Warren Wiersbe
- "The Life Application Bible," Tyndale House and Zondervan
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### 2nd Corinthians 1:1-11

#### THE COMFORT OF GOD

Right from the beginning of the church in all parts of the world where the Gospel is preached there were conflicts motivated by Satan and satanic influences that for generations had their way in the darkness of the world. In Corinth, the same as in Jerusalem, Antioch, the churches in Asia and Galatia there were struggles by God's faithful servants against false teachers, heresies, false accusations, deception and misleading brethren. The problems of affirmation of the truth are still with us today, and will be until the end of this age. Satan is determined to stop God's people because he could not stop Christ from doing His Father's will. Now it is our turn to affirm the principles of the ministry we have received. It will not be easy. If it was it would be a false spurious ministry.

Paul and Timothy knew their calling and the roles they were to fill in preaching the Gospel and establishing biblically sound New Testament assemblies. There was no question in their minds as to what they were called to do and who was the Source of their strength and comfort. Confidence in God and the work to which He has called us does not depend in the ease of the circumstances. In times of difficulty the needed grace and peace to pass through them in faith, comes from our heavenly Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. We will not necessarily be released from the tensions and trials that accompany a work for God, but we will find what we need when we remember what He is to us. He blessed us in the past [Eph.1:3]; He is our Living Hope as it relates to the future [1Pet.1:3]; and He comforts us in the present [2Cor.1:3].

Our God is the Originator of all mercies. It is of His "mercies" we are not consumed. He has demonstrated to us manifold mercies. His mercies are tender and they are exceeding great mercies. His mercies are a multitude of blessings to us. When we remember what He is to us, it is possible for God's people to move through dark valleys in faith and confidence that there is the right way to go. In all the experiences God arranges for us to pass through, there are benefits that we not know now or even realize they are benefits that will enable us to fulfill our ministry for others. Our God is the God of all comfort, not merely sympathy. He comes alongside of the who need comfort and the Holy Spirit enables us to minister to those needs.

Past lifestyle does not always go away quickly. Those early laborers knew experimentally what it was to suffer because of the ministry in which they were involved. They were affirmed in the rightness of this suffering because it was the sufferings of Christ and for Christ they were enduring. But further and better was the fact that in the suffering, they had the needed consolation that gave them peace. Challenge against God-given authority is not uncommon even among God's people. However, we know that even though there may be noisy discontented believers who are motivated by the flesh, God has His faithful, dedicated people who continue on in their faithfulness to God. Commitment to Christ does not stop at conversion but is intended to increase as we live consistent lives in this world in spite of the pressure to compromise. The affirmation principle comes into effect when the Spirit of God enables us to abound by Christ even when enduring suffering for Christ in times of trouble.

The two men who labored together, one older and one younger, in the immoral city of Corinth, knew that in spite of the evil in the city, God had many there He was going to save from their sins. To "Corinthianize" was a commonly used term to describe sexual immorality that was rampant there. People who lived there were used to that and the practice wasn't seriously frowned upon. It is impossible for us to change a society or even socially accepted practices by our efforts. Those changes happen when God changes a person from within by the Word of God and the Spirit of God bringing about the new birth.

When we understand the "comfort of God" does not mean our trouble will go away, but means we are given needed strength, hope and encouragement to go through difficulties, then we can remain confident, and to a certain degree, joyful as God affirms to us the value of what we are engaged in. Because of that divine affirmation we have experienced, we are able to participate in, and share in the suffering of others. In the

service of Christ, He has identified Himself with us, and we pass on that affirming principle to others as we go through times of persecution. Christ suffered with the early Christians in their persecution. The Lord Jesus charged Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road with persecuting Him when he was persecuting the believers in Christ. There are wide varieties of suffering people go through when they minister to others in Christ's name. When our trust is in God, suffering can make us more like Christ, draw us closer to Christ, help us to grow in Christ and develop a Christ-like character. When that happens, we are far more qualified to come alongside and encourage others who are going through difficult times.

Trouble accompanies active Christian service that reaches out to lost souls. Satan is not going to give up territory or people without a battle. We must be willing to obey God in our service even though it will mean hardship. Our own abilities and skills are not enough to do what is needed in our ministry for God. It is our attitude of dependence on God that gives us the right mind-set for God to be able to work through us. By prayer we are able to participate in another person's ministry even though they may be far away from us. Satan will challenge those who pray, to give up their spiritual labor as well as those out in the field ministering the Gospel in Christ's name. It is an interesting fact that the identification word, "Christ," is used alone 38 times in 2nd Corinthians. This indicates the urgency of the people to remember it is God's Anointed Person who we represent when we affirm the word of God by principle and precept. The word "ministry" is used on 17 occasions to remind us of our obligation and privilege to pass on God's truth constantly and confidently. We find our encouragement to do this in God Himself. It affirms what we do when we remember who God is to us, what God does for us, and what God does through us.

**2 Corinthians 1:4.** *"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."*

#### **COMFORT THEM.**

It may not take much: the pressure of a hand, the sympathetic look in your eye, a compassionate silence.

It may not take long: the short talk on the phone, a few lines on a card, an appropriate email.

It may not cost much: in fact, it probably would be better if it came from you personally, not a store.

It may not seem like much: some measure worth in tangible terms - money, flowers, expensive gifts.

But comfort comes in many different ways - God started it all off.

When disappointments come: draw near and pass on some experiences of your own.

When trials come: take time to pray with one who is going over the path of testing.

When pain comes: hold a hand with a gentle touch and try to be silent.

When sorrow comes: pray first - then go and sit and stay as long as you are needed. Then leave.

Comfort can be given in many different ways - the same way God gives.

Comfort the lonely with your presence: it takes time for one to know if you really care.

Comfort the bereaved with your prayers: it is more important to let one know you intercede.

Comfort the one in pain with your present: a card or bunch of flowers is a visible proof you care.

Comfort the one in anger with your patience: to be able to vent to a hearer is a way to move on.

Comfort is needed to bring different conclusions - the way God chooses.

An individual can comfort: sometimes one person is better than two or more because of the need.

A couple can comfort: the interaction of husband and wife can give a larger perspective.

A family can comfort: children often can give a sense of normalcy to one who has suffered a great loss.

A church can comfort: the church family can rally around and meet great needs effectively. Comfort can meet many different needs - the way God supplies.

**"O God of all comfort: I have experienced comfort from Thee countless times. I have had comfort from brothers and sisters on many occasions. I want to be in touch with what is going on so that I too, can meet the need for comfort whenever I see an opportunity to act in Christ's name. Amen."**

**2nd Corinthians 1:12-24**

## **FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE**

In the Christian life there often comes the pressure to act unwisely or retaliate inappropriately when we feel we are being unfairly criticized. The flattery of people is probably more dangerous to us in the long run of things, but our pride and ego may be injured when unfounded charges are laid against us. There is no need to fall under such pressures, because we have been supplied by our gracious Father with all we need to overcome such things. We have the comfort of God, who is the God of all comfort. In whatever circumstances Paul found Himself, God was there to meet his need, and He is our God also.

Paul could live in good conscience because by God's grace, his exemplary behavior was known in the world generally and by the Corinthian believers specifically. One's conscience when we live our lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, enables us to be a person who can be trusted. The word "conscience" (with knowledge) means that we are not left without understanding as to what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. The integrity of a person of faith and good conscience is evident to all who are around. To challenge the integrity of a trusted person, is usually the work of one who wants to cover up something they know to be wrong about themselves. There may be reason to be cautious about a person unknown to us. Words a person may say or teach need to be weighed on the scale of one's reputation and the integrity displayed over a lifetime. Some people are gifted speakers and the things they teach may seem to be superior to what we have heard from others we know. However, words without the weight of experience or a life of integrity to back them up, will lead to division, discontent and dismay among God's people.

When the apostle changed his plans in regard to coming to Corinth, the carnal believers there charged him with not being a man of his word. A change of plans is not necessarily a sign of deception or carelessness. It may have been the result of something having to be done that had a priority over what was the original intention. Holiness and sincerity as a pattern of life of one of God's children, shows itself in the words they speak and the deeds they do. If a person is historically unreliable and unstable, then we have reason to doubt their word. But if the manner of life of a person is consistently lived before the Lord and the people, and a change has to come, it is not right for us to question that person's integrity. When critical situations arise, we need to be able to adapt to them with a good conscience and faith in God to direct our actions.

Sometimes critical situations arise when help is needed but not wanted. Worldly wisdom may make an impression and seem so logical, but that is not what is needed. A spiritual person knows when to be quiet and when to speak. When something has to be said and some correction to be made, the way we speak is often as important, and maybe more important, as what we have to say. To speak truth with gracious words and without a critical spirit has a positive impact on those to whom the words are directed. Transparency and reality without a critical attitude, often is what is needed to correct a wrong. To follow or spread rumors, to repeat gossip and come up with a list of "what ifs," is often the way people deal with things or people they don't like. We need to live each day in the light of the Lord's return and we will not be in situations where we have to make up excuses for ourselves.

God's will always supersede the plans we make. When we are willing to abandon our plans in light of what we learn to be God's plans, we will have a clear conscience even though our plans are changed. Every wise believer will want God's will and wants to be doing it when the Lord comes. That incentive will keep us serious about the ministry in which we are involved, and committed to doing God's will. Our desire to do this should keep us from being at the wrong place, and saying and doing the wrong things.

Paul was not a man given to indecision. His "yes" meant yes, and his "no" meant no. But there came extenuating circumstances in which his plans had to be changed. When those times come, we need to evaluate what the real purpose behind a matter is. People may criticize and complain, and say you are not to be trusted if there has to be a change of plans. However, we have not solved a problem if we only deal with the symptoms without finding out the real cause of a problem and the purpose behind a criticism. Waiting for an appropriate time is not procrastination. It is wisdom to determine what the big picture of a matter is. The whole point of Paul's delay in going to Corinth was that they would be ready to listen to his correction and take it because they were ready for it, and that glory would be brought to the Lord Jesus Christ by the results that would be forthcoming. We need to consider the most appropriate way to deal with things and select the best possible time to act.

It is useless for us to waste our time trying to defend ourselves against criticism when people do not even know or seek to know, nor understand the work we do and the actions we take to do it. If people honestly want to know the reasons we do or don't do certain things, they will come and ask us. If they have made their minds up already, and don't want to be confused by the truth, they won't understand our reasons because they don't want to. The affirmation principle will keep us consistent and in fellowship with God - and that is what really counts.

The gracious Holy Spirit has sealed us, secured us as one of those who belong to God. He has anointed us, designated a specific purpose we are to fulfill, that the ministry we have received will be accomplished and established in a way pleasing to God. The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve God in the right way by the gifts and strength He give us to do a work beyond our natural capacity. It is very important that we stand firm in faith and a good conscience in our commitment to the Lord, no mater what pressure people may put on us. We live for, and serve, a living Master and His will overrides any complaints or criticisms others may make. If we remain true to His will, we will be kept from falling into snares, doubts, failure and sin.

It is not uncommon, Father, to be misunderstood by men.  
But by Thy grace and mercy, help me not to criticize them.  
May it be my greatest pleasure to follow Thy revealed will.  
In that way I won't be moved, though others may question me still.

It is not unknown by me, Father, to want to do things my way.  
But please grant to Thy servant, the ability to hear what You say.  
May I never allow self-will to control my words and my actions.  
So that in every place Thou dost call me, I will labor to Thy satisfaction.

It is not very strange, Father, for pressures and temptations to come.  
But when they come to surround me, give me strength to resist each one.  
May I not give place for a moment to anything that dishonors Thee.  
So that in life's journey and daily walk, Thou wilt be glorified in me.

It is not unusual, Father, for challenges to be made against truth.  
But give Thy feeble servant the wisdom, to plainly declare the worth  
Of righteousness, holiness and justice, so that truth will put on display.  
So that the skeptics who mock Thee will see, their arguments in disarray.

It is not unheard of, Father, that Thy children sometimes falter and fail.  
But give to me this day, Father, the strength to do well what Thy work does entail.  
May each action, each conversation, have some benefit that some needs meet.  
So that the result of all we do here, brings some lost one salvation to seek.

**"Bless Thy word, O Father, in all the activities of this day. There is much being done in Thy name. May it all have divine sanction. And may the words Thou hast for me to speak, be given in love, power and grace, as guided by the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 2:1-11**

### **POSTPONING A VISIT**

We people are first saved, especially those who have lived a very ungodly lifestyle in their past, there often comes a great sense of relief from guilt caused by sin. Along with that there is the peace that comes from knowing one is forgiven by God. A sense of well-being may be associated with knowing one is in the family of God, and the fear of death and the future may be replaced with contentment. However, it is not long after when some of the habits of the old life reappear and begin to reassert themselves in our life pattern. The joy of devotion and worship, and interest in Bible reading begins to fade as well. Prayer becomes a ritual that falls into a pattern of repetition of the same things time after time instead of a special time of communion with God. Before long one may find themselves less interested in attending assembly meetings and less interested in fellowship with Christians. This happened in Corinth and Paul had written a letter and then gone there to try to stop this backwards drift and rectify the condition into which they had fallen. In the letter he wrote he clearly stated what was wrong and what needed to be corrected and why. It had been his intention to return, but he postponed the visit to give the Corinthian believers time to act on the teaching and instruction he had given. One has said, "If we are not going forward, we are going backward. We may think we are just standing still but that is only self-deception."

In the situation and circumstances Paul found himself, the same as today, correction brings sorrow and emotional pain. Paul stayed away for awhile so as to not inflict more pain on them for their carelessness and the division varying opinions caused. He had given them the words of God as he defined the problem and gave the solution. When the people of God have declined in their Christian life, neglected the Bible, lost interest in spiritual things and started living a worldly lifestyle, they resist the teaching of scripture and allow their personal bitterness because of coldness of heart, to bring misunderstanding of the corrective measures of discipline. Bitterness will defile us and others, and cause that person to overlook the compassion and love that motivated the discipline. Scriptural discipline carried out in a scriptural way has as its objective blessing

for all who are involved. When a believer recognizes in himself a cold and rebellious heart, that person because of caring discipline, will turn in repentance to the Lord, and renew His confidence in God's word. But the Christian life is more than our response to teaching. It is agreeing with God as to the rightness of the corrective discipline that has a change of behavior as its motivation. If there is only an impression of spiritual commitment in order to be accepted by others, and one does what is expected only because of what people think or say, the joy, peace and real spiritual growth that accompanies a return to God, will be missing. Some people will fake that change in order to regain social acceptance with friends and family. The reality that accompanies real repentance is not a pretense.

Paul knew the believers in Corinth had corrected the things that had to be dealt with and was glad they had acted on what he had taught without him having to be there. He had caused them grief because he had to expose sin for what it was, and define corrective discipline to deal with it. Now they were giving him joy because they had obeyed his teaching and they were no longer trying to cover up the wrong. When one who has caused distress and anguish repents, and the behavior that brought discipline in the first place, has now changed, then there is blessing that comes to the hearts of all of those who are a part of that fellowship. Sadly, some think we should be tolerant of sin and overlook it for fear we might offend or discourage the erring one. The opposite is really the effect when repentance is genuine and a person accepts responsibility for their own actions without trying to find someone to blame for their sin. Love does not cover up wrong.

