

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

For those who have not studied the Second Letter of Paul to the church at Corinth we give a warm welcome. For those who have previously studied the Epistle it should be a time of gleaning even further insights. This letter not only has much to teach us, but it is the letter of all Paul's epistles which, perhaps more than any other, brings us to the heart of the apostle, for at his heart is the ministry which God has given him. In 4:1–2 (cf. I Cor. 4:1–2) Paul wrote, 'Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God' (*NRSV*). He speaks elsewhere of the privilege of ministry having been of grace, but here it is of mercy. In Paul's mind mercy is the greatest thing that God can give.

Introductory Study: The Writer of the Epistle—Paul

Saul of Tarsus—The Opponent of the Gospel

To understand a letter we need to understand the writer. In the case of the two letters of Paul to the Corinthian church this is not difficult. We can assess his attitude to his converts by the coverage of the Book of the Acts, and the substance of both Epistles. Even so, we have a fund of biographical materials not only in the Book of the Acts but also in all letters which we call 'Pauline'.¹ The Acts shows him as a man furiously opposed to Christ and to the early church; a witness to the death of Stephen and, from that point onwards, a ruthless persecutor of Christian believers. In I Timothy 1:13 he wrote, 'I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him [Christ]'; in I Corinthians 15:9, 'For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God', and in Acts 26:11, 'And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities'.

Paul—Man of Revelation: Revealing the Mystery

In I Corinthians 15:3 Paul had written, 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures'. Of this magnificent message Paul speaks in Galatians 1:11–12, 'For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ'. To this he adds in verses 15 and 16, 'But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles [nations]'. It is in these two verses that we see the heart of Paul.²

¹ Not all New Testament scholars think all letters under the name of Paul are necessarily his. On the whole, nevertheless, they would call them 'Pauline', meaning they generally carry the thought and theology which is consonant with the accepted letters of Paul.

² Romans 1:5–6; 15:18; 16:25–26 show that Paul knew his ministry was to bring the nations to 'the obedience of faith'. This conformed with Old Testament teaching that one day all nations would submit to the Messiah of God. This helps us to understand Paul's unswerving purpose in ministry.

Grace had set him apart for the gospel before his birth. God at a point in history was pleased to reveal His Son in Saul of Tarsus, and so came the revelation that was not from man or through man, but which was Christ himself. This revelation was with a view to what Paul had been called for—to ‘preach him among the Gentiles’. Paul could not have a revelation of Christ within him and then *not* preach him to the nations. This was the ever-burning necessity for Paul. To know the gospel—to be transformed by it—is to preach it burningly. Paul believed there was no power to redeem man but the gospel, and that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation.

Paul the True Apostle

Paul was not only a proclaimer: he was an apostle, the founder of churches. He was not only the founder of churches but was as a father and nurse to them (I Thess. 1:7–12) and always held his converts in his heart (Phil. 1:7). As we will see he was passionately concerned for the Corinthian church, for he had had news of some disaffection for him, some resentment at the discipline he would minister to those who were his converts. So he tells of his pain for them, ‘For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you’. He speaks of his inner restlessness when as yet Titus had not returned to him to tell him the mind of the Corinthian church, ‘When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia’. He then cries ‘Thanks be to God!’, which many commentators take to mean that Titus had come at that point of time with the good news (cf. 7:13–16).

Paul the Man of Authority

The letter opens with these words, ‘Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God’, and to be an apostle of Christ was the utmost in the order of the proclamation of the gospel and in the founding and fostering of churches. In Romans 15:14–21 Paul lays out his apostleship. For him it was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles—the nations—(cf. Rom. 1:16–17; 15:18–32). Authority lay with the apostles, as the Acts and Epistles well show, but Paul denied in II Corinthians 1:24 that ‘we lord it over your faith’. Yet authority was such that he claimed, ‘We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete’. He asked whether the Corinthians really thought Paul and his band had need to justify themselves before the church, or was it that in his coming many would be dis comforted. On all grounds Paul was only, ever, for them, but that did not mean he overlooked evil when it raised itself in many forms among the brethren. In chapters 11 and 12 Paul speaks of his own innate weakness, but this is no reason for the ‘super-apostles’ to boast over him. When these special persons have a record like his of persecutions received and suffering endured, then they can, perhaps, make boasting of their so-called apostleship.

