2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

1. **Introduction: 1:1-12**
2. **Greetings: 1:1-2**
3. **Thanksgiving Through Trouble: 1:3-11**
4. **Statement of Purpose: 1:12-14**

**“*Jesus our only Boast*”**

1. **Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**
2. **1:15-2:11 How Jesus Establishes**
3. **2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**
4. **7:1-9:15 Perfecting Holiness**
5. **10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**
6. **Closing: 13:11-14 Be Complete**

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

 **I. Introduction: 1:1-12**

**A. Greetings: 1:1-2**

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-2 Greetings in grace**

**I. Intro.**

***History of Corinth***:

Ancient Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and remained uninhabited for a 100 years until 44 B.C. when Julius Caesar rebuilt it. When Paul visited the city in 49-50 A.D. it was little over 80 years old with a population of 80,000. Yet it had become the 3rd most important city in the empire as it was situated on the isthmus of Greece bridging the Adriatic Sea with the Aegean Sea. It was called the “*master of harbors*”, “*The crossroads of Greece*” and the “*passage for all mankind*”. The population was filled with opportunists seeking a better life especially the freed slaves and retired Roman soldiers. According to Acts 18 it had a substantial Jewish community as well. It was a young city with few traditions and an open society a boom town full of materialism and pride which comes with a self made man. It was also a sports town as Caesar had reopened the 2nd largest Olympic Games called the Isthmian Games. The city’s theater sat 18,000 and concert hall sat 3,000.

***History of 2nd Corinthians***:

The second letter to the Corinthians is probably the least known of all of Paul’s letters. In First Corinthians we looked at the church at Corinth but in Second Corinthians we are looking at Paul. We call this Second Corinthians, but it should be called Fourth Corinthians, because it is the last of four letters that Paul wrote to the church there. Two of these letters have not been preserved for us -- that is why we only have First and Second Corinthians -- but they are not in the order that these titles suggest. If you look at the chronology Paul began the church in Corinth around 52 or 53 A. D. He stayed there for about a year and a half; then went to Ephesus, where he remained for a few weeks, and then he went on to a quick trip to Jerusalem, returning again to Ephesus. While at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth which we don’t have. In First Corinthians 5:9, Paul says he wrote it to warn them about following a worldly lifestyle. In response to that letter, the Corinthians wrote back to him with many questions. In reply to that letter, Paul wrote what we now call First Corinthians. He tried to answer their questions and instruct them how to walk in power and in peace. Evidently that letter did not accomplish what Paul intended and there was a bad reaction to it. In this second letter we learn that Paul made a quick trip back to Corinth which he calls it a “*painful*” visit (2 Cor. 2:1). When he returned to Ephesus, he sent another brief letter, in the hands of Titus, to Corinth to see if he could help them. Titus was gone a long time and Paul grew anxious to hear what was happening in the church there. He became so troubled that he left Ephesus and went to Troas and then up into Macedonia to meet Titus. There in Macedonia, probably in the city of Philippi, he and Titus came together. Titus brought him a encouraging word about the church, and in response to that, out of thanksgiving, Paul wrote what we now call the Second Corinthians letter, which is really the fourth of a series of letters.

**II. Vs. 1-2 Greetings in grace**

Vs. 1 Paul writes as a man who knows trouble to those who are in trouble. He saw the benefit that came with tribulation as it drove him into the arms of Christ. There is a proverb about the storms of life that says, “*All sunshine only makes a desert*!” Saints consider this, for every one prayer that comes from us in prosperity 10,000 arise from us in adversity! Sometime after Paul’s 18 month stay the church had been visited by some impressive pastors as seen in 1 Cor. 1:12 the church was identifying with differing ones saying, “*I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ.*” This was a remarkable church as 1 Cor. 1:7 tells us “*that they came short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. They were a Spirit filled body of believers, yet with that they were not immune to operating in the flesh as seen in their treatment of Paul. Dear ones ***let us take stock of this truth in our own lives that we may not come short of any gift but still fail to owe a debt of love to all we meet***. If I had to chose (and we don’t) I’d much rather come short on the spiritual gifts and abound in love then the opposite! There were seven things based upon this letter that the Corinthian believers questioned Paul about:

1. Did he really have apostolic authority?
2. Why if he was right with God why did he suffer so much?
3. Why wasn’t he as good and flashy as other ministers?
4. Why was his travel plans changed so much if God was directing his life?
5. His refusal to accept payment, was that why he was collecting money for the “poor”?
6. Why he did have any recommendations as other ministers did?
7. Why didn’t he speak more about himself did he lack God’s power in his ministry?

If you have ever invested your life in to that of another person (be that a child or a friend) then you will understand this letter to the Corinthians. In this two verse introduction Paul conveys what this letter is all about and it twofold:

1. **To preserve his authority**: What always came first for Paul above any other relationship was his relationship with Jesus. To allow some in Corinth to question and put down his authority was allowing them to put down His best friend Jesus Who gave him the authority. This reaction is very much the same as when our children at times speak disrespectfully to our spouses, we love them, we would lay down our lives for our children but the one thing they can never do is disrespect one of their parents to the other parent.
2. **To preserve Jesus’ church**: The 2nd thing Paul wanted to write about was his overriding passion for God’s kids. Now again we understand this very well as parents because as much as we love our children we understand that part of being a parent is to correct bad behavior. To not do so is to allow for the destruction of the family.