When we can see a believer, who has enjoyed salvation at first, start to allow the ways of their old life to come back and their Christian activity slows down, we should connect with that person as soon as possible and help them get through that time of departure. Perhaps our concern will help bring to a stop that decline in their life. When fellowship with others becomes routine and the decline continues marked by criticism of others, contention, coldness and even doubts about the rightness of what is being done, or even the truth that is taught, then we should confront that person in the spirit of meekness to find the root cause of the symptoms that are obvious to us. Sincere care will cause sincere confrontation for the benefit of the one involved in wrongdoing.

To spare the assembly at Corinth, Paul postponed his visit, and they did see the positive results of his instruction. There was repentance on the part of the sinning one following the disciplinary action taken. Now because of the discipline there was an appropriate change of behavior, and he could be restored to the fellowship of God's people because there was evidence he had been restored to God. Forgiveness and the lifting of discipline follows repentance, and following forgiveness comes acceptance and comfort. Satan will try to keep that believer in his "domain" for as long as possible to make ineffective both the one who has sinned, and those who have been affected by his actions. He will try to introduce a divisive spirit among God's people that will effectively hinder the public testimony of an assembly.

It is possible to be too lenient and ignore or overlook sin that should be confronted. It is also possible to be too hard and never grant forgiveness. In deciding to confront or comfort, we must avoid personal anger and resentment when discipline is imposed on one who has sinned in a public and immoral way. Satan takes advantage of extremes. When the assembly at Corinth forgave the man who had sinned, Paul accepted that decision and forgave him too. Now was the time to reaffirm their love to him because the discipline was no longer needed.

The restoration of one who has been disciplined by being put away from the fellowship of God's people, follows evidence that there has been repentance on the part of the sinning one. That should be seen and admitted to by the whole assembly that has been affected by his actions. The assembly puts away and the assembly receives back that person when evidence of a change of attitude and action is obvious. An attitude of sincere repentance can be responded to by an attitude of sincere forgiveness on the part of those in the assembly.

Attitude plays a part in every relationship.  
It can enhance and promote sincere fellowship.  
When genuinely seen it leads on to companionship.  
If it is good, it will result in blessing.

Repentance is more than just the words we say.  
It means a sin problem has been faced and put away.  
Furthermore, it implies from God we will no longer stray.  
If it is real, it will result in change.

Sorrow is not always a bad thing to see.  
Real grief for sins committed is what really should be.

Awareness of its cause should bring a change in me.  
If it is godly, it will result in joy.

Correction is necessary when for others we care  
Who have strayed from God's way and no longer share;  
That effect of their wrong choices that give others burdens to bear.  
If it is wise, it will result in contrition.

Restoration is the objective when sin must be faced.  
The path of recovery will be easily traced.  
One who has been brought back can now take his place.  
If it is a fact, it will result in a new beginning.

**"Father, there have been times when the discipline of an erring one has brought restoration to many. There have been those whose repentance seems half-hearted. And in some cases, it has produced a divisive spirit because of a wrong attitude on the part of some. Please grant Thy servant wisdom when any form of discipline must take place. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 2:12-17**

### **UP TO THE TASK**

From time to time we need to be reminded of the fact that there is a spiritual warfare going on, not just around us, but in which we are engaged. It is possible that even God's people are unaware of the insidious way Satan is opposing the ministry of the Gospel. But for those like Paul who are actively engaged in this work, there is no question at all that an implacable enemy is out to destroy the work of God. The attention of the opposition is mainly directed at those whom God has called to carry the message to those who are still unaware of the seriousness of their condition. Self-centered Christians in Corinth were putting down the apostle Paul as one who had no authority or right to correct and direct them as to what was the mind and will of God. The challenges we face in Gospel outreach and activities associated with that work, do not always come from without.

Paul never kept his Gospel activities as a secret but informed others as to where he was, why he was there, and his intention in relation to the work at hand. He went to Troas to preach the Gospel and found an open door. Recounting the work the Lord is doing, is a good way to promote fellowship in the work and to encourage those who have committed themselves to pray for the work of the Lord. However, even when we are where we should be, there are uncertainties that affect us. It is a fact that we usually have a plan and a protocol we follow that helps us keep order in the work. But these are not carved in stone so that they cannot be deviated from if the occasion demands it. In those apostolic days the synagogues were open to the Jewish evangelists to use as speaking places, so they used that privilege as long as they could.

Sharing in Gospel work with others who labor at the same task, both encourages us and adds to the strength of the work. Older and younger people working together makes possible the coordinating of experience and expertise with enthusiasm and physical strength. One may only see the issues before them each day, and the other can look farther and perceive the outcome of a certain course of action if it is followed. Even though the door was open at Troas, Paul went on farther because of the way circumstances affected him. The harvest field is white and ready for harvest everywhere. And yet we can't meet each and every need nor can we reach every city. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential in the work to which we have been called.

To be able to minister to people addressing their greatest need is a real cause for thanksgiving. Paul appreciated being "put in trust with the Gospel," and it is certainly a cause for us to be thankful for as well. What a high privilege it is to give people the light of the Word of God so they can be saved. God has entrusted us with His saving message for mankind. Paul was thankful for his ministry to the Lord's people and the bonds of grace that linked him to them. He really cared for them in spite of their failings. He wanted them to go on strong for God and when failure came, to deal with it in a biblical way, and then go on to fill the expectations of a Christian life. It is not uncommon for us to become discouraged when things don't happen the way we want or the results of a work to meet our expectations. Let us be thankful for any way God is willing to use us in furthering the work of His kingdom. Whether preaching the Gospel, ministering to the needs of other believers or maintaining a holy relationship with them - it is a real cause for thanksgiving.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Victor in this spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. We who are privileged to work for Him are like joyful captives in His triumphal procession through a watching world. For those who represent Christ, the Gospel is good news and a beautiful fragrance of God's grace in saving our souls. For

those who are not saved, the Gospel is repulsive and has the smell of death on those who want their sin. The results of the Gospel are joy and liberty to those who are saved, and fear and bondage to those who are not. Who is capable of representing our Lord Jesus Christ in this world?

The ability to do this work in the view of the watching world comes from our Lord Himself who commissioned us and sent us into the world to publicly proclaim the Gospel. The knowledge of Christ is the power given to us to accomplish the task. The pleasing aroma of Christ gives us the occasion to present the "Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." The effect of the work for Christ is blessing to those who believe on Him, and death to those who refuse to believe on Him. The Holy Spirit enables us, keeps us focused on the task before us, protects us in the work and makes us competent to do what the Lord has commissioned us to accomplish.

In contrast to this are those who are hucksters of divine things. They use religion as a way of making money for themselves rather than furthering the kingdom of God and speaking the truth. In the faithful Christian laborer, there needs to be reliability. We must be able to be trusted. There is a great need in any who are involved in God's work to be sincere in their character, godly in their conduct, transparent in their clarity to speak for God, and to speak in Christ's name they must be faithful in their communication of the truth of the Gospel.

The person who is equal to the task because of divine empowerment is a person of unquenchable optimism who is truly thankful for the privilege of telling others the way of salvation. They do not focus on those things that seem to be obstacles, but believe in unvarying success - always triumphant. The unforgettable impact is the savor or aroma that exudes from the fruit of their labor. Such workers are those who are sincere and are people of unimpeachable integrity. In the beginning of chapter three, there is another characteristic of such a laborer. They are known and read of all men to be undeniable in their reality. They are not fake. One of the greatest impacts of a person's ministry is the person himself.

**2 Corinthians 2:14.** *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place."*

**A WINNER.**

This is a man with a compassionate heart.  
He puts others first, right at the start  
Of his ministry to them, for he wants them to grow  
And teaches forgiveness, so the forgiven all know -  
HE IS A WINNER!

This is a man with a conquering faith.  
He's experienced God leading him from place to place.  
God leads the procession, for He's initiated,  
Real Christianity that cannot be imitated.  
HE IS A WINNER!

Unquenchable optimism, "thanks be to God."  
Circumstances tough, but trusting the Lord.  
Unvarying success, God will not be thwarted  
"Always triumphant" - God finishes what He started.  
HE IS A WINNER!

Unforgettable impact - there is a "fragrance" that's real.  
It is obvious he has been given the Holy Spirit's seal.  
Unimpeachable integrity - this man is genuinely sincere.  
There is no question as to whose image he bears.  
HE IS A WINNER!

Undeniable reality, there is evidence to see,  
This man is being what God intended him to be.  
Now how about me? Is victory in my sight?  
God help me to show daily, Christ is my life.  
AM I A WINNER?

**"I come with heartfelt thanks, Father, that I have been able to follow in a measure the path Thy truth has shown me. I know this cannot be done by will-power or self-will. It must be God at work. May there be a fragrance of some kind, from my life today that will make known the glory of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 3**

### **PERMANENT, NOT PASSING**

Every act of our lives, every conversation we have, everything that motivates us are like the building blocks of our reputation. What we are known for across the spectrum of the society in which we live is what will commend our words and actions for a long time to come. Paul's teaching, labors in the Gospel and manner of life commended him to those to whom he had brought the Gospel. False teachers came along to Corinth with forged letters of commendation which they thought would give authority to what they taught. Such letters did not authenticate the apostle Paul's authority. His labors in the Gospel and the teaching work he had done in Corinth, those who had been saved by God's grace through his ministry, were his commendation. The authenticity of his work that could not be denied, was the Corinthian believers themselves. They were in his caring heart personally, and were known as believers in Christ publicly.

Believers themselves are the message of Christ to the watching world in every age, and in every place, they are found. The point of a letter of commendation is to assure believers in the area to which they come, of their trustworthiness in the place from which they have come. It does not take long to see beyond the written words to the attitude displayed and the actions taken by a person. If the written words correspond to a "letter" written by one's life lived for the Lord Jesus Christ, that will be easy to see.

The Old Testament imagery of the tables of stone on which the law was written, was something that could be seen externally and met the need of those who demanded credentials. A letter gives statistics for those who are skeptical of the reality of a person's testimony, and in the case of one who speaks publicly, of the that person's right to speak on behalf of the gathered company. Still, that is far inferior as a testimony of one's credentials when compared with the known facts of human hearts that have been changed by the grace of God through the teaching and preaching of a servant of God. A letter has value only to the degree those who sign the letter have the authority to commend the person. Inward changes and changed lives authenticate the ministry given by the power of the Holy Spirit. Results consistently testified to by the power of God cannot be denied as real. We do not have a manual to be filled out as proof of a person's salvation. God makes plain the strength and character of a man's work when that man is dependent upon God alone to accomplish the work to which he has been called.

Genuine conversions to God are able to be seen by those around. We do not need press releases to make public what we think are our accomplishments. The needed character and strength of a work comes from God only. Natural talent that a teacher or preacher may have is limited at best. Truth that is explained so that it can be understood and acted upon, gives life and glory to God rather than that which kills and brings glory to self. There is a great contrast between those whose ministry is based on confidence in God, and the self-confident expressions of those who minister the letter of the law. The law slays us. The spirit of grace that gives life is ministered by the Holy Spirit through those whose competence is in God. The law is a standard but it cannot give life. God's grace ministered on the basis of the new testament changes sinners into living letters of Christ.

The laws of the Old Testament condemn us and point out the reason we are not able to come to God and receive eternal life. Laws cannot justify the sinner, nor can it make us righteous. It does not give us the Holy Spirit or an inheritance in Christ. It doesn't give us new life or freedom. The law condemns us by revealing our guilt. In contrast the new covenant means we have received new life, a spiritual new life, brought about by a new birth by the Holy Spirit. The new covenant of grace means we have been declared righteous permanently because we have been given the righteousness of Christ. Our forgiveness has come through the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now our acceptance by God is based on the righteousness imputed to us by the perfection of our sinless Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was an "able minister of the new testament" in that he could make plain to the people the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. The Judaizers of that day and those who teach grace plus works today, mislead people and impose a bondage, where freedom has been granted.

Holiness was the demand of the law - perfect holiness without exceptions. Its glory was that it revealed God's involvement in the lives of His people. Now the Holy Spirit gives us new life in Christ and empowers us to do what we naturally can't do. We cannot please God in the flesh. Moses had to put a veil on his face so people would not see the fading glory of the law. The law was like a spiritual veil. We do not have to hide behind a veil because we have been brought into liberty given by the Spirit of God and that veil is taken away. Glory should be able to be seen, and should be increasing in the lives of those who are in Christ as they reflect Him as lights in the world. Pride and hardness of heart had kept blindness on the hearts of those who insisted on trying to be keepers of the law in order to be accepted by God. Refusal to repent and trust Christ alone, keeps false teachers, and those who followed them, from understanding the teaching regarding the Lord Jesus Christ in the scriptures.

Salvation and the new nature imparted to those who put their trust in Christ alone, removes the veil from those who could not see the point of the law and the blessings that lie beyond the limits of its ministry. Now we have been given life in Christ so that living human beings made new in Him, reflect Christ. Now we are free from sin and the condemnation it brings, and can enjoy our liberty by the Spirit. Now we are able to reflect the moral glories of Christ and the truth of God. Now we are used by God to be like Christ in the world. By "beholding ... the glory of the Lord," progressive sanctification continues in a believer as an ongoing evidence of the work of the Spirit of God in us.

God intends us to "be conformed to the image of His Son." We are privileged to look on Him by faith and as we mature in Him, our prospect is to be like Him when we shall see Him as He is. The transparent ministry Paul was engaged in that is referred to in the first two chapters of this book, is now a glorious ministry that progresses and exalts the Lord as His people are engaged in this great service for Him. We need to be sure we allow nothing to detract or take away from this ministry because of what other people may say or think.

**2 Corinthians 3:16-17.** *"Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"*

### **LIBERTY.**

LAW has it's demands: undeniable – unattainable – unreachable – uncompromising;

It kills me because I am me: imperfect – impulsive – impatient – incapable of its perfection.

It condemns me – awakens me – challenges me – enlightens me – teaches me – instructs me.

The light of the law shows up my darkness: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

GRACE has it's demands: admit my lack of attainment – give up my independence – stop trying to earn what is impossible to earn – accept with humility what God gives – in faith reach out an empty hand to grasp what cost God so much – acknowledge with thanks, the gifts that grace gives, asking nothing in return. Grace is carefully balanced by God. "The law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Liberty comes to me, at high cost to others.  
I am able to live in freedom paid by a band of brothers,  
Those who died - and living fathers and mothers -  
Have paid the price of freedom for me.

The darkness that covered the face of the earth,  
Was lifted when Christ paid sin's price with His death.  
Life has been given, starting with the new birth -  
Jesus paid the price of freedom for me.

Now I'm a Christian and the Spirit's within.  
I grieve Him and quench Him, by giving place to sin.  
So He too, pays the price for the blessings He brings.  
The Holy Spirit pays the price of freedom for me.

The load is gone - from its weight I am free.  
The darkness is gone - now I can see.  
Father, Son and Spirit have brought full liberty.  
Thank God, by His grace, I am free!

**"O Father in heaven, the Great Source of every blessing: I am living in freedom today and full liberty of those who are bonds servants of Jesus Christ. To many it may seem like a paradox, but to me it removes all uncertainty about the future and give assurance about the present - everything is under control - Thy control. Such liberty keeps life in order and full of meaningful work and service. I give Thee praise and glory for this great liberty, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

### **2nd Corinthians 4:1-6**

#### **A SPECIAL MINISTRY**

When God has a special work for one to do for Him, He prepares that person like a potter would form a clay jar, to be suitable to do the work to which he has been called. That particular ministry is like a treasure to be nurtured and cherished, because it is a glorious work. The ministry Paul was writing about, brought salvation to those who heard and heeded his message. It gave spiritual life to those who were dead in trespasses and sins. It resulted in transformed lives and produced righteous living as a normal way of living. This ministry

came to Paul like a gift from God. The way we look at any service we have been given by God; determines how we fulfill it. If I have a careless or casual attitude toward this work, there will be very little come out of it. If by God's power and grace I apply myself to the work with vigor and enthusiasm and an optimistic spirit, then usually there will be something for God and His glory that will result.