We look forward, then, to the spiritual riches of this Epistle, and are grateful for the man Paul whom the Father and Christ raised up to be the true apostle in the foundational days of the churches. His work is exceptionally valuable, seeing he was, right from the beginning, in the matter of the gospel and the bringing of it to the whole world. We are eager to hear all we can from this special source.

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An Introduction to the Letter

In Acts 18:1–18—Paul’s second missionary journey—we read of the founding of the church at Corinth. Paul remained at Corinth for 18 months (v. 11), teaching. Towards the end of that time the Jews sought to have Paul indicted before the local tribunal but failed. After a time Paul returned to Antioch in Syria, passing through Ephesus on the way, but only staying a short time, promising he would return for a longer period, which he did on his third missionary journey, thus founding the church there. In Acts 19 we see that Paul had a fine ministry in Ephesus for a period of some three years. Acts 20:1–6 is thought to be the time when the present II Corinthians was written. It is thought that Paul wrote four letters in all to the church, though not all at this time. Studies on I Corinthians show us the nature of that church, its problems and Paul’s advice concerning them. The second letter was written from somewhere in Macedonia about the year A.D. 56. It appears Paul had visited the church a second time—although this visit is not recorded in Acts—the visit being occasioned by Timothy’s report to Paul on the church at Corinth, which explains ‘the third time I am coming to you’ (II Cor. 12:14; 13:1). The third letter—often called ‘the severe letter’—was written (7:8), and was painful both to the Corinthians and Paul. Titus brought news to Paul of the church at Corinth that was good. They had accepted Titus as Paul’s messenger (II Cor. 7:13–16) and his severe advice, especially about the person who had caused distress to Paul and the church (2:5–11; cf. I Cor. 5:1–5) and so Paul was relieved (cf. 2:12ff.; 7:5ff.), and wrote this fourth letter, now called ‘II Corinthians’.

Paul’s Reason for Writing the Letter

Roughly speaking the Epistle divides into sections which reveal the purpose of Paul’s writing.

- (a) 1:1–2 gives the normal salutation and establishes apostolic authority.
- (b) 1: 3–11 speaks of blessing in suffering, a testimony to Paul’s apostolic ministry.
- (c) 1:12—7:16 is a long section justifying Paul’s attitude and actions towards the Corinthian church. A reasoned defence of the apostolic ministry, it is subdivided into:
 - (i) 1:12—2:13—explaining Paul’s seeming vacillation in coming—or not coming to Corinth.
 - (ii) 2:14–17—the triumph of Christ in the apostolic life and ministry.
 - (iii) 3:1–18—the superiority of the new covenant, grace and freedom to that of the former covenant .
 - (iv) 4:1–18—Paul’s faithfulness to his calling, the nature of suffering that always comes with the proclamation of the gospel, yet which brings grace to more and more people.
 - (v) 5:1–21—the hope of resurrection and the new body in the face of the judgment of Christ, and the motivation this doctrine brings for the proclamation of the gospel, which is that of the new creation through the Cross and the reconciliation that is based on that work of the Cross.

- (vi) 6:1–2—an appeal to receive grace fully, but which (6:3–13) will be accompanied by the ministry of suffering—something which inevitably results in separation from that which is polluted and polluting (6:14—7:1).
 - (vii) 7:2–16—Paul’s heart opened to tell of the sorrow he felt regarding the writing and receiving of the ‘severe letter’, but then his joy at knowing it had been fully received, through his messenger Titus.
- (d)8:1—9:15 is a dissertation on the whole matter of the monetary collection for the impoverished church at Jerusalem, and a biblical exposition of the principles of giving.
- (e)10:1—13:10 is a special argument and defence regarding the matters which have arisen in the Corinthian church because of the coming of those Paul called ‘super-apostles’, i.e. those who make out their ministry to be superior to Paul’s and call his in question. This, Paul says, may force him—when he comes—to bring correction, discipline and so a change in the wrong thinking of some members. In this section Paul again introduces the matter of his suffering, showing that he is no ‘super-apostle’ but is, in fact, a real apostle. On the one hand he has been, vision-wise, exalted to heaven, and on the other he is essentially and wholly weak, thus being a living exposition of the grace of God.

Conclusion: The Purpose and Value of the Book

We have seen, briefly, that the church at Corinth was a powerful one, formed by the apostolic preaching of Paul, and covered pastorally by him. The first letter indicates that the church had many problems, some of them quite serious. Some of the problems were answered in what we call I Corinthians and perhaps in another, more severe letter. Paul, as spiritual founder of the church, is anxious for his converts, and he has them very much in his heart. His love for them is deep and wide.