Notice how Paul accomplishes this in the opening sentence to the Church as he addresses them as “*an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*”. He ***didn’t say*** he was under the authority of the Church as he was under the authority of Jesus Christ. Had he said that his authority was **only an arm of an institution** then he would have been only a “*man pleaser*” a “*higher-ling*” doing the biding of those who he was writing to. By saying that his authority and mission was from Jesus the only savior of humanity he is telling them that even above his love for them was his love for the Lord. Dear ones we must not allow our earthly affection rule over our eternal affections! Such authority Paul says had come **not** by his will but by the “*will of God*”. He hadn’t arrived to this position, he wasn’t a self made man; ***he was called to it by one who created heaven and earth, counted the numbers on hair on his head and knew his thoughts afar off***! By this statement Paul says, “*Don’t like me, and don’t think I’m as powerful a speaker as others, not impressed with me? No matter, because I don’t see myself in your assessment I see myself in God’s assessment!*”

But Paul didn’t just see himself in the right perspective he also had that same view of the church as he writes to them as the “*church of God which was at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia*”. ***Paul hadn’t allowed their treatment of them to change his view of himself but even more amazingly he hadn’t allowed their view of him to change his view of them***! Ill regardless of how they had spoken of him and acted towards him then were still the “*Church of God*”. They treated Paul like dirt and Paul treated them as a treasure! These folks had sinned against him but he reminds them that he still sees them as Saints! Oh how difficult this is to be hurt by others in God’s church but not allow such hurt to change our view of how God sees them! By addressing this letter not only to those in Corinth but also to those Achaia which is the main land as well as all the surrounding Islands that make up Greece Paul is letting those in Corinth as well as those who may have heard of their ill treatment that his view of them hadn’t changed even though they didn’t approve of him. ***Dear ones when someone speaks evil of you speak well of them. When someone speaks ill of someone to you speak well of the one they have spoken ill of, see all in the eyes of Christ***!

Vs. 2 It is always difficult to gage our spiritual maturity and growth in Christ. Is it by our service, bible memorization, church attendance or giving? Some would think so but I believe Paul demonstrates a more accurate test that each of us can apply to ourselves to determine if we are maturing and growing in Christ. *The best way we can see our progress is watch our reaction to those who don’t treat as well. Those who spread lies, don’t give us our do, take our position or defame our reputation. What do we do when like David we have a Saul who tosses his spear at us? Do we pick it up and throw it back? Do I defend my position, motives and reputation? Or do I simply let it fall to the ground and never allow my heart to be the motivation to hurt someone else even if they deserve and have it coming?* What enabled Paul to maintain this biblical perspective of himself and them in spite of the circumstances? He writes in this salutation “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” This greeting goes on undetected by many for two reasons:

1. We don’t know what was the usual salutation
2. We don’t know the language

To dig beyond this and you will find that the typical greeting was “*Charein*” or “***Hello***” not “*Charis*” or “***Grace***”. Most would have expected the normal “*hello*” in the letter but Paul didn’t just wish to say hello he wished them God unmerited favor! I suggest to you that when you are hurt by the actions of another the best way to maintain God’s view of them is to pray into their life what they lacked when they hurt you “*grace*”! The Hebrew greeting “*Shalom*” “peace” is replaced by another word for peace “eirene”. The first is used to illustrate our relationship with our fellow man the 2nd is used to illustrate our relationship with God. Their actions may have been anything but peaceful but the antidote in never the same back but to pray for God’s blessing over them! No one will ever experience the “*peace from God*” until they have encountered the “*grace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ*!”

 Having read this letter and done the background I’m intrigued by Paul’s ability in these two verse to handle his heart and attitude. I want to know his secret, how was he able to maintain such a right heart? This letter contains 257 verses of the most passionate and personal words Paul ever wrote. He passionately speaks of his ministry in defense of their accusations. He answers their seven indictments against his authority. Then in the next section of the book he instructs the Corinthians on true repentance and the fruit of that in giving to others. In the final section Paul speaks of what adversity brings in the heart, “God’s strength”. Because of this we will learn the secret of Paul’s life which is ***winning through weakness***! Authentic Christianity is not seen in health and wealth but in our weakness. The Spirit filled life is not viewed in splash and flash but in meekness! To be affective in this life the Christian doesn’t need the “headline” instead they seek invisibility so that all will see God’s ability and visibility!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