It is a privilege to minister to others in Christ's name; it is not a punishment. It is a blessing, not a burden to be allowed to serve God with reverence and godly fear. In a practical sense, we serve God when we serve other people in His name. The transforming ministry of the Gospel and the fulfilling of the commission the Lord Jesus gave to His own disciples, is the basis, the foundation of a lasting work for God. A positive attitude toward this work keeps us from quitting when difficulties arise. Paul did not "faint" in the work. God does not give us a work we are unable to do. He gives the ability and power to accomplish His plans through pain and trials because this is a glorious ministry. There is no need to faint as we wait for the seed to generate and the harvest of new life to be brought in. We do not faint in the work because we know when we sow, we reap; we reap what we sow and we reap more than we sow. In our witnessing we need not faint, nor in the warfare when we feel like we are failing, because the inward man is renewed.

There may be those in our day, the same as in Paul's day, who will deliberately mislead people by twisting the word of God to please the people and take away the reproach of righteousness and being biblical. Paul plainly condemned that. When the scriptures are taken out of context and applied to suit an opinion already formed, the true teacher and preacher should explain the word of God as it is revealed in the Bible, and let it correct and/or condemn those who have ignored it. Deceivers are often like undercover people, but those who tell the truth of God from a biblical perspective are usually open and transparent people. They have nothing to hide. Paul was open about himself and honest and faithful to the people. That is the way we should be.

Anyone and everyone can receive the message of the Gospel and be saved. But many will not receive the Gospel when it is given as a proclamation of God's truth. Many today do not want to "be preached at." They would rather be enticed, tantalized, comfortable and not confronted with the problem and consequences of sin. Satan, "the god of this world," uses fallen men to promote lies rather than the truth. Deceit and subtlety often accompany those who are spiritually blind, who Satan uses for his purposes. It is not uncommon for money and the display of wealth to attract people to a religious leader. Listeners feel, "If he got rich in his brand of Christianity, that's the kind I want." Power and pleasure also are used by Satan to blind the minds of them that believe not.

We can know when a person's teaching or preaching is right, because that person will be declaring Jesus Christ is Lord, and will be hiding themselves rather than promoting themselves. Those who promote themselves often come from a church, but when they find their opinions are not accepted and acted upon, they end up in a cult. In cults the emphasis is on a man and what he says, does or says he can do. Paul did not promote himself. He knew he had received a special ministry to fulfill and was not side-tracked from that commitment. He practiced humility. His focus was on the Lord Jesus Christ, not on himself or what he did. A false teacher often will promote himself. Paul had to make a defense of his ministry to the Corinthians because of their carnality and divisive spirit. This was not common practice to Paul. He did not trust in himself nor did he have to make a point of commending himself. He did not want a fan club behind him to cheer him on.

A true servant ministers to others. His desire will be to let the light of God that first shined in his heart, shine out of his heart to give light to those around, so they can come to know God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth of God that is in the "earthen vessel," the clay jar, cannot be hidden when God uses His servants to minister in this special work to which they have been called.

**2nd Corinthians 4:6** *"For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

#### **LIGHT SHINING IN.**

From heaven to earth the command was given:  
"Let there be light!" came the voice of our God.  
A brilliance called "Shekinah", and the darkness was riven  
Bringing light here on earth at the command of the Lord.

Again, God spoke and the sun began shining.  
The moon too, reflected its glory at night.  
The background of stars in their place all aligning,  
Respond to the Creator who speaks in His might.

On the top of a mountain, God commands once again,  
And the face of His servant reflects holiness.  
At the bottom of the mountain against the backdrop of sin,  
That bright face is covered from man's guiltiness.

On another occasion three witnesses watch,  
As the face of the Savior outshines the sun.  
Two messengers from heaven, there with Jesus talk,  
About the work of redemption still yet to be done.

About ten in the evening of February the twelfth,  
The darkness of soul was pierced by God's light.  
As the Spirit of God worked, a messenger was helped,  
To reveal to me the Savior, and my mind received sight.

The light shining in, revealed clearly to me,  
That God looked at the blood and was all satisfied.  
I too looked at Christ, and in faith I could see,  
That the blood of the Savior was all God required.

That light is still shining, and I enjoy to the full,  
The knowledge of God, as I look at my Lord.  
I am learning from Him daily, and seek out His will,  
The light still shines from the page of His Word.

**“How enjoyable it is, Father, to live in the light. So much is seen that would be hidden in the shadows or in darkness. The light of day, the light of morality, the light of truth, the light of the Word of God are all reflections of the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. I thank Thee for the joy and warmth light of every kind gives. Most of all, I thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

## **2nd Corinthians 4:7-18**

### **LOOK AHEAD**

Like jars made of clay that we human beings are, is not what is important in our life and ministry for the Lord. The value of the vessel lies in the treasure it contains. An empty vessel has no real value unless it holds something that is needed. Paul was such a vessel because he held the truth of God to be transmitted to us through him. In his openness and faithfulness, we have been blessed. The trials the apostle Paul went through did not negate his ministry in any way, but rather enhanced it because of the triumph that followed. He could be trusted with a treasure. God knew what vessel to choose to fulfill His divine purposes. The priceless contents of the vessel made all the sufferings he had to endure, worth every pain.

God's power to fulfill the work to which He has called us, is in every believer. His truth, the Gospel, the unfolding of divine purposes through us, humbles us as vessels that contain such holy things to pass on to others. The fact that the Almighty God would allow us to be identified with His great treasures, keeps us from pride, and motivates us to keep in meaningful contact with Him, the Source of the power He has placed within us. Really, people around us should be able to see God through us, and the evidence of what is important to Him should be shown to them as we live and move among them. God is able to be glorified through weak vessels that are obviously nothing in themselves, but contain what every person needs - the truth of God. Because of what we have, given to us by Him, He guards the vessel in times of difficulty and suffering, as the vessel guards the treasure within it. When we "buy the truth," we do not sell it for any reason nor ignore its claims on us and others.

It is not uncommon for a clay jar holding divine things to be imparted to others, to go through suffering in different ways. In fact, it would be unnatural if suffering did not come as a result of godly living. When truth is being brought to others, there will be rejection, undeserved anger, subtle opposition, open persecution, humiliation and mockery directed toward one who holds the truth of God in his heart. It may come from those under the power of sin and those under Satan's dominion. False brethren, and even those who profess faith in Christ, may oppose because of the challenge of truth to their lifestyle and materialistic aims. When suffering for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be assured God will not abandon us even though we may feel we cannot take one more thing - we are at the end of the rope. What costs us nothing, usually accomplishes nothing. There is a price to pay for the privilege of holding such a treasure as truth is. Sadly, many today who one time held the truth and seemed to appreciate it, and the privilege of sharing it, have sold it. Now in the interest of making people feel comfortable, and having them think we are tolerant of sin because we do the same things, the treasure is gone from many vessels. False teachers have no

treasure in them and do not suffer. They are popular and well-accepted by those who want to avoid the sufferings of Christ rather than be a partaker of them. Other may suffer, but not the popular teachers who want to make their brand of Christianity "seeker friendly."

Christ won a great victory when He suffered, and blessing has come to millions of people because of that suffering. His victory was over sin and its consequences, death and its claims, and hell and its pains. Because of His victory we have been given eternal life. It cost Him, and blessed us. That principle now flows over to us. Now suffering, humiliation and trials are opportunities for the Lord Jesus Christ to be demonstrated to a watching world through us and in us. Paul's sufferings are mentioned three times in 2nd Corinthians. Was his ministry a success or failure because of his sufferings? The Corinthians apparently considered it a failure - at least at that time. If we measure success by the numbers of people who attend a meeting, or the degree of popularity we have among unbelievers or carnal believers, our measurement is by worldly standards. "Few there be that find it," is not a welcome phrase to those who want to do their "ministry" in the ways of the world. Anything God accomplishes through His faithful servants is a success, whether it be great or small. What God does is not destroyed. What we do in the energy of the flesh is spurious and will not last.

The sufferings, difficulties and problems we encounter in our ministry, will not last forever. Our assurance is that the outcome of a ministry directed by God, is victorious. We need to keep focused by faith on the goal, not on the obstacles, discomforts and discouragements we face from day to day. We will be raised with Christ and God will be glorified by the effects of His abundant grace. There is not reason for us to lose heart and walk away from the work we have been called to because of problems. The Spirit of God gives inner strength so we will not quit. The trials we face are working for God's glory and He renews our strength daily. Criticism, weariness and suffering will happen in any work God gives us, but that is to be expected. Our service for Him is involved in rescuing lost souls and bringing them to maturity in Christ.

The power of Christ works through the weakness of men, so there is no way the flesh can glory in supposed success. Our commitment to Christ and the ministry He has given to us is what is important. We can trust Him to meet our needs day by day of whatever nature they are. There is a purpose behind it when God allows His servants to go through suffering as they carry out His revealed will. We are identified with Christ in this way. He suffered reproach and rejection, and He was despised by men. He was acquainted with grief in the course of the life He led while here on earth. Another purpose is that self-centeredness and pride are generally lost in times of suffering for righteousness' sake. Our perspective is sharpened as to what this life is all about, and the future becomes more real to us under the tension of suffering. Our faith is demonstrated so those with whom we come in contact know we have a positive motivation they cannot see or understand without faith themselves. Instead of the trials of the ministry being a negative influence, the power of God to sustain and conquer during times of suffering is put on display in a positive way. God's power is seen more clearly in the lives of suffering saints, that when everything is favorable.

This life and all that it entails is temporary and soon forgotten. Eternal things and the future become more real to us when we are going through times of suffering. That is when we truly realize the things we see, are only temporary. Even though they take our attention now, they do not last. The unseen things that grace promises, truth defines, faith claims and holiness practices, remain forever because that is their nature.

The sky is full of clouds, but they soon will pass.  
Famines and feasts come, but they too will not last.  
When seed goes in the ground, the die is cast.  
These things are real but temporary.

The house we grew up in may burn to the ground.  
Things once important to us are no longer found.  
Created things are beautiful as we look around.  
These things are real but temporary.

Unseen things we can't touch like sight or intelligence;  
The thoughts we have; actions that bother our conscience;  
Intentions of our minds and evil concupiscence.  
These things are real and eternal.

Grace that is greater than our sin, meets our need.  
Faith that we live by when God's truth we do heed.  
Gratitude and thanksgiving that replaces our greed.  
These things are real and eternal.

Humility and kindness, compassion and tact.  
Love and thoughtfulness; insight before the fact.  
Decision making and appreciation that accompanies the act.  
These things are eternal.

God's kind of life that He gives as a gift to us.  
Acceptance by Him when on the Savior we trust.  
Assurance of forgiveness, peace granted thus.  
These things are real and eternal.

**"Eternal God, my Father: I am looking ahead this morning beyond the quickly passing events opening before us today, into the future that lies beyond my last day in mortal flesh. May I be able to nurture the unseen things of my life today that will bring glory to Thee. May the trials and pressures we go through in this work be such that there will be honor for Thee rather than disappointment in myself. May I welcome any suffering that Thou dost allow that produces and interest in eternal things on the part of others. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 5:1-10**

### **WAITING**

Our existence as persons began at our conception when we began an endless journey through growth, birth, life, death and into a future existence we can only faintly glimpse through the words of scripture. We are looking through the limited vision of our experience into the future, and it is like looking through a smoked glass. It is folly for us to form dogmatic opinions based on our own vain imaginations. However, we may get a little true understanding of the form of things and their purpose, but still are bound by the limits of what we know, unless we have a real, vital, living faith. The Spirit of God uses things we are familiar with to describe things with which we are not familiar.

The "earthly house" is a reference to the composition of our physical bodies. As "this tabernacle" the description has to do with the character of our body as a temporary dwelling place of the soul and spirit, and it is passing. It is our temporary waiting place in view of what God has ahead of us. The second house referred to is "a building of God." He makes it to suit the future uses He has in mind for us. The composition of that body is spiritual, but that does not mean it is only some ethereal spirit in a vapor without form. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." This second house is eternal in its character and is the permanent immortal body in which we shall be able to serve God without sin.

It is true we will die physically unless our Lord comes for us before that time. We know this may happen at any time. We will have a resurrected body awaiting us to indwell it. The resurrected bodies of God's people will be much different than the dying bodies we have now, and yet we will still be the same persons in those changed bodies. Our present bodies have been programmed by God to provide a dwelling place for our souls and spirits through which we connect with the world around us. The resurrected body will suit us to the new surroundings of our eternal future. Presently "we groan" because of our limitations and inability to fulfill what we would like to accomplish in the ministry of reconciliation we have been given. The inward longing of our heart, the appeal that engages our thoughts while we wait for the future, is that we want that future body. The one we have now, suits us to the limitations of our surroundings. The resurrected body will suit us for everlasting living. We will not be bodiless spirits when we die. We will be recognizable persons who will "be known even as we are known." There will be permanent changes to the resurrected body.

It is a hope to every human being, whether they like to admit it or not, that there is life beyond death. That hope is wired into our personhood and is universal in spite of culture or religion. The inner longing for God is expressed in the search for meaning in life. People long for a positive reason for their existence to be made known to them. So, people study philosophy, psychology, anthropology, astronomy, archeology and many other areas of study to find out about themselves. We have to go beyond even theology to find that there is an Almighty God who is beyond human description in His being, who desires to be a Gracious Father to us and wants us to enjoy Him, and He us, forever. No matter what people say, or the fact that many will deny the existence of a real personal God, that longing for God is in us by nature, and we cannot avoid this fact no matter what we might say.

Religions and cults have thrived on this fact and make money by the millions on this inner urge of people who follow their teaching. False teaching has deceived people and kept them bound by their longing for God, by telling the people they have the answers and will pass it on for a percentage of their earnings or for some sum of money. For those of us who have come to God by faith in Jesus Christ, we have opportunities in our daily lives to share our positive hope in Christ. We have the scriptures of truth that have been proven

reliable when acted upon, on which to base our convictions. This is not vain suppositions or personal opinions. This is the infallible word of God in written form that has stood the test of time, and the test of millions of people who have responded to, and obeyed its teaching.

The Holy Spirit is God's pledge to us regarding the future beyond this waiting time. God has promised that we are undeniably His and has identified us by giving the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. He is the "earnest" of God's promises to us. We have experienced many of them already and know that all of God's promises will be kept in their entirety. The Holy Spirit is the "earnest," the pledge of God as it relates to our future. We do not know all of the future, "but we know who holds the future." As to the future, the inheritance that awaits us is way beyond our comprehension. But "by the earnest of the Spirit" we know that all God has for us is ours in Christ. Beyond this waiting time, the assurance we have that we are undeniably God's people who have been identified by the Holy Spirit within, is as positive as if we were already living in the future. That is a wonderful feature of everlasting life. We have it now, and can already live in the good of it even as we wait to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord."

Our aim then, is to be useful in this ministry of reconciliation the Lord has given us now where we walk by faith. We do not know the outcome of efforts put forth to bring men and women to be reconciled to God. God reserves the real knowledge of the ministry to be revealed to us in the future at the judgment seat of Christ. Our knowledge of divine purposes is used by God through us during this waiting time to reach out to others so they may be reconciled to God. Labor for the Lord is not vain effort even if we do not see the results. Our present goal is to please Him now. In the future we will probably be surprised at what was of value and what was "a vain, empty show."