A new problem had come into the Christian community, namely the invasion of it by some who called themselves ‘super’ or ‘mega’ apostles. Perhaps these were names or designations Paul had given to them in irony. Many in the church were tempted to belittle their founder, and to look at the more flamboyant and demonstrative persons who had come amongst them. Paul’s reasons, then, for writing this letter are to counter the charges and criticisms which have arisen against himself. In the process of penning the epistle he opens up the whole subject of the ministry that suffers, and the necessity for weakness that the grace of God may work effectively. What we must see is that, whilst Paul’s ministry as an apostle came in for various criticisms, yet the principles for his ministry are the same as obtain for our ministries today.

In this part of our Introduction we have scarcely begun to open up the great themes of II Corinthians, and to do this we must first get a bird’s-eye view of the book, such as we have given above. We then need to study the text in detail so that we pick up and enlarge and give due value to the various themes and subjects. The text which follows will help us to do this, although it is not intended to be a detailed commentary.

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Chapter One: Verses 1–11

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus: The former enemy of the gospel—Saul of Tarsus—was turned by Christ and the Spirit into the great apostle to the Gentiles. He who had once burned with zeal *against* Israel’s Messiah now burned with zeal *for* him. Commissioned on the road to Damascus when he met Christ, and three days afterwards in Damascus through Ananias, he became the willing slave of Jesus (Rom. 1:1). The Corinthians had seen this powerfully, for it was through him they had come to Christ. Since he was an apostle *by the will of God*, they would have to listen to him as though he were Christ himself to them—whatever other messengers purporting to be apostles they may have heard (cf. 11:1–21. See Galatians 1:1). ***Timothy our brother:*** Timothy had come to the gospel through Paul (Acts 16:1–5) and whilst here is ‘our brother’ yet he was a son to Paul (I Cor. 4:17; I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2) who had commissioned him in the gospel. The Corinthians would have known him as one of the apostolic band.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: Paul understood *To the church of God* and the whole idea of the church of Christ—so many he had founded, and so deep a doctrine he had of the Body of Christ as his other Epistles show. ***which is at Corinth.*** The marvel of it in one locale—Corinth—showed how much on the earth it is, with its unseen Lord in heaven as its Head. Corinth—known as ‘the cesspit of the East’—was the miracle of grace Paul now addressed. ***with all the saints.*** I Corinthians 1:26–31 shows that the saints were drawn from socially, intellectually and economically material that was not outstanding, but which had been wonderfully transformed. The word ‘saints’ probably had its origins in Daniel 7:13ff. but the doctrine of ‘sanctification by faith’ (Acts 15:8; 26:18; cf. I Cor. 1:2, 6:11). A saint is one who is admitted to the true worship of God and is used by God in his service. ***who are in the whole of Achaia.*** Achaia was really the whole area south of the province of Macedonia (cf. I Thess. 1:7).

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace. Undoubtedly this salutation containing the two great words ‘grace’ (*charis*) and peace (*eirene*) were well known to all believers, but they were words filled with rich meaning. Having their origins in God’s covenant with Israel (cf. Exod. 34:6–7) Christ had given them new a deeper meaning. Grace is the working of the Persons of the Son and Father—***from God our Father and***—working firstly to bring salvation, and then to keep, sustain and mature the saints (cf. 6:1–2). Peace (Heb. *shalom*) carries the ideas of serenity, security, assurance, reconciliation with God (cf. Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:15–17) and with all in the community. Both peace and grace come from the Father and ***the Lord Jesus Christ***—a term which, when broken into its 3 components carries great meaning, ‘Lord’ meaning at least the ‘adonai’ (Lord) of the O.T. and at most ‘Yahweh’ (LORD). I Corinthians 12:3 show this designation can only be understood by the Holy Spirit and articulated through him. ‘Jesus’ means ‘Yah our Saviour’ (Matt. 1:21) whilst ‘Christ’ (Gk: *Christos*; Heb. *mashiach*) or ‘Messiah’ had long been understood by Israel as its coming Deliverer.