 **I. Introduction: 1:1-11**

**B. Thanksgiving through Trouble: 1:3-11**

**“The God of Lost Causes”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 3-7 Glory or Gripe**

**III. Vs. 8-11 Someone deeper than the hole I’m in**

**I. Intro.**

Paul has more to say on suffering than any other New Testament writer and does so in 2nd Corinthians more than any other letter. Suffering or troubles is mentioned 17 times in 5 verses. Ah but he also mentions comfort as the word appears 10 times in its noun and verb forms in 5 verses; (1/3 of all it is appearing in the New Testament). In verse 3 Paul says that there are **two things of which God has a complete monopoly on**: He is the Father of **ALL** mercies and the God of **ALL** comfort. James 1:17 reminds us the same saying that “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*.” There was a pastor who had a very busy week and was unable to get to his study for Sunday. So late a Saturday he gave instructions for his wife to take no calls so he could get to the work. They had two small children who were not used to not accessing Daddy and wanted to play near him. After multiple interruptions he told his wife to see if she could occupy them with something as to keep them quiet. She came up with the idea of having them help crack nuts and it worked for a while until they began to squabble over who got to use the nut cracker. The little girl discovered if you put the nut in the space between the door and the jam you could crack several nuts at the same time. All was well until she didn’t move her hand fast enough and got her fingers pinched and let out a scream that made the boards shake. Her father came out of his study to see what the commotion was and seeing that it was only pinched fingers again said to his wife, could you keep them quiet, please. As he turned to go back to his study he could hear the conversation between the cries, “*Honey it will be ok your fingers will stop hurting soon, I promise*!” “*That’s not what hurts*” the little girl said. “*It’s not what hurts honey, well what does hurt*?” “*It hurts that Daddy didn’t stop and come to me and say, Oh you poor little thing let me kiss it and make it better*!” Dear ones our Father is over every mercy and comfort let’s make sure we take the time to distribute those mercies and comforts!

**II. Vs. 3-7 Glory or Gripe**

Vs. 3-7 Normally in letters this section is filled thanksgiving but Paul chooses to launch into one of the concerns the Corinthian believers had with his ministry which was his sufferings. There was apparently a feeling that if you experienced “*trouble*” then you weren’t in the will of God and Paul is going to debunk this. Perhaps today we would use the word “*stress*” or “*pressure*” to identify what Paul is writing about. That which ties your stomach up in knots in the day and causes you not to be able to sleep at night. Paul offers some relief to those things that stress us out and its “*comfort*”. The word in the Greek is the same word Jesus and others used concerning the Holy Spirit. The word means to comfort but not in the sense that many think of comfort by consoling someone, giving them a hug. Instead ***it means to comfort by way of strengthening them***. Friends the Holy Spirit doesn’t merely give you a hug when you’re down consoling you when you’re stressed; no He strengthens us. The Holy Spirit is what enables us to keep going on to victory even when we feel like we can’t go one more step. ***Perhaps many of our prayers remain unanswered because we have been praying for the wrong thing: Escape instead of strength***? Here in our text Paul offers us ***Four reasons for stress***:

1. Vs. 3 “*All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us.*” This is a Christianized version of a typical synagogue blessing with the addition of God being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The synagogue prayer included God as the “*Father of Mercies*” but Paul added the fact that He is also the God of “*all comfort*”. He recognizes that God sent these very things into his life; therefore he never prays to have them removed so that he might escape from them. He sees them as opportunities for the release of the strength of God. ***The first reason*** for stress is it’s ***the way we discover what God can do***! Abraham Lincoln once confessed that, “*I have often been driven to my knees to pray because I had nowhere else to go.*” We don’t naturally turn to God to find out what He can do if we think we are able to handle the situation on our own. Typically we do two things:
2. **Try to jump**: In our own strength we try to hurdle the first few stress on our own until they pile up and we hit the ground with a thud.
3. **Turn and run**: Try to escape it but most often the escape just adds to more stress.

Paul tells us, “*Don’t jump in your own strength or turn and run, instead stop and face it in God’s strength*.” “***These aren’t obstacle to our faith***”, Paul says. “***They are opportunities to experience God’s strength***!” Notice how Paul puts this in verse 5 in the NLT saying “*You can be sure that the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.*” The direct amount of God’s “***strengthen***” is **always equal to the stress**. That is why Paul chose “***glory***” in the stresses not “***growling***” in the stresses. We get confused between “***glorying***” and “***growling***” as we think that complaining about our stresses is the same as glorying in our stresses. Paul saw those stresses coming from the hand of his loving Father who was giving him the right amount and not one more so that we could discover His peace that surpasses understanding.

1. Vs. 4, 6-7 NLT “*He comforts us in* ***all our troubles*** *so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*” Paul says that ***our sufferings are not sent for just us they are for someone who is watching you to see how you handle the pressure that you are going through***. When we “***gripe***” and “***growl***” instead of glorying we are teaching younger Christians that God is powerless against our stresses and strains. We are telling them that God’s “*strength*” can’t answer the bell of our stresses! Are people seeing the truth of this promise lived out in our stress? That is what Paul says in verses 6-7 “*So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer.*” “*We are confident that as you share in suffering, you will also share God's comfort*.” God’s not taking it away from me so that he can take us all through it. And by taking us through it we learn that patience will produce God’s strength in the present and future. No stress will last, no trial or trouble will outlast God’s presence and strength and we will only find this true when we go through seasons of trouble.