Every act of labor, every word of teaching, every anxious prayer of intercession, every entreaty we make to people to repent and believe the Gospel is known by God. His evaluation of every thing we do in this waiting time will be just, and if done according to His will, will be rewarded. We can rest in confidence that He has left us here for His divine purposes, and that is all we really need to be concerned about. We are to do what we do, "as to the Lord." That approval at the judgment seat of Christ is what motivates us to be reconcilers. The plain is clear. There is a "must" involved. This is going to happen. The people at the judgment seat of Christ are believers who have been left here to reconcile those we come in contact with to God. We reach out to them in Christ's name and seek to draw them to Him.

The presence referred to is ours, when we appear before our Lord Jesus Christ at the "bema." The reason or purpose behind this appearance is that everyone of us who own the name of Jesus Christ as our Lord, may receive from Him for the things done during this waiting time. There will be recompense for everyone as everything done, good or bad, is recalled and reviewed. That discrimination of activities and events may be a great surprise to us, when we are finally able to see everything we have done, through the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What about today, tomorrow or the day after that?  
Is there some unknown purpose, some distant mountain track;  
That I am to climb that I might be in the place where God intends?  
Is there some waiting person who through me God a message sends  
That might make a difference between eternal life and death?  
Or is there a person who is waiting with bated breath  
For an answer to the question, "Why am I really here?"  
Is there such a person God intends for me to now draw near?

These questions I can't answer because I know only me.  
Often there are reasons for choices that at the moment I can't see.  
So, it is really my responsibility to be ready and quietly waiting  
For His call to me to go as a reconciler without any hesitating.  
Perhaps some isolated place, or in the middle of a great city,  
There is someone with a broken heart waiting for someone to take pity  
And give a listening ear or speak some counsel from God's word,  
So, they would come to faith in Christ, based simply on what they've heard.

Someday, maybe in the near future, I will be called upon to stand  
Before my Lord at His judgment seat where I will see His outstretched hand  
And know by the mark of the nail there, He is the One who for me died,  
And I will love what He has to say, neither good or bad will hide  
From His holy scrutiny and I will see the holy flame  
Consume wood, hay and stubble, leaving only what in His name  
Was of value, and as the holy smoke disperses, all that's left there to see

Will be what is of worth to Him - and I hope He'll smile at me.

**“Father, I am waiting today for the Lord to come. At the same time, I want this close fellowship to continue during this waiting time. So please give Thy servant appropriate thoughts and words to pass on to the people in Thy name, that they may come to true repentance and genuine faith in Christ. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”**

## **2nd Corinthians 5:11-21**

### **THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**

Reverential respect for the Lord does not create a paralyzing fear in believers. It does enable us to understand, at least to a degree, the value of the One to whom we belong. We are made aware of His righteousness and perfections when He judges our motivation for service and our actions in this service. When one knows the fear of the Lord, that person is motivated to please Him. This keeps us from fearing earthly powers like governments, people's opinions or even the power of nature. Our Lord has "all power in heaven and in earth" under His control. The fear of the Lord also gives us courage when difficulties arise and opposition pressures us to conform to the ways of the world. This "fear of the Lord" is not something that is against us, but is for us. We are on God's side in this ministry of reconciliation in which we are involved. God is for us, not against us. In fact, "If God be for us, who can be against us."

There is liberty from anxiety because of the fear of the Lord. We are free and able to fulfill our ministry because the things that would normally worry us are under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. His dealings with mankind are just and righteous, so the ministry of reconciliation is a positive one. The Lord takes care of His own people and in that way the fear of the Lord is a comfort to us and strengthens us to go forward in the work He has given us in spite of whatever foe may oppose the work in which we are engaged.

Some people are concerned only with what is external. They want to look good, be popular, and be successful. Popularity, money and outward appearances are very important to them. This is how they measure their success. These are the false preachers and teachers who want to get ahead in the eyes of the world. It doesn't usually take very long to find out what motivates them. When the focus of one's attention is on himself more than on Christ, we need to avoid them and reject what they teach. Maybe the content of the sermon they preach seems to be biblical and reasonable, but the objective of the teaching is on the wrong person.

Paul, Timothy and those who shared in their ministry, gave the Corinthian believers good reason to be assured of the truth of their teaching. It was from their hearts and was given out of concern for their eternal well-being. They never asked for money and did not covet popularity. It was obvious to those believers that what they did was honoring to God. Our love and respect for God cannot be hidden, even though it comes from the heart. The external and physical appearance does not necessarily overshadow the hidden motives of the heart. Reverence for God and love for Christ begins within us and soon is able to be seen externally by facial expressions, tone of voice and other forms of communication that reveals our respect for God, others and our own self-respect.

The love those early servants of the Lord had for the Lord, and His love that was in them towards other people, motivated them in their labors. They were "constrained," "compelled," "held on" to the course of their ministry. They couldn't avoid the work they were called to because they were held to it by the bands of divine love. This is the highest possible motivation we can have. When we consider all we have in Christ, what He has done for us, and what we owe Him, we will be glad to accept the pressures of the ministry of reconciliation. The Lord Jesus was the example to these men, and He is to us today. The motivating force that keeps us engaged in the ministry we have received is that He gave His life for me. Now what can I give to Him. There was no unselfishness in the Lord Jesus Christ when He died for me. He did not hold on to His glory when He willingly died for all.

Now those who serve Him in the ministry God gives, do so to please Him out of love for Him. We want to bless others in His name because His love for them has been put into us. The life we live now is "through Him," "for Him," and we will be "with Him." He died for us that we might share in the new creation. The fear of the Lord is a great motivating factor in the ministry of reconciliation. Love for Christ is another great motivating factor that keeps us committed to the work to which we are called. There is yet another factor: we have been called to, and given this work by our Lord Jesus Christ. He has commissioned us to do this work.

When a person is born again, they have been given new life. This is not a make-over or a restoration project of the old life. This commission has been passed on to those who have new life in Christ. This is more than

dropping off old sinful habits. This is not self-motivation to try to reform ourselves. This is a new creation in which we now live in Christ, for Christ and with Christ. The gratitude that comes when we are forgiven of our sins because Jesus died for them, starts us new from within our soul because a spiritual rebirth has taken place. This new life brings a new aim in life. We want to please our Savior. There are new associations and a new attitude toward God, others and myself because of this new life. We apply ourselves to new activities, form new attachments, have new energy for living and a new calling as ambassadors for Christ. We work under a new covenant agreement and we have a new perspective for living. We associate with a new body of believers in a new fellowship.

This is not a mere turning over a new leaf like some do on New Year's Day. This is not some passing fad or some religious novelty that has us chasing after some smooth speaking man who may fail under the pressures of the world, the flesh and the devil when they join forces against them. This is a whole new way of life that looks at people and sees them as God sees them. We look at the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and we love to yield to His authority, learn from His wisdom and submit to His leadership. This new view, this new perspective, changes us to reflect by our lives what it means to be a true child of God with the interests of the kingdom of God as the basis of our commitment.

We have been reconciled, brought back to God, because we have been cleansed of our sins by the blood of Christ and are made righteous in Him. We belong to Him now, no longer strangers to His grace or aliens to His kingship. We have been reconciled to Him ourselves, and because of that, have now been given the privilege of reaching out to others with the ministry of reconciliation. What we have experienced has qualified us to tell others about this. This is no light thing, no trivial responsibility. We now speak to other in Christ's name, the highest possible authority, and bring the message of reconciliation to our generation.

The Lord Jesus Christ has given us His righteousness and has taken our sin. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin." Our sin was on Him when He died. In turn we have received from Him His righteousness and perfection that makes us accepted by God. When we accept Christ as our personal Savior from our sin, His righteousness is put into us, imputed to us, and becomes ours. What was worthless and evil, has been exchanged for what is of surpassing value and absolute perfection. What grace is this!! The substitution of Christ for us has made it possible for us to represent the kingdom of God to others. We have been reconciled to God by the death of His only begotten Son. Now we are sent out to a rebellious people to tell them to be reconciled to God. He has done nothing to apologize to us for, but in His grace has come near to every person who will call on Him out of a pure heart. It is up to those who are lost sinners to take a step to Jesus and be reconciled to God.

**2 Corinthians 5:18.** *"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation:"*

### **RECONCILED.**

Walls erected high - barriers seem insurmountable - chasms look uncrossable - faint glimpses.  
Backs turned - silent looks from a distance - straight-lipped faces - cautious steps going away.  
What can be done? Is there a solution or does this have to go on and on without a change?  
Bibles gathering dust in original wrappings - Sunday morning newspapers rattling - graceless food.  
Knees that never bend - hymns that are never sung - praises that are never given - thankless.  
Is there no way to God? Is there no balm in Gilead for the soul? Will this distance forever remain?  
Intervention from above - a night of angels' voices - a guiding star - a Child born and a Son given.  
God looked at His calendar of events - the time had come - Light has come into the world.  
The first steps of reconciliation are made by the One who didn't cause the separation.  
God extends His heart and hands and Son - God moves closer to identify Himself with us.  
Jesus Christ has come in the flesh - the God-Man drew near to the lost - the love of Christ is real.  
The great act of reconciliation - "He hath made Him to be sin for us" - reconciliation is now possible!  
Faith acts and the Bible is opened - inflexible knees gladly bow - halting words of thanks are said.

Songs arise in the heart - songs in the night are sung in the silence of the heart - praises begin.

Evidence of reconciliation begin to flow - "God, who hath reconciled us to Himself."

Instead of anger and embarrassment, there is gratitude - instead of resentment toward God, thanks.

Instead of distance, there is a sense of nearness - instead of fear of God, there is love for God.

Instead of uselessness, there is a sense of purpose - instead of opposing direction, there is fellowship.

Now we have experienced reconciliation and can become reconcilers - now the walls start to drop.

Now the barriers are removed and hope is renewed - now the valleys have roads through them.

Now instead of backs turned we catch sight of anxious faces - and tell them of reconciliation.

The fear of the Lord as we look into the future day of reckoning challenges us to be reconcilers.

The love of Christ constrains us to be committed to the ministry of reconciliation.

The commission of Christ motivates to continue on even when there may be discouragement.

**"O God who in reconciling grace, reached to us when we caused the problems that separated us: I am eternally grateful that You were willing to reach out to me when my back was turned to Thee. I am thankful that I have been reconciled to Thee. I am also now awakened to the ministry of reconciliation that has been given. May I never consider this work done as long as I am alive. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 6:1-10**

### **THE WORKER'S STANDARDS**

In any service we do for the Lord we are called upon to do, there are standards of conduct and reasonable protocols that should be followed. Otherwise the pressures to compromise the truth in order to gather numbers to appear successful, or the subtle appeals to adapt our message and our actions to make the Gospel attractive, will undermine the whole purpose of the Gospel. How could those Corinthians ignore God's message and God's messenger when they had experienced salvation by grace? Why could they not see through those men who were creating confusion, and what appeal did they have to a real believer? The teaching of the false teachers appealed to the flesh and the teaching of Paul brought conviction and focused on the grace of God. God's message affects people in a way that is not just the normal reaction to one who sermonizes. The salvation message is important and insists on repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone to be reconciled to God.

Paul, the evangelist, realized his calling came from God. God didn't need his assistance in His work, but he had his own part to do in the ministry of reconciliation. It was to remind people of what God has done already and what He has a right to expect of every person who declares the Gospel. In this ministry one plants, another waters and God gives the increase. He allows us the privilege of serving in this ministry. Paul beseeches the Corinthian believers to realize that the grace of God to them has the work of reconciliation as one of the major reasons behind it. The quotation of scripture from Isaiah pointed out there is help for sinners and now is the time for us to urge them to take advantage of this help. The reason is clear the help is assured.

The cause of Paul's service was his awareness of being workers together with Him. He knew what he was doing in his ministry and did not give offense lest his message of reconciliation be hindered. Our actions in ministry communicate our attitude towards the Lord and toward people. Carelessness and indifference about spiritual things are easily seen by both believers and unbelievers. Not every situation in life in which we find ourselves for the sake of our ministry, will be pleasant. But a bad situation may turn out to be an opportunity. Our reaction to conflict, family problems, financial problems, joblessness and other areas of pressure in our lives, reflect the strength of our faith or the lack of our faith.

The ten features of the circumstances in which Paul was because of his ministry, approved his credibility as a trusted laborer for the Lord. Unwanted circumstances can often test us as to the reality of what we profess. It is in those troublesome times of life when there seems to be so many problems, that the reality of what we have professed in words, becomes real in deeds. In the same way eleven features of character are listed.

Each one testifies to Paul personal character and the character of his work. Much of what we do and say in the ministry of reconciliation is supported by who we are. The "armor of righteousness" is a strong defense in our stand against the pressures of the flesh. We also have access to the "armor of light" with which we can defend ourselves against those things of darkness the world will tempt us with. Even more, we have the "whole armor of God" at our disposal to withstand the devil. The armor of righteousness on the right hand is our offensive weapon with which we go forward in our ministry in spite of obstacles and opposition. On our left hand we have defensive armor to protect us when attacks are made against our motives, message and methods.

In spite of what may come against us or hinder the way before us as we advance in the work of reconciliation, we have to remain true to God and to His word. There should never be any compromise to the biblical standards of truth in the message we proclaim, nor in the righteousness of the one who declares the message. There are eight phrases in these verses that testify to the challenge of the ministry we have received. Each one defines a fundamental response either in contrast to what is wrong or in complexity as to what is right. In reading and studying through these phrases of very challenging description, we are made conscious as to how we need to emulate those laborers of an earlier time. They had a ministry to fulfill. They knew what it was they were supposed to do and did it in spite of obstacles, opposition from false teachers around them, and the criticisms of believers whose expectation was a much easier course. To expect the life-transforming message of reconciliation to be gladly received by everyone is unrealistic. We need to simply know what we believe, what we have been called to do and not deviate nor turn aside from that to which God has called us.

**2 Corinthians 6:1.** *"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."*

#### **WORKERS TOGETHER.**

Grace, we received at the original Source, whether from here or some far distant land.  
And each of life's action follows a course, that originates from God strong right hand.

It is not in each one that the power is given, to do a work uncommon to man.  
The grace that enables us to face up to sin, is that each phase of God's work can be spanned.

One works in the city, another in the field, and others in languages diverse.  
One preaches, one teaches, others privately speak; that people might be freed from the curse.  
Some work in the public eye, some in small rooms; so that wherever the Spirit may choose;  
There are those put in place to meet face to face, those who are in danger and their soul will lose.

One sits down and writes in a letter or tract, and sends it off to a friend they might know.  
Another may speak similar words on the street, so that lost ones wherever he goes,  
Learn God's grace has made provision for him, and through His workers He thus can show,  
The way of salvation and deliverance from sin, and God's truth in the heart surely grows.

As workers together, God's people are found, in the places He wants them to be.  
It may be near home that God wants you to work, or maybe in lands 'cross the sea.  
Workers and works all vary in kind, what you do may be far different than me.  
But all working together in the field of the Lord; someday a full harvest will see.

May none of us hold back from the work we can do; for right now the harvest is ripe.  
We don't work by ourselves; we are workers together to gather the sheaves before night.  
The crop in the field is about to perish; and never dare we slack in the fight  
Against all opposition and some superstition, we must never God's glory lose sight.