1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

Blessed be. Not only are the hearers to be blessed but Paul—as often—breaks into doxology³ towards God, in this case *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, whom he worships. Paul's doxologies are many and are spontaneously uttered as—time and again—the greatness and goodness of God bursts in upon him afresh. This is often as he discusses the great themes of grace, peace, mercy, love and hope. His statement is profound that the man Jesus—always dependent upon God—has as his Father God himself (cf. Eph. 1:3) since it places Christ before us as a member of the Triune Godhead and so is a statement of unutterable depth. *the Father of mercies.* a beautiful statement can mean simply—but wonderfully—'the merciful Father' or 'the Father as the source of all mercy', since there is no mercy or, Exodus 6, 7—the revelation of Yahweh's glory—says 'The Lord, the Lord, merciful'. Mercy is often appealed to, but is never—so to speak—a right.⁴ Paul—our context shows—has known the mercy of God⁵ in his suffering in Asia (v.8ff.). this, too, is a beautiful statement. **God of all comfort,** All true comfort—a word used 10 times in verses 3–7—proceeds only from the Father. 'Comfort has the idea of encouragement (cf.2:7; 7:6, 7,13; I Thess 3:7; 4:18; II Thess. 2:17). The verb *parakaleo*—'to exhort' is the one which gives us the translation of the Holy Spirit as 'Comforter' (John 16:6, AV), otherwise translated as 'the Counsellor'. Paul had been in need of comfort.

1:4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

who comforts us in all our affliction. Paul is saying that even as he writes there are afflictions, continuing afflictions—and it has always been so with him and those who proclaim the gospel.⁶ Later, in chapters 4, 6 and 11 we will see the great need for 'comfort'—exhortation, encouragement and the assistance of grace. **so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.** Yet suffering is not simply a thing one bears with fortitude and on one's own, but it brings sympathy and understanding of others, and helps to share on the same plane of such suffering (cf. I Cor. 12:25, 26; Col. 2:24). Thus suffering is immensely profitable and this we will see as we read on into other chapters⁷.

1:5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 1:6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 1:7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

The sufferings⁸ we experience *cannot outweigh* the comfort that comes to us. God more than matches the suffering with such support and strength, and its end is always glory (Rom.8:17ff.). In 4:16 this suffering is not heavy: in fact it is light. So see 11:23 and 12:10. Suffering is not without point on any score for in Philippians 1:29 it is a gift, and in I Peter 4:13 believers are enjoined, 'rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed'. Suffering and glory cannot be separated

³ It has been said that all good theology is doxological: it is in the midst of praise that we truly see God. It is in truly seeing God that we cannot do otherwise than praise.

⁴ Archbishop Trench once said that grace has to do with the guilt of sin, but mercy to do with the misery of sin. Mercy relieves from terrible misery, as its contexts generally indicate.

⁵ Paul speaks of God's mercy as saving him (I Tim. 1:13) and the gift of ministry being mercy (II Cor. 4:1).

⁶ Doubtless mixed with these external sufferings—things which come upon the apostolic band—there was Paul's suffering in regard to the Corinthians church and his 'severe letter'.

⁷ See especially 4:7–18. Cf. 6:3–22; 11:22–29.

⁸ See my little book *The Fellowship of Suffering* (NCPI) where the matter of suffering is more fully worked out

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

First the point of suffering is the comfort and salvation of the Corinthians. ‘Comfort’ as we have seen is the strengthening of believers, and salvation precedes this, but here salvation is also used in the sense that it is found in Philippians 2:12—the pursuance of present salvation working out what has already been inworked by God, so that it is a process following the crisis of conversion to salvation. Here, too, the suffering is spread across the church, and the suffering of the whole is a fellowship⁹: those who suffer can teach and help others who suffer and together all learn patient endurance. In Romans 5:5 ‘suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character’; James 1:2 ‘the testing of your faith produces steadfastness’; in I Peter 4:14 it is because of suffering that ‘the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you’.¹⁰ It is a comforting knowledge to the Corinthians to know that the suffering they endure is not peculiar to them. Peter (I Pet. 5:9) says, ‘the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world’.

Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Paul now is assured—despite the rumours that had come through concerning the Corinthian church that they too are not only set for suffering but will benefit by it, and that as the Pauline apostolic band has received comfort—solace and strengthening—so will the Corinthian church follow suit.

1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 1:9 Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; 1:10 he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.