**III. Vs. 8-11 Someone deeper than the hole I’m in**

Spurgeon said of Paul, “*Here was a man, who never knew but what he might be dead the next day, for his enemies were many, and cruel, and mighty; and yet he spent a great part of his time in praising and blessing God*.” The degree that we can comfort others is a direct parallel to how we ourselves have experienced the comfort of God. That’s what tends to make a “*good comforter*”. It is a day of liberation when a person comes to the “*end of their self’s*” when all they were confident in themselves has been dashed upon the rocks of reality! What may bring you there may very well be extremely different then what brings me there but the main thing isn’t what got us there or how long it took till we got there it’s that we finally have arrived. We may very well be experiencing the “*sentence of death*” in our lives. The Death of a marriage, business or something else but look carefully at Paul has to say about God in the same verse, that the purpose of this death sentence was our death to trusting in ourselves so that we could learn to trust in God who raises the dead!

1. Vs. 8-10 “*I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us*.” We don’t know what Paul is referring to specifically; (*Some think it was a physical illness other think it was what we are given the answer in Acts 19 in the riot in Ephesus*). Whatever it was and (*perhaps it was a combination of things*) Paul felt emotional, spiritually and physically near death, he had given up and was hopeless as he was brought to a new depth in human despair. But Paul says that this was allowed so that He could ***find a new depth of God grace and love.*** It took this stress to break through Paul’s prevailing pride and stubbornness. I have found this to be true in my life the: “***Hole I find myself in is always proportionate to the depth of my pride and stubbornness***.” It takes that depth to drive me to His grace, strength and love which is deeper still! Corrie tin Boom was fond of saying, “*There is no pit so deep that the Lord is not deeper still*.” ***The truth is we Christians will do anything and everything in our own strength to avoid having to depend upon God’s strength***! The human struggle is against our own self sufficiency. Ours is the God of “***lost causes***” the God who alone raises the dead, to whom has never seen or known of a “*hopeless situation*”! Paul was brought to the place where he said he was “*crushed and completely overwhelmed, and thought he would never live through it*”. But Paul does not dwell on the negative stress but rather the positive reality of God’s strength saying, “***He did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that He will continue to deliver us*.**” We ought to see that such stress allows the believer in Christ to demonstrate and “*alternative life*” style from gripping to glory!
2. Vs. 11 “*He will rescue us because you are helping by praying for us. As a result, many will give thanks to God because so many people's prayers for our safety have been answered*.” The final reason that God allows stress in our life is to show us that no man is an Island! We are members of a body and when one is going through stress then the rest of the body is there to hold up the weak member of the body. So when you are stressed don’t just “*Grin and bear it grin and share it*”, so that the rest of the body can lift you up for prayers! ***People won’t care about how much we know until they know how much we care***! This is the purpose of the Christian community to gather together to pray for each other. God has allowed these stresses in our lives to cause us to rally our prayer support around each other, which strengthens and encourages us through all the stress. In Acts 17 Paul describes his pending ship wreck on Malta. As they lift port in Sidon Paul had been warned by the Holy Spirit of pending doom and as the seas got rough in the 17th verse we are told that they used “*cables to undergird the ship*”. That what prayer is for us when we are facing the stresses of rough seas in our lives they “*undergird*” us with God’s strength and peace. Thus a Church that prays together will be able to stay together during the storms of stress.

The ability to comfort others and bring blessings to other lives rests not on having shared the same experience but rather upon having experienced God’s comfort having suffered! God has one purpose for each and every believer and that is to destroy in us any possible confidence in the flesh. Where self-confidence is something of our past not our present or future because it has been replaced with a confidence in God who raises the dead!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**II. Statement of Purpose: 1:12-14**

**“*Jesus our only Boast*”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**“*In the Hands of the Master*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 12-14 A clear conscience and an open heart**

**III. Vs. 15-22 Assume the best**

**IV. Vs. 1:23-2:4 Mercy and love**

**I. Intro.**

**Imagine Paul’s life**: His health issues, the riot in Ephesus, the constant threat from some of his own countrymen who wanted him dead. Then you have this group of folks who you risked your life for, laid down your plans to spend 18 months to disciple and they are saying that you are not called of God, flakey and worldly. Last week we tackled one of the complaints the Corinthian believers had said of Paul: That if he was truly anointed by God why all the trials and stress? Paul gave 4 reasons for stress in our lives. Today Paul takes on another complaint and that had to do with his *change in travel plans*. Yet in so doing **Paul addresses a much bigger challenge that has to do with how to handle “*misunderstandings*”**. **Is that something that you have ever gone through? Has someone ever misjudged you actions, misconstrued your motives, and misinterpreted your words?** Well if that has ever happened to any of you then Paul has some advice to you on how deal with this.