Workers together are a powerful force; all the gifts that God gave have a place.  
Workers together meet multiplied needs, when all of the workers have space  
To each do his part in the on-going plan to bring in God's harvest in haste.  
The motivating force in this work that we do, is ultimately - God's saving grace.

**"O Lord of the harvest, and God of our salvation: in this field in which I labor, I am conscious of others who are at work that I may never see. Bless their labors, O God, and give them the assurance that their labor is not in vain. Some we will strive together with, for the faith of the Gospel, and will blend our efforts. Others are unseen and unheard of but we will all join together as one, when the harvest day is finished. To God be all the glory! Amen."**

**2nd Corinthians 6:11-18**

### **TRUE SEPARATION IS WARM DEDICATION**

The trials of the Gospel that are associated with the ministry of reconciliation are not surprising. To confront evil with truth will cause animosity and anger on the part of those who love and live in sin. The true minister of the Gospel; the characteristics of one who carries out the ministry of reconciliation with dedication and commitment, can not be hidden. There will be honor given to such a person by those who respond in faith to Christ, and dishonor by those who reject the light the ministry of reconciliation brings. This may come even from those who know what is right but want to blend in with the world system and the people around.

This attitude did not close the mind and heart of Paul and those with him toward the Corinthian believers who were critical of the work they were doing. The heart of the apostle was still opened to them with love, and they did not withhold their affection from those cold-hearted Christians. When he "opened his mouth," he frankly expressed the thoughts of his heart even more than before. It is not a sign of "lovelessness" when one seeks to correct what is wrong in those he genuinely cares for. Love does not let wrong go on to its terrible end. In love, one realizes the consequences another person is facing and of which one is unaware, and seeks to change any behavior or attitude that allows this to continue unchecked. This may not be appreciated at first by those who we are seeking to help. The Corinthians narrowed down and restricted their affection toward those who brought them the Gospel and sought to guide them in the ways of God. Resentment by those of self-will may often be expressed and even lead some who resist the truth to walk away from it in anger.

Those believers should have made a large place in their hearts for those who truly cared for them. When we make room for competing forces in our lives, our fellowship with God and His people is dampened. If we allow such things a place in our lives, God cannot act toward us as a Father who is wanting to enjoy warm fellowship with His sons and daughters. Alliances formed with unbelievers will hinder their love for the children of God who truly care for them and do not want them to lose the joy and fellowship of those who are committed to God and the ministry of reconciliation.

"Yoked together" has in view a scene from the Old Testament prohibitions of an ox and ass plowing together. To yoke two different species of animals together is not only not a proper fit, but it is cruel to each animal whose characteristics are very different. Two oxen can soon match their strides and actually move their feet in unison as they lean into the yoke. There is "affinity" there. Two donkeys or two mules or horses working at the same job harnessed together can soon match their strengths to more than double the desired result. The challenge of service is not restricted, but rather enhanced when the guidelines referred to in this chapter are adhered to. Affection and service becomes stronger by the yoking of equals who witness, work and worship in harmony and fellowship. Narrowing does not mean weakening. It is placing power under control - the control of divine intention.

Association with just anyone restricts rather than enlarges the work of those involved in the ministry of reconciliation. Wrong people will not make a business; a fellowship of some kind; a marriage or a religious enterprise go better. One person who is not in agreement with one hundred who agree, can hinder the efforts of them all. Binding relationships that are not based on scriptural principles, will weaken our Christian commitment, integrity and standards. To make the aims of unbelievers to suit those of believers in Christ is impossible. The compromising of character and the integrity of a Christian's life, soon blurs even the basic Christian testimony, and will ultimately destroy the distinctiveness of that person's Christian living. Soon there will be no difference seen between the believer and unbeliever. A non-Christian cannot put on Christian characteristics for very long because he does not have the new nature God gives when a person is saved. That person does not have the Holy Spirit within and has no power over sin. On the other hand, a true Christian who does not keep in fellowship with God, can soon revert to the way they were before God in grace, saved them. They are not yet exempt from the attraction of sin when attacked by the world, the flesh and the devil.

There is quite a variety of binding connections to which we can be quickly linked. Business connections bind us when we begin to think in materialistic terms of profit and loss only. There are social groups that bind people with common interests to each other. Social activities also will claim our interests and soon make them of equal or more importance than the activities of a local assembly. When two people marry, they are bound for life. The things that interest and affect one will do the same another person. Church fellowship has a very strong influence on our personal fellowship with God. Any affinity that is formed between people who have contrasting opinions and commitments in these areas, can make our hearts and minds like the world, and stops our public testimony to the truth of God.

The first of the five contrasts listed, "righteousness with unrighteousness," affects our witness. Commercial interests that are formed in business, binds us to the one who is morally the weakest in the yoke. Very

seldom do those who compromise in business, ever rise to the commitment to absolute integrity that is expected of a child of God. The Christian yoked in this way is actually one who is a defector from the commitment needed to be a reconciler. In business we share in common (fellowship) the good and bad of the partners and equal associates. There are similar consequences when light and darkness try to blend. Political connections bind us to the practices of the majority. Communion or effective unity depends on each one in that affinity adapting to the accepted practices of the whole group to provide a "united front." This defection from the intended integrity of an individual that is expected of one engaged in the ministry of reconciliation, negates their witness almost entirely because it represents the world instead of the kingdom of God.

Social groups have a great attraction today for people who feel isolated and alone in cities. Much of that attraction is based on what is going on socially around us and is controlled by the god of this world. Christ and Belial (Satan) have nothing at all in common. There is discord, disharmony when the music, the entertainment, the social appeal of the devil and his followers would try to mix with the things of God. The believer who would seek to do the ministry of reconciliation in a way that appeals to the devil, is already defeated.

In marriage there is the uniting of three parts of one human being with another with the purpose of two becoming one. The physical union has no real meaning without the union of both the soul and spirit of each. To a certain extent, there can be a "soulish" sharing if one is willing to compromise what he or she really wants. But the spirit of the unbeliever is dead, and the spirit of the believer has been made alive by the grace of God. The whole-hearted, whole-person union desired in marriage is impossible if one is a child of God and the other is not. Often such marriages are lived in disillusionment or end in defeat and defilement. That same result comes when a religious agreement is attempted between the temple of God and idols. This is impossible. There are even different definitions of worship these days so now the verbiage is the same but the meanings are different. To many a "worship leader" is one who leads the singing in a gathering. To the "temple of God," worship is an attitude that leads to expression, often in very few spoken words, or even the silence of awe. To try to find common ground between the temple of God and idols is like trying to link life and death. The only thing they have in common is the length of their separation. To those who are involved in religion, church is the building they go to, or something they do, as in "do church." To those who are "temple of God," church is who we are - the "called out" people of God.

We are to maintain our witness for Christ in this world, but are not to be locked into any kind of bondage or relationship that compromises the body of truth we represent, "the faith." Nor are we to try to adapt our personal faith in God to anything that would divide our loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ or contaminate our personal allegiance to Him. Our commitment and obedience to God is fundamental to our fellowship with Him, and dedication to Him. Ambition, emotion and attraction to the wrong things can quickly control us and erode our dedication to the ministry of reconciliation. Separation is not just keeping a distance from sinful practices that compromise our lives. We are separated to God, and for God. It is important that we keep our distance from sin and draw close to our God. We are here in the world to represent Him in our ministry. Our behavior reflects on God. But separation to Him also makes it possible for Him to act as a Father to us when we are obedient and unique sons and daughters. Imagine, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty!!

Some things were just never intended to be mixed.  
Broken steel cannot with wood and twine be fixed.  
Sun and darkness, day and night  
Are not able to function fully in mere twilight.  
Up and down has to be either one or the other.  
A magnet with wood shavings doesn't even bother.  
Righteousness and lawlessness have no common ground.  
True fellowship between them will never be found.

Water and oil don't either the other attract.  
Grey is only a dull bland mixture of white and black.  
Political parties are mainly known by their difference.  
Communion desired would seem like interference.  
For believers to accommodate to the world is defection.  
To try to form close association with it is spiritual infection.  
There is no concord, no harmonious union  
Between Christ and Satan, or those mixing communion.

In and out is to travel in opposite directions.  
A lie and truth have totally different inflections.  
One who believes in the Lord and one who does not,

May have some things they share, but in basics have naught.  
Defeat and despair may follow hard on the track  
Of those who compromise truth, and can't change or come back.  
To appeal to the religious flesh and/or man's basest nature  
Defiles one's worship now, and shortchanges their future.

**"Father, Lord Almighty, the attractions of this age seem to be taking a strong hold on many of Thy people. Give Thy servant the wisdom to address the problems we face as assemblies gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with grace and truth in equal parts. May few words be spoken with divine power, and may they bring results to Thy glory. Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 7:1-16**

### **SINCERITY OF THE SERVANT**

The rewards of faithfulness in the ministry of reconciliation are great and are there for us to claim. True separation to God and warm dedication to His work first of all brings us closer to God Himself. He promises to receive us and be a Father to us - the Lord Almighty! It also brings the saints of God closer to each other as sons and daughters in His family. We are not isolated free-lancers doing our own thing in the work of the Lord. There is unity of people and purpose when we understand who we are and why we are here. Even more, another result of separation to God and from those who are in the world-system is that it brings God closer to us, He promised to "dwell in them, and walk in them." There is no closer fellowship with God than that!! What wonderful promises we have! What a great motivating incentive to cleanse ourselves from everything that would defile the flesh and spirit. That is the negative side of being aware of the promises of God. On the positive side, we are to "perfect holiness" in every aspect of life. This would mean that in the five areas of scriptural separation, in the "fear of God" we do not allow practices that defile the body (flesh), nor do we allow anything to contaminate the soul.

Holiness in the context is a reference to being without sin. God's people are known as "holy brethren" who shun bitterness and jealousy, and rather cultivate forgiveness. As a "holy priesthood" we should be those who conduct ourselves with godly reverence and devotion. We do not put holiness on as a piece of clothing and then put it off at our convenience. The people of God are a "holy temple" who can bring joy or grief depending on their behavior, and as a "holy nation" our lives before the world identifies us as to whether we are living in the fear of God or not. We can perfect holiness by separating from sin. We can avoid sinning by feeding on the Word of God, memorizing it, praying earnestly ourselves, and asking for the prayers and help of other people. "Perfecting holiness" means we are to have nothing to do with those things that are of the past life by making a clean break from them all. Maturing in faith promotes and produces a Christ-likeness that is essential in the ministry of reconciliation.

There was a deep sincerity in the heart of the apostle Paul as he made this appeal for their love and affection. They had a significant place in his heart and he was totally committed to live or die with them. He found joy in them even though they were ignoring him because he knew where they came from and what they had been. He had carefully explained the ministry of the Gospel during the four previous chapters and now picks up his own testimony as a sincere minister of the Gospel he preached. There is a glad reunion with Titus, his co-worker who was also a great comforter to him when he brought his report of the response of the Corinthian believers to Paul's corrective letter. Joy is not limited to those things that makes us comfortable. Sometimes the joy we have in trials and pressures is deeper and more significant to us because of the situation in which we are found. In hardships we can be comforted and find joy when we know the ministry to which we have been called is progressing. Correction as well as promotion is part of the work of the Lord. A caring man like Titus who had been proven by his faithful conduct, is one who can be trusted to give an accurate assessment of a work that has been done.

There are some principles of confrontation that it is well to follow in the interests of affirming one's ministry. Paul did this and the results were what he had hoped to accomplish. Do not be abrasive and arrogant, but be firm and bold in addressing the problem. Wrong has to be repented of and godly sorrow brings repentance that corrects the matters that are wrong. Affirm all you can that is good. Encourage what you can honestly see is positive. Perhaps this is a major point to be made because the affirmation principle sees correction as a result of godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow brings embarrassment and bitterness as it looks for someone else to blame for their wrong actions. Be accurate and honest when bringing correction. Do not give half-truths nor quote hearsay as evidence. Know the facts and do not exaggerate. In a corrective ministry, one needs to carefully prepare and not "wing it." Do not neglect to follow up after a confrontation. There is great value in the first contacts after the matter has been dealt with. A clear understanding of why the confrontation had to take place and a careful clearing of the charge is strengthened in this way. Be gentle after being firm - firm regarding truth, gentle regarding people. Use speech that reflects Christ's

words, His message, His approach to confrontation. His words were always spiritual with the objective of ministering to the whole person. Punishment is a form of discipline that is used after all else has failed to change a person's behavior.

The Corinthians responded appropriately to Paul's correction. It is difficult to accept correction or rebuke with grace and tact. Those saints accepted the responsibility to clear themselves of evil and to make the wrong right. They wanted the will of God and acted on the matter in the way they were instructed by Paul. The report Paul received from Titus assured him that his boasting of their basic soundness of heart and desire for God's will was vindicated. Ministry and the ministers of God's truth is a basic theme in this epistle, but there is also another beautiful theme - "rejoicing."

There was rejoicing in the heart of the apostle Paul over the manner of life and value of it in Christian testimony. Behavior of the messengers greatly affects the way the Gospel message is received. Believers also find cause for rejoicing in each other as we are exhorted by one another to be faithful in view of the coming of the Lord. In the circumstances of life, we can find cause for rejoicing in spite of the pressures that may come against us. Our attitude toward God allows us to see beyond the immediate things that could discourage us, to the One who controls all circumstances in life that we may be called upon to face. When there is godly sorrow for sin and genuine repentance that completely clears a whole matter up, that is a cause for rejoicing. A wrong has been corrected and the faith of those involved is affirmed. Confidence restored in a person, or in this case, an assembly of God's people, is certainly a great reason to rejoice.

So even in the middle of difficulties in the ministry of reconciliation, there are many reasons for us to be encouraged and rejoice in the work of God being fruitful in the lives of His people.

What would I do when ignored and criticized for no righteous reason at all?  
Would I retaliate with sarcasm and anger, or quietly wait for God in grace to call?  
I hope there is enough spirituality in me that in God I would put my trust.  
And gracefully turn in silence and walk away knowing God knows all that is just.

There will assuredly come some times when in love, I must make corrections.  
In fairness to His people I am obligated to occasionally give some directions.  
To allow sin in my brother to go on unaddressed, is really to him quite unfair.  
Giving scriptural guidance to help him recover is how I his burden can share.

When one who has fallen comes back to the Lord, that is a very good reason to rejoice.  
To have taken time to help him return was for the benefactor a very wise choice.  
All of the saints who had been praying for him found joy in his steps to recovery.  
What one person does, has an effect on many, that is a blessed discovery.

A caring person has placed high value on every person no matter what he has done.  
There is gladness of heart and love is confirmed, when the prodigal finally comes home.  
The one who sincerely cared and gave scriptural guidance, is the one who acted with  
grace.

It was his satisfaction that appropriate action brought him back to the appointed place.

There will be time when we are misunderstood, we will have to do what is right  
In spite of others who only see wrong, and are willfully blinded to light.  
So, we may have to act alone, and in faith follow on with the Lord.  
The results God intends are near at hand when we act according to the Word.

**2Corinthians 7:16.** *"I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things."*

### **CONFIDENCE IN YOU.**

What a man is Paul! They criticized his looks; they criticized his speech; they criticized his message. As far as those Corinthians, he couldn't do anything right. He had brought them the Gospel but that didn't seem to count for anything. He lived among them in that ungodly city, but they seemed to think that meant nothing to this man of vision. He worked with his own hands so that no one could charge him with taking their money or living off of them, but still they complained. He talked straight to them about what was wrong and what to do to put things right. He wrote to them when he was away. They couldn't charge him with not caring about them or what happened to them. In spite of all that he tried and tried again. Why bother with such a bunch of high minded, morally low, self-centered, ungrateful, carnal people!? He couldn't help it. They were his spiritual children and they were doing a bad job of living the Christian life and bearing a Christian testimony in the place where they were living. They weren't fooling the people around; they weren't fooling God (some of them had already been taken away) and they weren't fooling the apostle who had brought them the

Gospel. Instructors could give the information; teachers could apply the truth to their situation; but there are times when only a father will do what is needed.