The facts of this passage—verses 8–10—are that the Pauline band had suffered deeply. For Corinthian triumphalists—if there were really any such—this would be wholly unacceptable (cf. 2:14). How deeply they had suffered does not seem to be known to Paul’s readers, but the fact that they had was certainly known. News would be brought to them. Paul had not mentioned the suffering in the first Letter so that it must have been of recent happening. ‘Utterly, unbearably crushed’ are strong terms and many are the conjectures. What is noteworthy is that the sufferings Paul describes in chapters 6 and 11 have *already happened*. Many of those sufferings are not recorded in the Book of Acts, or the Pauline Epistles so it could be any of them. Paul does not disclose what happened, but he does speak of the intensity and almost lethal nature of it.

but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead;

Humans try to rely on themselves, and even believers attempt to do the same. In this case—in Asia—it had to be God who rescued them, and so it brought them into reliance upon Him. So must the Corinthians learn this lesson—time and again. Only God raises—can raise—from the dead.

1:10 he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

These things can happen—almost certainly will, but the experience of deliverance builds solid hope for future deliverance. The intimate nearness of God to his people is a great power by which to face opposition, persecution and suffering.

⁹ See Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24; cf. I Corinthians 12:26.

¹⁰ IN the NRSV it is translated ‘the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you’.

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A Precis-Commentary on the Letter

Note: This precis is issued to all in the class so that they can read ahead, or having read a chapter can revise it when necessary. It is not to be used in place of the more detailed commentary. This precis will not be used in Class Lectures.

Chapter One

Verses 1–2: The typical Pauline salutation to the church. This asserts the authority of Paul as an Apostle, thus authenticating what he writes in the letter, and the doctrine which he insists is apostolic. It is written to a particular location and so is apt for the church to which it is sent. ‘Grace’ and ‘peace’ are always found together, grace being the basis of the Gospel which the apostles preached, and peace (Heb. *shalom*; Greek *eirene*) being the result of being justified by grace (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:1).

Verses 3–7: Paul refers to the principle of suffering, then of receiving divine comfort, and so having the ministry of comfort to others. In verse 3 Paul blesses¹¹ the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ. That Paul should bless shows the rich state of his being as he sets out to pen the letter. Often Paul’s richest theology lies in his doxologies. Speaking of God as Father brings the whole principle of God’s Fatherhood to the readers (cf. Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5f.). ‘Father of mercies’ is a remarkable statement.

Verses 8–11: Paul recounts the terrible experience ‘we’ (*he* or *they*, i.e. both?) had sustained in Asia, which proved almost to be lethal. Paul does not explain the actual event but it was certainly a dangerous and demanding one.

Verses 12–14: Paul insists that what he does has been in purity of motive and intention, praying they will understand.

Verses 15–24: It seems Paul could be accused of vacillation in his plans to come to Corinth, but he protests that this was not the case. He points to the firmness and faithfulness of God in Christ Jesus (i.e. no vacillation) and claims his action was similarly faithful and truthful. Indeed it was to spare them (pain) that he had not come to Corinth as promised.

Chapter Two

Verses 1–4: Paul insists that he intentionally refrained from coming but wrote in pain and tears, not to spare them the truth, but to show his love for them, and thus to prepare them for his coming to the church.

Verses 5–11: Someone at the church had been strongly disciplined. Was it the man of I Corinthians 5:5—given over to Satan? We do not know, but certainly he had received severe discipline, and now it was time for forgiveness by the majority. It does not seem that he was set against Paul, primarily. Love must now restore this one, for otherwise Satan could use the occasion powerfully.

¹¹ Blessing is a great theme throughout Scripture since God blessed sentient creation and in particular the man and woman together in Genesis 1. From that point onwards God blessing Man, Man blessing God, and humans blessing one another is a constant and significant theme.

Verses 12–13: Paul, having sent the letter written tearfully, was restless to know the outcome, so much so that he could not use the opportunity for ministry afforded him at Troas, and had gone on to Macedonia. (In 7:5 Paul takes up the narrative again, having spoken from 2:24 to 7:5 on the apostolic ministry.)

Verses 14–17: This is the beginning of the main subject of this letter, namely the apostolic ministry. It may be that Titus has come to Paul and Paul is expressing rich praise for the good outcome, but in any case he is here saying that this ministry has two aspects, one of life unto life, and the other death unto death. It is God who leads them in the ministry through Christ. Their ministry is truth, i.e. no peddling of the word of God.

Chapter Three

Verses 1–3: Does Paul require commendation to present himself to them—the Corinthians (cf. chs 10–12; I Cor. chs 2–4)? No! Generally messengers had to have credentials (Acts 9:2; 22:5; 18:27; Rom. 16:1), such credentials—regarding Paul—were written on the Corinthian believers’ hearts for they were the outcome of the preaching of Paul—they thus authenticated it, yet it (their lives) was also the very writing of the Spirit.