**II. Vs. 12-14 A clear conscience and an open heart**

Vs. 12 Before Paul clears up the misunderstanding he wants the readers of this letter to know that no matter what they think of him his conscience is clear before the Lord. What **a great place to start in handling misunderstandings**! Thomas Aquinas, the 13 centenary theologian said, “***Man regards the deed but God sees the intention***”. Take the time to examine your own heart, actions or words and see if there is anything that you should of or could of done differently and if there is go and make it right. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if there is anything in this situation that you have done that grieves the Him. You don’t have to own the entire thing only the parts where because of pride or insecurity you acted contrary to how the Holy Spirit and Jesus would have you to have acted. There may be parts of the situation where you have no regrets at all. But upon the Holy Spirit bringing conviction you copped an attitude for a moment, said something that was harsh or in anger then that is what you need to repent of and own up too. I find that ***much of what separates people from fellowshipping with each other is the failure to own their own part in the situation. People have adopted an “all are nothing” attitude to misunderstandings which never allows for reconciliation***.

Vs. 13 Notice Paul says “*For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand*”. Paul *is not indifferent to their heartache over the situation, he realizes that they have a beef with him but he wants them to know that he has had the Holy Spirit examine his heart and he has a clear conscience.* *He is not writing to justify his opinion or apologize for something in the situation, he is writing in hopes of clearing up the misunderstanding*. Purity in action is difficult; purity in motivation is even more difficult!

Vs. 14 The next thing I notice is **that he wants them to know how he feels about them and how he hopes they feel about him. In verse 14 (***in the NIV***) he says “*as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus*.”** Paul’s conscience was clear but he didn’t adopted a “*Forget about it attitude in hopes it will all disappear*”. Most often these things don’t just disappear they usually tend to fester and smolder waiting for a little “*hot air*” to send it back to flame. It is interesting to me to notice what seems to **cause the “*flair up*” as indicated by Paul’s words. It was a presupposition of how someone feels about you in the past or from their perspective how you feel about them from the past.** That is why Paul tells them how he feels about them and believes how they feel about him. It is important that we express our true heart towards someone that is estranged from us.

**III. Vs. 15-22 Assume the best**

Vs. 15-17 *Saint’s think of this a moment and you will discover that we would have a much better success rate in reconciliation if before we ever got to the misunderstanding we dealt with our own heart first*! Paul uses the same word four times with regard to his decision making (verse 15 *intended*, verse 17 *planning* and *plan* three times). The problem ***according to 1 Corinthians 16:5-9***, was that Paul had a “Plan A” when he had written to these Corinthians but ended up going with a “Plan B”.

1. **Plan A**: He planned on leaving Ephesus, where he had been living, crossing the Aegean Sea and visiting them to help work out the problems they were having in the church. From there he planned to travel by land up through northern Greece into Macedonia, to the cities of Thessalonica and Philippi, where he had planted churches, and return again to Corinth. He expected them to help him take ship from Corinth to Jerusalem to bring the gifts of the church to the poor starving saints there. This was his original plan but that’s not what happened.
2. **Plan B**: Instead Paul went directly from Ephesus to Macedonia, and worked his way down the coast at last to Corinth. After the visit he had them help him on his way to Jerusalem and Judea.

Now considering the challenges of first centenary travel and communication the change of plans seems a silly thing to get upset about. Yet based upon verse 17, they were clearly upset about this and made accusations against him. There was a group in Corinth who opposed Paul, and they used this as proof that he was an unreliable individual. Paul wasn’t a man that was irresponsible; *integrity lay at the heart of Paul’s ministry. Truth was the medium, sincerity the evidence and power was the outcome*. Friends, may I make a suggestion? **When we come to a place of disagreement with someone chose to “*believe the best*” instead of “*assuming the worst*”! Take a look at their whole Christ like character and interpret the discrepancy based upon that. There are far too many times that we skip from “*judgment*” to the “*execution*” assuming they are *guilty* instead of assuming they are *innocent***. Paul’s explanation is twofold: verse 18-22 and verses 1:23 - 2:4.

Vs. 18-20 Paul’s change of plans were prompted by the Holy Spirit with direct benefit to the Corinthian’s not himself. He wasn’t being “*wishy washy*”. He wasn’t saying one thing with no intention of doing what he was saying. A Christian shouldn’t say yes when they have no intention of being faithful to it. When God says "No," he means "No." He never says “Yes” and means “No.” God's promises are always positive promises.

Vs. 21-22 Notice in verses 21-22 the Holy Spirit has done three things to “*establish us... in Christ*”. This is in the present tense which describes an ongoing experience that was completed on a single action of the Holy Spirit.

1. “***Anointed us***”: Literally this reads, “*God…christed us Christward*” which indicates that the Holy Spirit has made us Jesus’ people, a believing community.
2. “***Sealed us***”: This seal is a sign of ownership that identifies us as His and marks us for redemption.
3. “***Given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee***”: The Holy Spirit in our hearts is the entire guarantee we need to know that we will one day have the full inheritance.