So even though they were such rascals, he didn't give up on them. He praised them when and where he could rightly do so. He was comforted by them because he loved them with his heart. He rejoiced in their mourning because now he could see some light at the end of the dark tunnel of their misdeeds. He made them sorry because he had to. He didn't take back his words of rebuke. But now he is seeing some sorrow that is leading to change. The Corinthian believers didn't like it but finally they could see the reason. They had cleaned up their act. They had made necessary changes. They had challenged themselves and it was obvious God was at work in them. Now he could see the results and Paul is delighted. He knew the potential was there but it was hard to get the rubbish out of the way so that what was right would triumph over the wrong. Now Paul is rejoicing! Now his confidence in them is vindicated! Now he can boast again to his fellow-workers that the labor is not in vain!

Is the travail worth it? Is the separation from what we want most, worth the hassle? Is the seeming indifference of the audience, the lack of interest worth the effort of hours of preparation and minutes of delivery? Are the traveling and the sleeplessness, the outlay of money and time worth it? Isn't there some better way I could spend my time than this? Do they even care that we care? At the moment I can't answer these questions. But I can be confident that I have no other choice in the matter. They have instructors and teachers that are good at what they do, but they don't have fathers – and I am one. So, I must go again and again, even though it may, at the moment, seem fruitless. I have no way of determining the value of such effort. I only have the confidence that this is the way God intended it, so that's enough for me. God knows and I don't. All I know that this is his method of "perfecting the saints" so I'll keep doing it while I can.

**"Father, this is for You; not them; not me but You. Every effort, every evidence of usefulness, every glimmer of light I am allowed to see is all for You and all because You are willing to use a clay pot to carry some to thirsty souls who don't even know they need a drink. So, fill me and empty me as You see fit. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2 Corinthians 8**

### **GIVING WITH GRACE**

There are a number of ways Christians can express their fellowship with other believers. One of the best evidences of fellowship is by showing the grace of God in our giving. Outside interests often takes care of inside problems in the assemblies of God's people. The motivation that unites believers is common concern for others; particularly when we have experienced the blessing others have been to us. Paul used the word "grace" to lift the act of giving of our substance to a high plane of Christian experience. It actually lifts giving from a mere responsibility, to an act of worship, expressing heart-felt appreciation to God.

Biblical principles and examples, such as the Macedonian assemblies, exemplified, when carried out as God intends, eliminates the need of special appeals for funds made by men. Those assembly believers had experienced "rock bottom" poverty and hardscrabble living, and yet their giving, in spite of the circumstances in which they found themselves, was considered a "grace." Giving in this way was a great joy to them and their giving was not ostentatious but full of genuine liberality. Generosity of heart does not need high pressure tactics to raise money. The whole point of grace-giving is not how much we give, but why we give and how we give to God. The reason we give is because we have genuine appreciation for God's grace to us, and love for Him is our real motivation. "We love Him, because He first loved us." With that kind of motivation, the "how" part of giving is sacrificial giving, which is very different that tithing or proportionate giving. This goes way beyond being just the right thing to do, to where there is real joy in being able to participate with God in that which is close to His heart - the welfare and well-being of His children.

Interest in the kingdom of God and its interests, links us to other believers and increases our vision to include the interests of God's people in other places of the harvest field. Informing the Lord's people of a need is not soliciting funds. People are motivated when they learn how they can have part in a work and meet needs to the best of their ability. Voluntary and enthusiastic giving gave satisfaction to the Macedonian assemblies. The interests of the people of God gathered to the name and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, find their supreme example for giving in Him. Those believers gave themselves to God first and from then on sacrificially gave of their substance in the way He showed by His life. He gave His all. Living by faith is a characteristic of the just. We trust the Lord to give us guidance and direction in life. Our commitment is to speak the truth of God in love and live out what we teach and preach. Applying biblical truth has positive effects on those who know we have unchanging values based on the standard of the scriptures. We learn to

be biblical by studying the Bible, first for the correct interpretation, and then to apply that truth in practical application to the affairs of life.

Earnestness in Gospel testimony and preaching is a characteristic of those who gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of giving by God's people makes possible the outreach of the Gospel in far-off fields as well as in harvest fields near at hand. This grace is enforced and demonstrated to be genuine when love to each other and the part of believers, and love to all men is evident, not only by words but also by deeds. The grace of giving is shown to be real when the saints give from their hearts to the Lord Himself. Growth in faith is directly proportionate to how we apply ourselves to the word of God and the truths we practice in assemblies where we have our united testimony. Knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ comes when we read and practice the things our Lord taught and did when He was here on earth. Love and its expression in giving increases our capacity for ministry in all the areas of our lives. Advice in giving is much easier to accept than commands to give when demanded by men who have an agenda they want to promote.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ was unmistakable. He set aside His glory to be "found in fashion as a man." He exchanged His eternal riches for human poverty, and subjected Himself voluntarily to human limitations. In that way God's character was revealed in humanity in a way with which mankind can identify. This is what God intends from us; His character made visible obvious in human flesh. The quantity of giving is not what counts, but the quality. The Old Testament gathering of manna by the children of Israel gave a good illustration of what God intends from His people today. We are not to be greedy or lazy in our giving and receiving. The blessing that really counts is to the one who gives as much, or more, than the ones who receive.

Principles in giving are not complicated. We must be willing to give, or it has no real value. Our giving is to meet the needs of others, not for what we benefit from it. Gratefulness to the Lord is our response and the motivating power behind the action of sincere giving. Each person who gives to the Lord needs to be committed to the promise they make as to how much they give to the Lord from what they have received from Him, for His use in the kingdom of God and that of His people. Each person should give as much as they are able. God knows that amount and so does each individual believer. We know personally what our obligations are and how much we need to meet them. That determines the proportionate amount we need to give to meet them. God has given us everything we have and He knows we should give realistically from what we have, not from what we do not have.

The handling of funds in an assembly should be carefully and faithfully dealt with by those who can be trusted. There should be no cause for blame in those who handle funds that have been given to God by people. Paul, Titus and another brother whose praise was in the Gospel, were responsible men who had been tried and proven. Integrity in handling money must be maintained. The purpose for which funds are given must be met. Financial practices must be above board. Our motive for giving is that by faith, we believe God can use this to bring spiritual blessings to others. Material blessings from giving by grace are out of a desire to serve the people of God, to further the Gospel so sinners will be saved, and to honor God.

These physical things given by God's people are made to become spiritual things to be used for a spiritual ministry. Honoring God with our substance, lifts the common practice of meeting needs to a spiritual dimension. One who handles holy things of whatever kind they are, must have a reputation for being blameless in the public, and cooperative with those who labor with him. Such people are representatives of the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 8:9.** *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."*

#### **GOING BEYOND THE NORM.**

Needs are real: not always near at hand but far afield, in desperation voices rise to call on God.

Crying children - hungry mothers take food from their own plates - to stave off the inevitable -

Unless - unless from far away, another voice comes to the throne of grace and says, "Here am I."

There in homes and groups of praying, working people, comes the needed response, "Send me."

The example is given - there is none higher than He - from Him we learn how grace really works.

The need of all humanity was before Him - the ultimate glory of divine holiness all around Him.  
"He made Himself of no reputation" - "...for your sakes He became poor..." - from riches to poverty.  
"Obedient unto death even the death of the cross" - there was no farther He could go - no other way.

Because He went beyond what was normal - we live - we have eternal life - we are children of God.  
Where sin abound, grace did much more abound - way beyond what was normal or could be expected.  
The exceeding riches of His grace will be forever seen - because He went beyond even normal grace.  
He is able to do exceedingly abundantly - beyond our wildest dreams - He went beyond the norm.

Now, how about us - are we willing to go beyond the extent of our comfort - go farther than normal?  
People of poverty often give with abundance - how about people of abundance - do we give?  
It begins way before tithes or offerings - there is a willingness to give ourselves - unhesitatingly.  
Then it moves to be willing of ourselves - beyond normal - beyond our power - give to God.  
From affliction and trial comes the real joy of giving - far greater than the weekly normal.  
A sacrifice of self to the Lord - "I am His, purchased by His blood" - then giving to the will of God.  
From poverty comes abundance - from giving comes abounding grace - from abounding grace...  
Comes love, sincere, Christ-like love - and other are helped and blessed by those going beyond the norm.

**"Father God, "normal" sounds insipid. It sounds so casual and uncaring. It is right alongside of the word "lukewarm." I do not want to be like this. Give me the power and willingness to live above what is average. If this nest of mine needs to be stirred up, please do so. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 9**

### **RESULTS OF GIVING**

Titus and two other brothers were sent by Paul to Corinth to encourage the Corinthians to fulfill the promises they had made. Those three trusted men would be able to wisely represent the spiritual interests involved in the giving of the Corinthian's substance for the benefit of other believers in need, and would cheer them on to act on what they said they would do. Giving to God and to His people is really one and the same thing. We serve God when we serve His people. The grace of giving to God is not seen in the sense of competition as a fleshly challenge or some promotion that has been advertised. A spiritual response to a need that is known will not be that of grudging reticence but a glad privilege.

Previously the believers at Corinth had been used as an example of zeal to the Macedonian saints. Now the reverse is happening. The believers of Macedonia who were very poor, were used as examples to the Corinthian believers as a challenge to rise to the occasion and keep the promise which they made some time before. Enthusiasm at the beginning of a work often prompts people to want to be involved, and they make commitments to support the work. However, between the initial interest and the glory of a successful completion, there are days, weeks, months and sometimes years of hard drudgery in the work. When things are slow and nothing exciting is happening, we are in danger of overlooking our promise of commitment. When we make a commitment, we should fulfill that without having to be pressured to do what we said we would.

The giving Paul wrote about in these two chapters was a service to fellow Christians who were going through very difficult times. Even though they were in a different part of the world, it was still a responsibility the Corinthians had taken on to meet. This kind of giving is called "ministering to the saints," reminding us who God's people are. No matter who they are, where they are, or the circumstances in which they find themselves, they are God's people separated unto Him. To assist them was the right response to meet their need. The gifts to them was described as a "bounty," or "that which is given liberally." This was considered to be a generous gift, not a demand or a response to guilt that was imposed on them. This prompting on the

part of the apostle Paul and his fellow-laborers was a challenge to them to act so that both Paul and the Corinthians themselves could avoid shame and embarrassment for neglecting what should be done.

Giving was never intended to be a complicated matter. It was, and still should be, considered a blessing. The guidance for giving and the principles on which we minister in this way, are very simple. When we sow seed in a field, the amount of return we can expect to receive is in direct proportion to the amount of seed we plant. One other thing about a sowing time: when we are sowing the seed of grace-giving, other believers are prompted to sow their seed as well. Like the giving of the Macedonians prompted those in Corinth to give, so what is done as an investment in the work of God now, will bring benefits to many now and will be a blessing to many in the life to come. The blessings of the returns are in direct proportion to the amount given.

Another principle in sowing is not only do we reap what we sow in the measure to which we sow, which is the principle of increase, but the way we give, the principle of intention, is in relation to our motives. Do I give willingly or grudgingly? Do I give out of necessity or am I a "cheerful giver?" To be a joyful giver who is glad of the opportunity to give, is more valuable than the amount of money or substance we give. Cheerful, generous giving reflects on our attitude toward God and our response to what He has given us. God gives us the resources for living and investing in the same way we sow seed in a field. A Christian who holds tight to what he has is really a contradiction to the Gospel he professes. We are enriched and bless others at the same time we are giving. God gives to us so that we can give more bountifully. Out of the abundance of God's grace, He gives from His fullness what is needed to the joyful giver. He makes that abound in fruitfulness because of faith and grace that continues to increase, not decrease. This "service" done supplies present needs and is a priestly ministry. This kind of grace isn't looking for a reason to give, but an opportunity.

This ministry of giving glorifies God and reflects the spirituality and submission of those who exercise it. They express in this way obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and demonstrates love for the saints that is seen by those who look on. In this way those who give and those who receive as well as those who look on and see evidence of Christian love are all blessed. "God is no man's debtor." God's people are united when they become channels of blessing. Love is expressed by their giving and they become united in prayer as they bond together to meet the needs of which they become aware. Cultural and racial barriers are lowered as the grace of giving crosses those barriers. National differences are bypassed when needs are being met by those who care and joyfully give from what they have to further the well-being of God's family wherever they are.

Self-interest does not represent the Lord Jesus Christ. He demonstrated in His life and provision for our deep need, what giving to God is really like. God's giving goes way beyond our ability to describe it. His unspeakable gift is one way the value of giving can be known. It is beyond our words to describe. His giving is unsearchable, beyond our understanding. It is unchangeable and beyond any acts of men. It is undefiled. Beyond our capacity to copy. It is unequalled; way beyond anything men have done. It is unmerited; far beyond what we deserve. It is unlimited - beyond our comprehension. But we can "render unto the Lord," by "taking the cup of salvation" and returning to Him with a sacrificial offering from our hearts. The grace of giving is one way we demonstrate what it means to us to be saved.

**2 Corinthians 9:8.** *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."*

**ALL SUFFICIENCY.**

From God Himself, comes all that is needed;  
All grace to do what He wills.  
My part in this grace, is to be sure He is heeded;  
For every good work to fulfill.

It is not from ourselves that we give what we have,  
For the Source of all giving is God.  
It is from the abundance of all that God gave,  
Through us, God's grace does abound.

To give of our bounty, and to give from our heart,  
Provokes others to meet needs all around.  
Many are ready but need someone to start,  
And from them will God's blessings abound.

In using with grace, all that God gave to me,

I am blessed, when from the storehouse of grace;  
As a "hilarious" giver, I am able to see,  
God's blessings abound in this place.

From the sufficiency I have, the needs of others are met,  
And the giving brings glory to God.  
The results of such work to which our minds are so bent,  
Will bring unity to the saints of the Lord.

Overshadowing all this, is God's "unspeakable gift,"  
That defies all attempts to define.  
But this I know personally, I have experienced it,  
I am deeply thankful for this gift so sublime.