Verses 4–6: Paul knows of no self-recommendation. As 1:9 shows, their reliance is only on God, so here, God has given them—the apostolic team—the power and capacity to serve in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant rested on the written code of laws, but the New is dependent on the Spirit, i.e. they ministered not laws but the Gospel *in the Spirit*. In this way Paul is about to contrast law and grace.

Verses 7–11: Now comes the contrast of the glory of the two Covenants. He uses a Jewish way of reasoning (a *midrash*—a semi-allegorical comparison by way of application) to compare two dispensations. The *law* (an era of judgment) cannot equal the era of righteousness (justification by *grace*), so that the glory of the first—shown in Moses on the Mount—is surpassed by the era of true glory (grace).

Verses 12–18: The former glory was fading, the latter unfading—the very basis of a concrete hope—so we have hope in the new glory. Moses veiled his face—this *midrash* interprets—so that the transient nature of glory (hope) should not be seen. So when Moses—the law—is read there is necessarily a veil, a lack of full and pure understanding. In Exodus 34:34 Moses would remove the veil when going to meet the Lord. So in our meeting the Lord (by the Spirit bringing the Gospel) the veil is removed. Here Paul means by ‘the Lord’, ‘the Spirit’ (see v. 18). The Spirit brings freedom (by contrast to the veiled face from the law), and so there is liberty, i.e. the liberty of justification from law. Now with unveiled faces—i.e. in boldness, not dreading to look—we reflect the glory of the Lord (or the Lord’s glory is reflected, i.e. by the mirror of the Gospel), and as we continue to behold him we are changed from one stage of glory to another (cf. I John 3:3; Heb. 12:2). This is the work of the Spirit as he applies the Gospel.

Chapter Four

Verses 4:1–6: The ministry is of grace (Eph. 3:7ff.) and so we persist. Against much current practice (cf. 2:17) it is ministry in honesty, so that the truth confronts those who hear. They sense its reality, and are affected by it. Those who do not hear the truth have been affected by Satan—‘the god of this world’—and so their eyes are blinded to seeing the glory of God in Christ’s face, i.e. the New Covenant message of grace. Paul preaches Christ’s Lordship. As at creation so the light (here, of the Gospel) has shone to reveal the glory of God and has given true knowledge of Him.

Verses 7–12: Paul enunciates the principle that (i) the Gospel is innately the treasure, (ii) that our frail humanity is a vessel to contain the treasure, and *only* a vessel, (iii) that the

proclaimers of the Gospel are constantly attacked in a variety of ways, and (iv) to carry in one's body the 'killing of the Lord Jesus'—i.e. constantly to *live* and *proclaim* the Gospel—means the constant death-attack, but at the same time the manifestation and impartation of life to true hearers. There can be no other way of imparting that life.

Verses 13–15: As in Psalm 116:10, so now the principle of believing in the face of, and by stimulation of, suffering. That strengthening faith is based upon the knowledge of the sure resurrection. This, then, is the way of imparting grace to more and more people, out of which God is (increasingly) glorified.

Verses 16–18: The wearing down of the earthen vessel by persecution, opposition and suffering must not be regarded with fear or dismay. Such suffering, by comparison (Rom. 8:18–19), is very light, and its outcome will be for the proclaimer a 'weight of glory', i.e. something substantial. Hence the things of hope are regarded with faith, for they alone are eternal.

Chapter Five

Verses 1–10: The things of hope are regarded—they not being transient. The substance of passing from this life to the next concerns the new body of resurrection (I Cor. 15:35ff.; Phil. 3:21). Does Paul see a putting off of the earthly body, a becoming naked for a time and then putting on (at the resurrection in time) a new body of glory, or does he see this new body given at the moment of death? The Spirit is the *arrabon*, i.e. the guarantee, so that we *now* have *part* of what is to come. That encourages the believer who now has to walk by faith until—in the life beyond—he can live by sight. Whether encouraged here now or glorified there, we must all stand before the judgment seat to give an account of our lives, so that we might receive back what we have done—things good or bad.

Verses 11–15: In the light of what will be we now live. The 'fear of the Lord' motivates us to warn men and women. The Corinthians, then, should understand Paul and his team. No self-commendation is needed, but what explanation is given is to be passed on to those who do not approve of Paul. Whatever state Paul is in—ecstasy or sobriety—it is for his hearers' benefit. The only constraint the apostle knows is Christ's love for him. Christ's death was to cause men to change from self-servers to God-servers.