Paul tells them of these three truths with regards to the Holy Spirit to show them how foolish they were in being petty with regards to their dealing with him. So why did Paul change his plans? Well notice here three things in this section and I believe they give us the answer:

1. Vs. 18 ***The faithful God***
2. Vs. 19-20 ***The certain Lord***
3. Vs. 21-22 ***The indwelling Holy Spirit***

Paul proclaims to his doubters ***that God’s faithful and His will was made known to him through submission to the Lordship of Jesus who interpreted to him by the indwelling Holy Spirit a change in plans!*** Impossible to argue against the change of plans when it was God changing Paul’s plans.

**IV. Vs. 1:23-2:4 Mercy and love**

Vs. 23-24 Here in verses 1:23-24 thru 2:4 Paul tells his readers ***two things the Holy Spirit showed him that changed his mind***:

1. Vs. 23-24 First he says in verse 23 “*I call God as witness against my soul, that* ***to spare you I came no more to Corinth***.” To spare them from what? Well verse 24 tells us that he was shown insight into their hearts by the Holy Spirit that coming to them after having already dealing with their carnality ***would have caused them to see Paul as their boss and not their brother***. They would have been ***tempted to obey Paul instead of pleasing the Lord***! Paul didn’t want these folks to start doing the “***right thing***” for the “***wrong reasons***”. The right thing was “*obeying the word of God with regards to sin*” the wrong reason was because “***Paul said so***”. That is why Paul says in verse 24 “***we have no dominion over your faith****, but are* ***fellow workers for your joy****.*” Christianity is not just about “*what we do*” it’s about “*why we do what we do*”! The leaders of the local church aren’t “*your bosses*” they are your fellow brother and sisters “*workers for your joy*”! Ray Stedman made this observation; “*We Protestants are right when we say to the Catholics that God never intended to have one man, a pope, over the whole church but it is no improvement to have one in every church*.” The Church leaders are your helpers; they are there to encourage you and to help you to understand what your gifts are but you are not responsible to them for exercising it. They are responsible to the Lord to help you put it together with others and to maintain unity within the church, but not to govern what ministry you have. In Matt. 23:8 Jesus said “*You have only one Master and you are all brothers*.” So that was one reason that Paul didn’t come as he had planned, “***he didn’t want to preempt the authority over the Church that only belonged to Jesus Christ.***”
2. Vs. 1-4 Paul tells them ***the 2nd reason for the change of plans was because the Spirit led him to see that he had already caused pain enough by his letters and his painful visit***. Paul is like a skillful surgeon only cut as much as he had to. As soon as that was done, he stops cutting, because he didn’t like to create pain. The Holy Spirit had shown Paul that if he came again he would just cause unnecessary pain. That is how to handle a misunderstanding don’t bring hurt just to inflict pain but rather seek to minimize the hurt by affirming our love and concern for those who by their misunderstanding us are missing out on the love of God and the peace of the Holy Spirit.

***The harsh critical attitudes of some of the Corinthian believers towards Paul reminds us how easy it is to react unkindly and bitterly when we only have partial knowledge and choose to assume the worst instead of believing the best***! ***Relationships are like wooden bridges they are always easier to burn but much more difficult to rebuild*! Let’s consider that before we strike a match!**

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

1. **1:15-2:11 How Jesus Establishes**

**“*Faithful to forgive*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 5-8 Marks of repentance**

**III. Vs. 9-11 Marks of forgiveness**

**I. Intro.**

So far we have seen Paul in this personal letter address two very practical situations that every person deals with: ***The reason for stress and How to handle misunderstandings***. Now Paul deals with Church discipline but more specifically “*How the Church should receive one back into fellowship after the discipline.*” Church discipline is **not** aimed at knocking a person down it is aimed at picking a person up who has been knocked down by sin! ***Good church discipline is not taking the sinning saint and bring them into submission but rather loving them in such a way that we inspire them to goodness***. Thus “***discipline must encourage not discourage***!”

**II. Vs. 5-8 Marks of repentance**

Vs. 5-8 This section presents several difficulties with regards to the topic:

1. **What is the situation Paul is referring too?**
2. **What actions were taking to bring conviction upon the believer?**
3. **What is biblical repentance look like?**
4. **What does biblical restoration look like?**

Paul doesn’t mention in this letter the person’s or what the situation was so. Traditionally folks assume that he is speaking of the case in 1 Corinth. 5 where there was a fellow living in incest with his mother, (or as Paul puts it his “*father’s wife*”). Apparently the Church thought that by allowing this immorality to continue in their midst they were examples of how Jesus would love. Paul addressed this in 1st Corinth like a medical board addressing a doctor for not treating cancer in a patient. Others feel that this cannot be the case because Paul had not only written First Corinthians about that, but he had been there since then. Perhaps Paul is addressing the person who was leading the rebellion against him. Though Paul knows the person’s name he does not mention it as to not hinder the person’s restoration! He is careful to not over state his offences and instead is general. By these two actions we can see that ***Paul is out to restore a brother not get even with an offender***! It is safe to assume that the actions taken towards this individual would have been what Jesus gave the Church in Matthew 18 commonly known as the ***three steps to handling church discipline***.