**"Gracious God, my Father: it is beyond my ability to comprehend all the blessings that abound from Thy grace. There are times, however, when it is unmistakably clear, that You have been able to use the feeble efforts of this frail mortal man, to bring a good work for the glory of Thy name and the furtherance of Thy kingdom. For this privilege, I am so grateful. To God be all the glory, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians**

### **RESPONDING TO CRITICISM**

It is not the easiest thing to respond to criticism, especially when we think, and may know, it is unfair and based on jealousy or a frame of personal preference different from mine. Paul experienced this from some of the Corinthian believers who seemed to have formed a clique behind the leadership of a false teacher. The way he responded to this was a masterpiece of diplomacy. For the first nine chapters of 2nd Corinthians he had been commending the saints for acting on his corrective ministry and defining areas of ministry in which both he and they were involved. Whenever challenges are made either fairly or unjustly, it is an act of wisdom to not answer too quickly in the heat of the moment. It is important to rightly discern the reason for the criticism before addressing it. The challenge of the false teachers and those who follow them needs to be responded to only when we are sure what the real reason is. Paul did not make this a test of personalities by promoting himself. False teachers do that. He was defending his ministry and his call from God when he replied to their criticism

Paul did not boast about himself and his work. He had boasted to others about the Corinthians believers and hoped that boasting had not been in vain. He was forced to defend himself and his work because of the worldly view of his work by those who wanted to take his work over and turn it into a legalistic sect of the Jews. He had been attacked personally about his appearance and also about his credentials as an apostle. So, he begins the vindication of his calling by appealing to them in the "meekness and gentleness of Christ." He never hesitated to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to his work among them, but did not speak about himself until now. There was a good reason to do this and yet even now he addressed the matter in a Christ-like way. He found it necessary to make this defense of himself because his apostolic authority was being challenged. False teachers said that Paul's authority was of no value in order to advance themselves. There are such times when we have to defend the work to which we have been called by God. What others may say about it or criticisms laid against it can be ignored as long as there is no following by the believers of the false teachers. But when a divisive spirit arises and the threat of division is on the horizon, then we must rise to the challenge and speak out against that which is false.

If we seek the praise of men or boast about the work we do, we have likely already jeopardized the work to which we were called. We must always GIVE GOD ALL THE GLORY for anything that has been done of positive and eternal value. That is an essential trait of the true servant's heart. Any true servant of God knows that without Him we can do nothing. The outward appearance of a thing or a work does not give the reality of the matter. There is a sense in which we "walk according to the flesh" because of our humanity. Common sense is not a bad thing to have in this regard, but when we "walk in the Spirit" we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. We do not want to have to be bold and aggressive generally because that is most often a fleshly approach to anything. However, there may be times when we have to vigorously defend our work from false teachers.

When that time comes, we will have to boldly defend the truth that has been entrusted to us, as well as those "sheep and lambs" for whom we are responsible. By recognizing we are in a spiritual warfare, our walk in the flesh, our life, should never compromise the truths we defend by acting in anger, jealousy or aggressive behavior. There is authority recognized when confrontation is done in dignity, integrity, and under the leading of the Spirit. We need the filling of the Spirit when rebuke is necessary. Deceit, subtlety and

mere human speculation in order to win an argument are actions the flesh takes. We need to use spiritual weapons in the warfare against the falsehood of human reasoning.

Some of the spiritual weapons at our disposal are prayer for guidance; faith in the Lord to give us appropriate words to speak, and the Word of God to give authority to all that will be said and done. The Holy Spirit gives power to accomplish the purpose of the confrontation. Our hope in Christ motivates us as those who will give account of our representation of Him. Love for God and His people keep any necessary confrontation we may have to face, on a high, respectful level of interaction. There should be a dignified explanation of biblical truth that applies when we focus on the truth instead of on people. Those people the Spirit of God can use have taken their thoughts into "captivity" to yield to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was prepared to use apostolic authority against the man who a group of the Corinthian assembly was following.

False teachers can usually be identified because they are not interested in reaching out with the Gospel into any new areas. They want to take over the work others have done. They try to tear down what has already been done. A true teacher will seek to build up the work to the very best of his ability. When he comes to a place where God has been working through other servants, he will support and seek to reinforce that work. Apollos was that kind of teacher. When God calls a person to do a work, it is his responsibility to faithfully preach the Gospel so those people will know how to be saved. Then it is his responsibility and right to teach the Word of God and teach the people "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" with the purpose of establishing those believers in the faith. False teachers do not do this. They focus on themselves and on their interpretations and opinions as to how the things of God should be done.

In Paul's letter he had to boldly condemn division that had surfaced in Corinth dividing the saints into cliques who were choosing men to follow. He also had to deal with the problem of immorality that was being accepted by the Corinthians. He had to be firm and dogmatically plain as to what must be done about that situation. The disorderly conduct of some of the believers at the Lord's Supper had to be corrected in no uncertain terms. When he was with them some said he was weak in his body and his words were meek and quiet. In his letter of correction, he wrote words that were strong and there was no question as to what the assembly had to do. Those who are false among us will look for discontented people who think they have been overlooked or are jealous of another person's gift, and stir the flame of division. That kind of undermining of a work will not be stopped with casual suggestions. Comparing those who teach by eloquence or oratorical skills is a common problem. The preaching ability of one compared to that of others is not a requirement for leadership among God's people.

We do not have to pass our judgment on another man because his work is different from ours and is in a different sphere of service. We do have to take care of our own work, not to boast in it, but to protect it from false teachers. Glory from men is not what commends a work or worker. People praise one another by their own standards so they can feel self-satisfied and complacent. Such are not trustworthy people, nor are they wise. It is the Lord who commends the worker and his work. That will be obvious in the when trustworthy workers fulfill the commission the Lord gave them. Servants who know what they have been called to do are those of singular purpose. They are not easily side-tracked from the goal before them. Their preaching will be sound, both in the Gospel and in their teaching ministry that follows. Such people will carefully adhere to scriptural principles that are easily discerned by those who "try the teaching" with the Bible and God-given wisdom. We compare men and their message by God's standards and men's and make sure that any recognition given is not the exalt man but the Lord Jesus Christ.

The measure of a spiritual ministry can be made when I ask myself, "Am I where God wants me to be, doing what He wants me to do?" We do not need to boast about my work or have anyone else do it. But it is well for me to ask, "Is God being glorified in this work I am doing? Does this ministry have divine approval? Can God commend what is being done here?" When a work is done by authority granted from our Lord, and when there is evidence this ministry is spiritual - not fleshly, and God is using it for His glory alone, then we can be confident that we are doing right when we defend it against those who would try to undermine it or tear it down.

**2 Corinthians 10:1.** *"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence and base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:"*

**COMBINATIONS.**

Some things just naturally go together -  
Stormy winds along with rainy weather.  
Butter on bread - bees and honey;  
Debts we've run up and the need of money

Love and light can be seen by men,  
Love motivates and light will show.  
These two combined will make it plain,  
The Savior of sinners you truly know.

Faith and works, declare your words are true,  
When to the way of salvation, you testify,  
Faith may be hidden, but the works you do  
Indicate to observers, you are what you say.

Far greater than these, are the combinations,  
We see in Christ, when He came in the flesh.  
His grace and truth met each new situation -  
And fully made clear the extent of God's grace.

Christ's meekness and lowliness, are revealed in His Word,  
As He, among men, brought deity to light.  
His lowliness of heart - right to the cross - clearly showed,  
He alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

When meekness and gentleness are mentioned together,  
It indicates something is important to learn.  
Meekness, not weakness, shows strength with a tether.  
That balance is gentleness, so that truth may be borne.

With strength of His character and gentleness of heart,  
Correction can be accepted with thanks.  
And with grace given to us that our Lord can impart,  
The combination helps us in Christ-likeness to act.

**“Father in heaven, I would like to know, in a real way, the meekness and lowliness of Christ in my life. I know there is a yoke to take on me in order for this to be a reality. I am here and available for this to be a fact in me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

## **2nd Corinthians 11**

### **"THIS IS FOR YOUR GOOD"**

True fathers do not find joy in correcting their children, but they know that afterwards, when the behavior and attitudes are changed, the outcome will be better for everyone. The process is not easy, but the results are well worth the effort when we must deal with things that are wrong. "No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Paul had to turn up the heat on his spiritual children at Corinth because they were being led astray. He had to speak candidly to them in a way he was not used to doing as a spiritual father. But these immature believers who should have known better, had gone a long way out of the right way by following false teacher. So as a father he had to deal bluntly with them. He could see they were losing their focus in life by being distracted by the serpent-like subtlety that Eve had experienced. Like a father whose daughter is going to get married, he wanted to be able to present the Corinthian believers to Christ like a morally pure virgin to her future husband. His desire expressed was that they would listen to him for their own sake as well as for his.

Paul had a single-minded love for Christ. He wanted them to have that. Love has a right to be jealous. That is godly jealousy that any spiritual father has for those he led to Christ and who he knows are in danger of making a serious mistake. It would be wrong for us to overlook evil in order to have a false peace and false comfort among God's people. Smooth-talking men with a smooth, eloquent way of speaking are the ones spiritually immature people like to listen to. They may sound like they have authority because of their command of language or the degrees they might hold from a university and a seminary. But we must "try the spirits," test the teaching by searching the word of God and comparing what men say with what God says. Any distortion of the truth is wrong, is dangerous to the spiritual life of believers, and the person teaching it has Satan behind him.

When we hear one speak and their teaching about the Lord Jesus is different that what is plainly taught in the Bible - Jesus is God in the flesh, yet eternally God - then all he has to say must be rejected. Different teaching about the Holy Spirit that emphasizes the wrong things must be rejected. Teaching about the Gospel that tries to make it "seeker friendly" and doesn't bring teach conviction of sin, eternal consequences

for sin, repentance for sin and faith in Christ alone for salvation, must be rejected as well as those who will not preach the Gospel biblically. Those "super apostles" were eloquent in speech but servants of Satan. A loving father will rise to the challenge of preserving his daughter from the deceptive peril of smooth-talking suitors who want to take what they can get for themselves. A loving parent will gladly sacrifice himself instead of burdening his young children. Godly jealousy produces a godly fear of satanic influence. A father has authority that no one else can claim. The proof of that authority is demonstrated in the cost he is willing to pay for the safety of his children.

Oratory may not have been the apostle Paul's high point, but with his brilliant mind he could discern people. He knew their capacity to understand his message and could adapt and simplify his teaching so they could easily grasp its truth. He knew the Gospel personally because he had experienced its saving power and he got it from God directly. He also knew how to pass it on to other people. This is the responsibility of any minister of the Gospel today. We must have understood it ourselves by experiencing it right from the conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment to come when the Holy Spirit awakened us to our need.

Repentance toward God is evident when a person is humbled down in sorrow for sin and a complete change of mind about God, ourselves and salvation. When faith is placed in Christ alone for salvation, there is no question that rebirth by the Holy Spirit has taken place and the word of God assures us of that fact. A person who represents the Gospel simply, is not simple-minded. A person who loves the Lord knows that content is more important than the expertise displayed when the Gospel is preached. God's word and the Gospel message do not need our skill to give it value. Nothing we can say or do gives it merit. It is our responsibility to give the message, and it is God alone who gives eternal life when it is accepted.

We all have our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to a public presentation of God's truth. But when any person charges a fee for giving the Gospel message to lost souls, those words are no more than a speech like a politician gives, no matter how well it is put together or how well it is presented. However, God can bless the truth of the Gospel to the salvation of souls in spite of whoever preaches it, not because of who they are. Paul asked no money from the Corinthian believers and so he seemed like an amateur with no authority because of that. He knew that financial profit from them would be misunderstood by carnal believers. False teachers still make a profit from preaching and many even ask publicly for money. Paul separated himself from that kind of people, and so should we. Paul explained his demeanor was based on his love for them. He had superior learning as far as training is concerned. His leadership was selfless because he had the love of a shepherd for his spiritual children.

In contrast to that, Satan and his servants seem to be good people, who can talk well, quote the Bible, and are attractive and moral people who have a smooth way with words. Those who appear righteous, moral, family-oriented people outwardly, often cover inward motives with words that seem alright, but come from another source instead of the scriptures. They portray themselves like those who came to Corinth did as "apostles of Christ," following the same pattern as Satan who presents himself sometimes as "an angel of light." They consider themselves as "ministers of righteousness." True teaching must confirm the scriptures. The lifestyle of true teachers should be consistent with biblical standards of morality and doctrine. All teachers will be judged as to their teaching. True teachers will have their teaching tried by fire as gold, silver and precious stones, or as wood, hay and stubble. Those who are false teachers, "their end shall be according to their works."

Paul gave a list of his credentials that should have silenced every critic, and removed every doubt as to His authority. His boasting was legitimate. He expanded his defense by pointing out he was a Hebrew. This would silence the Judaizers in regard to his learning. He had actually been a student at one of the most well-known prestigious schools of that day, the school of Gamaliel. As an Israelite he was faithful in keeping the laws in which so many of the false teachers prided themselves. Paul knew, and kept, the spirit of the law which was even more important than the letter of the law. His lineage was of the seed of Abraham, and he was from the tribe of Benjamin. Further though, was the fact that he was of the faith of Abraham, not just the pedigree, Abraham being the father of the faithful.

Externals have their place in Christian testimony, but that which is from within is what is important and lasting. The outward trials of Paul indicated the degree of his commitment and authority. The outward expression of our faith indicates what is behind our motivation to further the work of the Lord. Paul's concern for the new assemblies that God had raised up across Europe and Asia was genuine. The welfare of God's people is always on the hearts of those who reach out with the Gospel and see lamp-stands arising as the Lord's people gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

It is impossible to avoid difficulties when furthering the work of the Lord. Many people will criticize methods that are different from those used where they have lived all their lives. Most will not understand why these difficulties are experienced. When we take the Gospel to "regions beyond" where we will not be making claims on another man's work, there will be persecution because Satan does not take inroads of light into his dark kingdom sitting down. There are also perils on the journeys that have to be faced everyday when we leave our "comfort zones." The work itself generates pressures in which decisions have to be made and the servant must accept the consequences of those decisions himself - whether they be good or bad. Another of the difficulties are the attacks of one kind or another that are placed on the worker. Temptations, trials, tests and even personal problems of health, finances and the maintenance of an effective devotional life are in jeopardy when busy in the work. Yet God is sufficient to meet all these needs from all of the abundant supply of His grace.

We can learn from Paul's example that for the good of others, there are costs we must pay. His good jealousy for the Corinthian church was because he had a right to be jealous over God had committed to his care. We cannot avoid the cost involved emotionally and in other ways when we carry out the work of the Lord. His generosity to the church teaches us that in our labors for God's people, we do not expect reimbursement, but have given to the Lord what we have received from others. His anxiety for that church reminds us that we will never avoid the pain, problems and blessings of spiritual fatherhood. None of the things that happen to us escapes the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He knows. His interests in the assembly is greater than ours, and He knows the future. We will do what we must and leave the all results to Him.

**2 Corinthians 11:28.** *"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."*

#### **A FATHER'S LOVE.**

Energy expended - labor not ended - children offended - family depended - self-interest suspended:  
A father's care.

Burdens to bear - enemies are near - false apostles to fear - does anyone care - no one to share:  
A father's burden.

The potential is great - there's a cost I must make - there's responsibility to take - a thirst there to slake:  
A father's work.

There are foes all around - strange doctrines abound - brass and cymbals give sound - all threaten to ground:  
A father's defense.

Hands of entreaty - words of simplicity - help for the needy - the Gospel preached freely - concern for reality:  
A father's love.

Giving wholeheartedly - praying unceasingly - meeting needs diligently - living consistently:  
A father's actions.

Work unappreciated - rumors unsubstantiated - challenges unmitigated - charges undesigned:  
A father's commitment.

He labors on because he loves - he gives himself because he chooses - he doesn't quit and never loses:  
A father's reward.

One comes in private and gives him thanks - not from the high, but the lowest ranks - and the father suffers all attacks:  
A father loves.

He knows the end will make it worth it all - he knows, and answers the Chief Shepherd's call - he will rejoice when all at Jesus' feet will fall:  
A father's love.

He will see down the lines of worshiping saints - he will see those cared for in bad circumstance - he will be able to see in a moment's glance:  
The value of a father's love.

To hear the praises of those he loved - to recognize them bowing before their Lord - to see them in heaven is his reward: The result of a father's love.