Verses 16–21: Paul contrasts the two systems—the old life in the flesh and the new in the Spirit, i.e. the old and new creations (creatures). The change to the new is by God, because through Christ He has reconciled the world to Himself, justifying the world of men, through the message He has given to His servants. They now proclaim reconciliation and exhort men and women to receive it. This all happened by the Cross where God made the sinless one (Jesus) to be sin for sinners so that they might become the righteousness of God in him—Christ.

Chapter Six

Verses 1–3: Paul entreats his readers (supposedly believers) not to accept the grace of God in vain, i.e. in an empty way. It appears that even believers can have an empty (vain) way of seeing and receiving the Gospel. The *now* of time is what is important: we must live by grace *now*.

Verses 3–12: Paul now brings in the proofs of his apostolic ministry (see also 11:23–29), namely his sufferings, which no one would endure who was not gripped by the Gospel, authenticated (in this case apostolically by the Lord) and sent. Paul reveals the various forms of persecution, opposition and denigration the true apostle knows. Paul protests his love for the Corinthians, and exhorts love in return.

Verses 14–18: (Note: 7:1 is also in this section). Paul gives practical advice on the belief

and action system of those in Christ. In I Cor. 6:9–11 he warned against the things that prevent entering the Kingdom of God. In I Corinthians 10:18f. he warned against idolatry in strong terms. Here in equally powerful terms he warns against any form of partnership with iniquity, darkness, unbelievers, or idols. With three quotes (Isa. 52:11; 43:6; Hosea 1:10) he shows the utter oneness of God's sons and daughters with Him. In **7:1** he calls for an application of purging oneself from every form of impurity so that practical holiness of life can be effected.

Chapter Seven

Verses 2–4: Paul appeals to the Corinthian church to respond to his true (apostolic) ministry, confessing and displaying his love for them, and stating his confidence in them, not counting his suffering as anything.

Verses 5–16: The narrative which he began in 2:1–13 he now continues. He recounts the restlessness he knew even when he came into Macedonia, but how with the coming of Titus this was relieved. Not only was he glad that the Corinthians had accepted his letter and his injunctions, but that they had personally felt for him. Their grief at their own failure had led them to the repentance that is fruitful, as against fruitless worldly grief or remorse. The substance of his letter to them had not been merely such repentance, or the discipline of the sinful person, but regarding their keenness for Paul in the sight of God. Titus had been delighted at his acceptance by the Corinthian church and their acceptance not only of Paul's disciplinary letter but also the obedience they had displayed to both Paul and Titus. The mission had been highly successful.

Chapter Eight

Verses 1–7: The simple and total giving of the churches in Macedonia Paul calls 'the grace of God'. Being very poor themselves these Macedonian Christians had given to the hilt and even beyond their means. Paul's instructions to Titus concerning the collection for the saints in Jerusalem was that the worthy saints at Corinth should give in similar manner. He was confident they would.

Verses 8–16: Here Paul gives a powerful example of 'the grace of giving'. Christ being rich became poor, so that we being poor might become rich. So this principle should obtain in the voluntary giving of love. Whilst not advocating rigid equality of means, Paul was urging a sharing of substance in love, pointing out that this made life even more fruitful for the one who gives.

Verses 16–24: Paul speaks now of Titus voluntarily going back to Corinth. With him Paul is sending 'the brother who is famous in all the churches' for his preaching of the Gospel. This brother will administer the collection for the saints, and Titus will also go to Corinth to minister with the brother, both in the word and the giving of the Corinthians, who in their turn are to receive both men, thus justifying Paul's sending them, as also Paul's confidence in them—the Corinthians.

Chapter Nine

Verses 1–5: Again Paul wants them to vindicate his trust in them and their giving. This is one reason why he sends the brethren to them, so that if Paul were to come with some from the churches of Macedonia, he would not be shamed before his accompanying brethren if the Corinthians were to be giving in a lesser manner than the Macedonians.

Verses 6–15: Paul again teaches on the principle of giving. He shows the blessing and enrichment

which comes from ‘hilarious’ (cheerful) giving, citing God as the true Provider, so that as they give so they will draw out great thanksgiving to God by those who see and/or benefit from the giving. All of this will be consonant with the Gospel, so that folk will ‘long and pray for you’ because ‘they see the surpassing grace of God in you [them]’.