1. Matt. 18:15 **Step one**: “*if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*” This step has nothing to do with ***aligning allies*** or spreading “***your side***” of the story, both of which are far too prevalent in the body of Christ. This step is never publicized and neither is it just a matter of opinion. Instead it has to do with one person coming to another who feels that the other person’s behavior is out of line with what the Bible has to say. This first step is done “*between you and him/her alone*”. There are a few things to consider before you launch out in this:
2. Galatians 6:1 reminds us that “*if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*.” The goal of this is restoration and to be affective the one confronting must make sure that they come in gentleness less they become part of the problem instead of part of the solution.
3. 1 Cor. 10:12 says that when dealing with someone we need to first examine our own heart if we “*think we stand we need to take heed lest we fall.*” Whatever has happened to our fellow saint is something that we also deal with, so ***come to them in your failure not theirs***!

***We are not to go to one another in those areas where we are irritated that someone is doing something in a different way than we would do it***. We are to only go to them in those areas where the Word of God has already said they are clearly wrong. The goal is to “*gain back a brother*/*sister*” who is not practicing the Word of God in their life. The person who goes is not to go to someone else and share what they have done; they **aren’t** to spread the offence to the Church. They simply drop it and act as if it never happened because once they repented it never did!

1. Matt. 18:16 **Step Two**: “*But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*” If, there is resistance and unwillingness to face the wrongdoing then Jesus said, we are to take one or two others so that there may be witnesses to the discussion. The objective of discipline is not punishment, but recovery and restoration. If the offending person repents then the matter is closed not to be brought up or spread to others.
2. Matt. 18:17 **Step Three**: “*If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*” The third step is to tell it to the church, with the expectation that everybody in the congregation who knows the individual will go and plead with him to reconsider, to face the trouble and admit it, so that peace can be restored. Apparently based upon verse 6 this is the level to which this church had come. The reason for this step is to be found in Paul’s words in verse 5 where he says, “*if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent--not to be too severe*.”

Vs. 7 Paul writes “*you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be* ***swallowed up with too much sorrow***.” “***What does biblical repentance look like***”? In calling for forgiving and restoration it is clear that this man had met the “***mark of repentance***” with what Paul calls “***much sorrow***”! In 2 Cor. 7:8-10 Paul address the Corinthian believers saying, “*For even if I made you sorry…Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner,….For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death*.” This mark of “***biblical repentance***” is **when you begin to genuinely see the “*hurt*” that your actions or in actions have caused others, especially Jesus**. ***Accompanying the admittance of wrong must be a true sense of sorrow caused by that wrong***. Based upon Paul’s words both here in this verse as well as in 2 Cor. 7:8-10 indicate that “***Godly sorrow***” is when **you don’t really believe anybody ought to forgive you, because what you have done is hurtful, and you do not think you deserve forgiveness**. John Wesley once offended a British General who exploded saying, “*I will never forgive you*” to which Wesley wisely responded, “*Then sir, I hope you never sin*!”

Vs. 8 The last question is “***What does biblical restoration look like***?” This fellow had come to that point (*albeit after the first two steps had been exercised without repentance*), to repentance and it was time that the discipline ended and full recovery began. So Paul says in verse 8 “***Now show him that you still love him.***”

**III. Vs. 9-11 Marks of forgiveness**

Vs. 9-11 **The last three verses help us understand how to bring a person to restoration in three steps:**

1. Vs. 9 “***Faithful confrontation***”: Paul says that he wrote them to “*put them to the test*” to see if they would obey the Lord in this matter and confront biblically the offending person. I think that is one of the reasons we see problems in the Church is that people are afraid to confront someone who is not being obedient to the Word. **Far too many people would rather talk behind the problem to others instead of talk too the person about the problem**!
2. Vs. 10 “***Fruitful restoration***”: Equally important is to be ready to forgive when the person has acknowledged what they did was wrong, saw the hurt that it caused and grieved because of it. One of the reasons for continual hurt and damage in the church is because of an unwillingness to forgive things in the past. Notice in verse 10 how quick Paul was to extend forgiveness there was none of that: “*I forgive you but I’ll never forget*” hard feelings. ***Biblical forgiveness is a threefold promise we make***:
3. ***First:*** ***To the person who has hurt you*** that has now repented saying, “*I will not let my attitude toward you be governed any longer by this offense. It has been put aside. My treatment of you from here on will be as though this had never happened*.” A promise that not only will you never bring it up again you will treat them as if it never happened in the first place.
4. ***Second:*** ***A promise you make to everyone else that you will not pass the repented offense along to them***. The matter is forgiven and ***FORGOTTEN***! Everyone else may know of the situation (*as was the case in the Corinthian Church*) but no one is going to throw that back at the repented offender. They aren’t going to treat them any different or hold it over their heads in the future.
5. ***Finally***: ***A promise to yourself that if your memory goes back to the offense you will repent and not let satan get a foothold in your heart***. We will do what Paul says to do in 2 Cor. 10:5 when he writes to take “*every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*”.