**"O Father of all fathers: please give to those who are caring for the churches, a sense of the value of the work they are doing. There are many who feel uncared for and unappreciated. Perhaps there is some way, Father, that an encouraging word may be passed on to the fathers. A lot of praise goes to instructors, but not a lot to fathers. I**

**thank You for those who are real in their role as spiritual parents. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

## **2nd Corinthians 12**

### **LIFE'S EXPERIENCES**

How is it possible to pass through the challenges of life's events without getting proud of our accomplishments, bitter at our disappointments, or despairing at our failures? A review of the past is not out of place when we get into hard places and start to question ourselves and the validity of our commitments. When Paul was being challenged, ignored and disparaged by those at Corinth who were being influence by false teachers, the Spirit of God led him to take a look back over his life of service for the Lord, and put it into writing for the benefit of others. Paul was no stranger to visions and revelations. The visions God gave to men were supernatural sights that affect them at the moment. Revelations are truths that were given at that time as lessons to be learned. Neither of them, are for self-exaltation, but are like divinely appointed gifts given by God. They are for the benefit of other people.

Paul had visions at various times in his life. He saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus road at the time of his conversion and calling. It was a revelation to him of the divine power the Spirit of God would use through him to reach kings, to take the Gospel to the Gentiles and to reach out to his own people. the Jews. He had another vision relating to his commission that led him into Europe and guided him in his service. The revelation at that time had to do with divine purposes as God was leading him to various places to reach specific people. Even as the pressure came heavy against him in his service, God gave his visions relating to his own comfort and care. In this way he had a revelation of the fact of God's divine preservation through the trials ahead. When God chooses to honor a person, what others have to say about him to others, or even to his face, does not really have reason to discourage him. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We have experienced the guidance of God and know his grace is in no way limited in meeting our emotional needs.

Physical needs have a way of taking over everything in our lives if we are not careful. There are some lessons we are given to learn through the experience of physical pain and suffering. God has allowed suffering in His people for reasons He knows are beneficial. Paul was no stranger to pain and discomfort. He had been hungry and thirsty. He had been beaten and stoned. He had been attacked by robbers and had been kept in cold dungeons. He had experienced dangers on land and sea. Most of those problems came and went. But he had one nagging, constant pain he could not get rid of and it was always there - "a thorn in the flesh." We may never understand why God gives us chronic physical conditions that seem to ensure that we are always in a measure of discomfort.

It is easy for people to tell us to "grin and bear it" but that is not easy to do. In fact, it is impossible. First, we need to understand our spiritual condition is more important that our physical well-being. In those times when we are a condition where all we can do is call on God for relief, we are actually safer that when we are free to do what we want. God honored Paul by giving him a sight of glory. To have a sight of the third heaven, God's dwelling place, was overpowering to him to the extent he couldn't speak of it. His physical condition kept him consciously aware of who he was, and the state of health which he could do nothing about, so he would not glory in the unique sight he had of heaven.

A lesson we can learn for ourselves is that when God allows us to have some unusual insight into what we have in Christ, we will never be the same person afterward. To be living on the high ground of spiritual awareness in Beulah-land make the affairs of earth, and the discouragements of life seem quite trivial in comparison. Paul learned about God's goodness when God humbled him and kept him that way by leaving him with "A thorn in the flesh" of which he was always conscious. It is possible for some success in the work of the Lord to make us think we did it, or at least our ability made it happen. That leads to pride which is a terrible sin with which we have to contend. It is important for us to remember it is God who provides all we need, to do all He intends. Obstacles may be blessings when they lead us to "trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not on our own understanding." When we recognize our limitations and rely on God for our strength, then we realize the work is God's and is being done by Him through His weak servant.

When we are in the place where we have faced our inability, and have committed ourselves to fulfill our responsibility, and have humbly and honestly presented to God our availability, then there are no limits to divine possibility. In that condition of bodily weakness when we admit to our limitations, our character is deepened and our worship of God is more meaningful, deeper and fuller than before. When God in His goodness humbles us, the result is a more balanced life. Physical suffering is not really a barrier to spiritual service. Not all sickness if caused by sin. Sometimes it is to bring us to maturity and to glorify God. Effective service comes when we rest in God's word and, in faith, trust Him to do in and through us whatever He

desires. That is when God's grace is shown to us in a special way to help us. There is sufficient grace given to enable us to do His will. And there is strengthening grace to bring to pass what God intended from us in the first place.

Sometimes when children refuse to listen to their father and will not obey him, he has to make them ashamed of themselves in some way. Paul had to do that with the Corinthian believers. They should have been honoring him and "boasting" about him. Instead they were critical of him like disobedient and spoiled children. So, with the objective of warning them about their attitudes, examining them about their sincerity, and vindicating himself as one who has authority over them, he goes further in his corrective ministry. He had experienced, and effectively used the sign gifts given to him by the power of the Holy Spirit. He had used the gift of healing. In fact, he had used those gifts more than all of them. They had seen with their own eyes the evidence of his spiritual authority. Even the obstacles he had to overcome had not hindered nor stopped the work he did.

It is often best in our labors for God to let the evidence speak for itself. But occasionally there is a reason to reiterate how God has used us if the purpose is to help others and glorify God. Paul shamed the Corinthians with the remark that he had done the same for them as he did with all the other churches, except he did not want to be a burden to them. He did not want any pay from them, he did not want to be fed by them nor housed by them. He paid his own way there "lest I be chargeable to any one of you." He only wanted to strengthen them in the Lord so he did nothing to enrich himself at their expense. The abilities and gifts people may have does not keep them from being carnal. Doubts about spiritual things and complaints about spiritual people are often expected from those who live carnal lives. Paul shamed them for their lack of commendation of the ones who brought them the Gospel and nurtured them in the things of God. He shamed them for their lack of appreciation for the grace of God shown toward those who had ministered to them. He shamed them for their lack of consecration. Yet in spite of all of this, he still refers to them as "dearly beloved."

Unreasonable people who are unreliable in their conduct, ungrateful for the help given them, and unthankful for the blessings they have received from others, are usually untrustworthy. But we are still able to express love in whatever way is suitable to their condition of soul. In love we must do like Paul did: warn them of the consequences of unscriptural activities in which they are involved, and of false teachers. We need to teach them the way of recovery, and urge them to act on it immediately.

**2 Corinthians 12:9.** *"And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

#### **THE POWER OF CHRIST.**

God has His reasons, it is not mine to contend,  
Or fully understand, or even try to defend  
The actions of life that brought this trouble to pass.  
I really don't really know, and I'm not going to ask.  
It is enough for me that His grace has supplied,  
More than enough to keep me satisfied.  
That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The pain in my body and the pain in my soul,  
I find hard to contend with, because I'm not really whole.  
The uncertainty of the future, and failures of the past,  
I can't really deal with, unless willingly I cast  
Every burden and confusion on Him who I love.  
Then His grace full, sufficient enables me to prove -  
That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The pressures from without, from those who look on,  
Make me ponder too often on the work I have done.  
Rather, let me lay it all down at the Master's pierced feet,  
That my joy and His glory will never compete.  
He's been pleased to use the little that I've been able to give,  
So that God may be honored in this life I now live.  
That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

This power is not self, for the self-life is weak.  
This power is not will, nor for will-power to seek.  
This power is not mind, for intelligence can fail.  
This power is not prestige, or honor to hail.

This power is not strength in the flesh to attain.  
This power is not beauty or attraction to gain -  
That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

No, the paradox is this - in weakness, God gives strength.  
For the glory is God's from the start to its length.  
Grace fully sufficient, is given to meet every need  
God determines the provision - it's not based on my greed.  
For the power to produce what God intended at first,  
Is by Him fully supplied - in Him only I trust -  
That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

**“Father God, there are many questions I have that I do not need an answer to. But sometimes I still wonder “Why?” So please, when there is no clear, unmistakable answer to such questions, give me the sense to not keep questioning. In this way I can truly express my unreserved trust. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

## **2nd Corinthians 13**

### **CARE: A DEMONSTRATION OF GRACE**

When a person truly cares for others, that will be seen in a number of different ways. Faithful warnings are one way real, loving care is demonstrated. Paul gave such a warning to the believers at Corinth in writing, so they could examine themselves ahead of time in regards to the reality of their Christian testimony, and be prepared for a personal visit from him. Such an exhortation to genuinely repent is needed when things are wrong among God's people. To establish and strengthen Christian testimony by corrective ministry is a divine principle. Truth has to be affirmed so that no one can mistake what it is and what must be done to return to commitment to the truth. Look for proof of what is right, and expose false teaching and false teachers for what they are.

To examine and determine the genuineness of one's profession of faith in Christ is done by comparing what we are like with the Lord Jesus Christ. Was He weak when He was on the cross? That is what the world looking on thought, but God's strength is "made perfect in weakness." The tests and standards of the world are not the standards of spiritual success. Christ humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. The true servant humbles himself like his Master. That is not weakness. There were false witnesses who testified against the Lord Jesus, and there are false witnesses who will speak against His servants. The reality of Christian profession of such a person needs to be proved to see if whoever does such a thing has the life of God in him. Each needs to examine himself to see if they are saved or not. False teaching is not evidence of divine life in a person. Is there evidence of the Holy Spirit bearing witness with your spirit as proof of your new life? Do you have love for God's people or are you one who is looking for flaws in them and their lives to justify your criticism? Is the life you live consistent in righteousness and is it a blessing to others? Have you been separated to God from the world, or are you joining in with the ungodly? These tests as we examine ourselves need to be applied lest one find out they are lost when it is too late to be saved.

If as a result of the Corinthian believers examining themselves in the searchlight of God's holiness, they found themselves to be genuine believers, then they would have to admit Paul was genuine in his apostolic authority because it was his message they believed when they heard the Gospel at the beginning, not that of the false apostles. We measure a spiritual ministry by its content, not by the skill or method of delivery. In the past and also in the present, there are those who speak "great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Such apostasy needs to be confronted and exposed for what it really is.

Christian character is a result of truth that has been taught, being affirmed and lived out in the lives of believers. It is up to us to be godly so we can live godly. In the end, God's truth will always triumph, but it is sad when lives of believers are wasted by following the charismatic approach of those "who speak evil of those things which they know not." These people are "spots in feasts of charity." They are like sunken rocks just under the surface of the water that tear out the bottom of a vessel and make it a shipwreck. Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ who warned the Corinthians of those "who should walk after their own ungodly lusts."

In contrast to the sharp warnings Paul gave, was the assurance he gave them as an example of divine grace. It was himself, who in his final encouraging words, prayed for the maturity of his spiritual children. The sharply written words were sent so he would not have to use sharp spoken words when he came to them had spoke to them personally. The writing was to build them up, not to put down fellow believers to their destruction. There are a number of ways the Lord ministers to His people. He does that through the truth of God ministered by those to whom the Holy Spirit has given a message. In our day we have the word of God

in the scriptures. The Lord also ministers to us through the holy fellowship of His people who share "like precious faith." He even ministers to our needs in allowing suffering to keep us from self-glory and pride. All of these ministries are to fit us for service. A balanced ministry does not come from only one person or from isolating ourselves from the Lord's people. One of the purposes of a called-out company of saints is to provide them with the spiritual nourishment that they will not get by being isolated from other believers. The desire to "be left alone: I have my Bible and my God, and I don't need other Christians to help me grow" - attitude, is a sign of full-blown spiritual pride, which is probably the worst kind.

The divine provision of unconditional grace extended to them, made possible all they needed for correction and for living together in faith and fellowship. Grace, love and peace are the results of responses we make toward God and His truth. To "be perfect" is a promise that maturity in the Christian life was, and still is, possible even after failure. Being "of good comfort" is an assurance of our security in Christ because of the riches of God's grace. To "be of one mind" in unity with other believers is not an impossible thing, but it can only happen if our focus of attention is on the same object. In this case it would be on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and the Gathering Center of the local church in His name alone. "Living in peace" is the harmony that results from the choices of the saints to commit themselves to be like Christ in our lives. When that happens His peace, that our Lord gave us is a reality we experience together. When these charges are real to us as a result of experiencing "the God of love and peace" in our personal and corporate assembly life will be assured. Fellowship with other believers will be a glad experience in which we can look each other in the eye and know this fellowship is affirmed.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the basis of our relationship with each other and with the Savior. It is by His grace we are saved and by the knowledge of Him "grace and peace are multiplied. The love of God has established the fact that we are not our own. God's love in sending His Son has given Him the right of ownership over every one He has saved by grace. "The communion of the Holy Ghost" is how fellowship is maintained between God's people. When these things are with us, there is evidence of the grace of God seen in us that will enable us to understand, and perhaps endure things that happen to us like happened to Paul. The affirmation principle reviews for us what is real and important. It will separate us from, and empower us to reject, all the counterfeit messages that seek to turn us away from the truth of God. To affirm the principles of God's word in a perishing world is one of the reasons we are still here.

**2 Corinthians 13:3.** *"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you."*

### **PROOF OF CHRIST.**

What is it you want to see – mighty miracles? Open your eyes look at yourselves and remember what you were before you heard the Gospel. Remember the hole you were in. The pit from which you could not escape. Recall the first time you heard the herald who called out the good news of salvation and deliverance. Think again about the moment the light of the Gospel shined into your soul as the Spirit of God revealed the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior, and imparted new life to you. **YOU ARE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING.**

What is it you want to see – a charismatic speaker? Great swelling words are typical of those who are not telling the truth or who have "men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Words that are slickly put together are not always true words. The movers of audiences are not necessarily movers of men's hearts. Plain, simple words that clarify the truth of the Gospel – words spoken from a heart of love for the souls of the listeners – words that impart light and life – words that bring "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" are: **THE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING.**

What is it you want to see – a great campaigner? Large retinues of people gathering around a skillful leader of people doesn't give the proof that is needed. Crowds that jam the streets are very impressive and make observers consider the value of the message. Preachers asking for huge sums of money give the impression that much is being done here in the name of the Lord. Rich hucksters of the "other Gospels" seem to give proof of their effectiveness in the kingdom of God – but these great movements of men are not **THE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING.**

What is it you want to see – a forceful general? Orders are loudly given that make people run and jump to obey the directives. Demands of instant and unquestioning obedience to act on them, may give the impression that this man knows what he is talking about. The "do's and don'ts" of his demands, urge people to do what he says or be lost. A legal form with its rules and regulations, leave the followers with a false confidence that all is well if I meet the demands. This is not **THE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING.**

What is it you want to see – a dynamic personality? One who is able to rally people around his personality, seems to many, to be proof of his calling. He is able to blend all differences into a sort of collage of beliefs that include everyone, and makes everyone feels good. Such a personality must be, in the eyes of many, a man or woman sent from God. He seems to overcome all obstacles with his ardor and impetuosity. But – this is not THE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING.

The results of a servant's ministry: lives transformed through the power of God working through his preaching; souls saved who were in the darkness of sin but now living in the light of God's truth; believers whose commitment to God's word is obvious to all who hear them and see their zeal for good works; and on-going work of God in an area where much labor has been expended; the name and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ honored; submission to God's will by those who have responded to the instruction passed on from the faithful servant – these are THE PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING through His servant. This kind of proof cannot honestly be denied.

**“O God and Father of all that believe: many voices are sounding around us here, but I give thanks that the Holy Spirit has given a discerning ear. I believe I know when I can hear Christ speaking through His servants and when it is only the skillful words of a well-trained speaker. So often there are many that are led astray by simple preferences. I desire to have always an ear tuned to the sound of faithful words spoken by faithful men, even though the words may be hard to bear. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**