Chapter Ten

Verses 1–6: Paul returns to personal vindication of his apostolic ministry. Some Corinthians have had the idea that Paul is a lamb at home and a lion abroad! Not so. Paul—as also other believers—knows and uses spiritual weapons—as against carnal or worldly weapons which believers should not use. Whilst the weapons are used against powers outside the church, they can also be used to bring discipline within the church.

Verses 7–12: Paul develops his stand against the criticisms which have been made against him. People had said his letters were indeed powerful, but that when he was present neither his person nor his preaching were of true power. These critics use themselves as the critical criteria by which the apostle must be assessed, but Paul’s coming will prove these (people and criteria) to be wrong. As yet they do not really understand Paul or his apostolic authority.

Verses 13–18: Paul further presses the fact of his authority in relation to the church, for he had founded it—under God. With their growth in faith will come further opportunities for the apostles to preach the Gospel—even beyond the borders of Corinth and Greece. It is unwise for anyone to be critical of another or to boast in himself. In the ultimate, true commendation comes from the Lord Himself.

Chapter Eleven

Verses 1–6: Paul is now about to speak of ‘the superlative apostles’—a term of irony! Paul had brought the Corinthians to Christ and had a certain claim on them. These so-called apostles will seek to seduce them from Christ, and get them to be under their instruction. Paul refuses to authenticate these so-called apostles.

Verses 7–11: Paul pursues his opposition to the super-apostles, for doubtless they are living at the expense of the church. Paul had not done that. Perhaps he ought to have so done! No, not really. By supporting himself he had showed them his love for them. Not so the ‘superlative apostles’.

Verses 12–15: Paul is out to destroy their confidence in the so-called apostles who claim to be no less than Paul, and to teach what he has taught, which is not the case. They are servants of Satan disguising themselves as angels of light. Such have within themselves the seeds of self-destruction.

Verses 15–29: Paul now gives way to irony—the Corinthians are gullible in regard to the super-apostles. Whatever these men boast can they begin to match what Paul does and has done? In verses 22–29 he lists the unending persecution and suffering he has known—a list wider than the accounts concerning Paul in Acts. He concludes by saying he has always had the Corinthians in his heart, and that he helps the weak.

Verses 30–33: The term ‘weak’ in verse 29 brings his thinking on to the line of comparing the powerful super-apostles with his own weak self. He seeks now to show his weakness, such as when he had been dangled over the wall of Damascus—in a basket!

Chapter Twelve

Verses 1–10: Paul now develops the idea of the power of weakness (as against the ‘strength’ of the so-called powerful apostles). Using the example of the man caught up—in a vision—to Paradise

he shows that visions may make a man boast, in which case he needs a ‘stake in the flesh’ from God, otherwise Satan will get the advantage of the proud person through his pride. The one suffering from Satan’s harassment (Paul of course) pleaded three times for release from this painful situation, only to find he needed the stake in the flesh to keep him from pride. He learned the great lesson that one is only strong when weak, only powerful in grace when he sees grace alone can aid him.

Verses 11–13: Paul rebukes himself for so foolishly vindicating himself, yet behind it is powerful reality. He has proved himself as a true apostle by patience—‘with signs and wonders and mighty works’, which had been so evident at Corinth. Again, they should acknowledge his true apostolic calling.

Verses 14–21: Paul now clinches his apostolic vocation in their eyes. He is ready to come for the third time. He had not burdened them, nor would he now do so. Just as Titus had come in love so he would come in love. Do they then think, with all that he has said prior to this letter and now in it, that he has been trying to prove himself? Oh, no! He has spent himself for the Corinthians—not for himself. He fears that when he comes he will find such division in the church that he will have to bring his powers of rebuke and discipline to the occasion. Paul’s words are strong enough to make some of them tremble.

Chapter Thirteen

Verses 1–4: Paul continues the matter of godly discipline. Do they want proof of his apostleship? They will discover it in his authority as he rebukes and punishes sin in the church. Sure, his strength lies in weakness. So did Christ’s, who was crucified through weakness, but who is strong through resurrection by God. Paul will be likewise strong through God. Let them not despise what they have regarded as weakness in Paul.

Verses 5–14: Paul goes so far as to say they had better consider whether they even be in the faith! He trusts they will not do wrong or be wrong. He does not desire to be attested by them as being correct—that is not his concern. His concern is whether *they* are in the faith, and *they* are attested as true. Paul does not mind being weak when they are strong (a little irony here?). He prays for their progress. He reiterates that when he comes his authority will appear severe, especially if they require it! He prays for their unity under ‘the God of love and peace’. He closes with the now well-known ‘grace’.