The person who says, “*I just can’t forgive that person, it hurts too much*”, has failed to realize that “***If you cannot forgive it is because you have forgotten what Christ has done for you while not forgetting the offense of another***.”

1. Vs. 11 2 ***Fathomable observations***: It is Satan who keeps bringing back to your mind the hurts of the past; he keeps interjecting them back into a situation. Paul says, “*we are not ignorant of his designs*”, and in Ephes. 4:26 he says, “*do not let the sun go down on your wrath*”. Don’t carry over that in your heart until the next day and give satan an opportunity into your heart.

As an illustration Ray Stedman tells a story about a ***mental hospital that had devised a very effective test to know whether the patients were ready to get out of the hospital and back to their life. The patients would be brought into a room where a water faucet was flowing out on the floor and handed a mop and told to mop up the water. If they took the mop and just started mopping away, with the water still flowing, they would be taken back to their room. But if they had the sense to go and turn off the tap first, and then mop up the water, they were ready to go back to life.*** **There is no sense in trying to clear up a situation until we have turned off the devil's tap by forgiving that which has been acknowledged as wrong. If we persist in bringing it up, over and over again, we are trying to mop up a situation where the water is still flowing.** To Paul the term “*body of Christ*” was not just a slogan and Church was not a “***trial membership.***” It was a radical family of relationships in which each person was precious and all were interconnected.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 2:12-17**

**“*From the Agony of defeat to the thrill of victory*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 12-13 Marble pyramids**

**III. Vs. 14-17 Marks of authentic Christianity**

**I. Intro.**

This week Christian Quarterback Tim Tebo of the Denver Bronco’s was asked about comments made by former Bronco QB Jake Plummer with regards to his visible faith and the wish that it wasn’t so visible. Tim described how wonderful it is to proclaim your love for you bride on your wedding day but how much better it is to continue to do so for the rest of your life each and every time you have the opportunity. Paul takes the time in this passage to do just that. But what is remarkable is that such praise wasn’t because things were going his way. Paul digresses into praise at a time when most wouldn’t. The victorious Christian life is not one of continual victory in overcoming all obstacles. No! It is one of heartache, of deep inner doubts, fighting frustrations without and fears within. It is one of being opposed often, yet confident that the God who is within you is able to work and do his will. The vibrant Christian life is a death march in which the marcher repeatedly dies to self centeredness. It is this march that Paul enthusiastically proclaimed in 1 Cor. 15:31 in any other sense would be an oxymoron with the phrase “***I die daily***.” Happy is the person who has discovered no freedom in their religion and no joy in their self righteousness all of this has become worthless to them for now they are “***Dying to live***”!

**II. Vs. 12-13 Marble pyramids**

Vs. 12-13 In Corinth some of the believers had treated Paul as an enemy and criticized him for everything from his tribulations to his travel plans. Upon his last visit Paul had been taken to the “*wood shed*” so he cut off his visit and went back to Ephesus disheartened by their treatment of him. While in Ephesus he wrote a tearful but stern letter of correction to them. When he hadn’t heard a reply he sent his fellow servant Titus to see how they were doing but when he hadn’t arrived when Paul expected he took leave of Troas and headed in their direction hoping to hear from Titus some encouraging news. Paul was suffering from what one author describes as an occupational reality called “***Pastoral Anxiety***”. A man who had been a pastor for 50 years had a dream in which this was displayed as his wife woke up to find him at the foot of the bed on his knees hunched over trying to scoop something with his hands. His wife watched for a moment and asked, “*Honey what are you doing*?” Still asleep he responded, “*Trying to keep this pyramid of marbles together with my two hands.*” You may not be a pastor but this illustration may fit your life as you stack the marbles of your life in a pyramid and you feel as though in doing so you are losing your marbles in the process!

**III. Vs. 14-17 Marks of authentic Christianity**

Vs. 14-15 Paul has confessed a sense of failure so heavy that it caused him to leave a great opportunity to see lives transformed in search of news of the believers in Corinth from Titus. But here he changes this into praise to God. *What caused such an instantaneous transformation in the apostle’s heart?* To reverse the quote of Jim McKay from ABC’s “*Wide World of Sports*” program of the 70’s “***From the Agony of defeat to the thrill of victory***”? Before we look at what caused this transformation look at how he describes the transformation:

 Most Bible scholars believe that Paul is thinking about the “*Roman Triumphs*”. It was the custom in the Roman Empire, when a conquering general returned from a victory over one of the enemies that threatened Rome that the Senate would grant him a Triumph. It would be equivalent to what we would call a “*ticker tape parade*”. The conquering general would ride through the streets of Rome in his chariot, followed by numbers of people swinging pots of fragrant incense. Behind them would be the captives he had taken, being led to their execution in chains; then there would come the commanders of his forces. The streets would be filled with people shouting praise. As vivid a picture as the “Roman Triumph” is the context reveals to us that ***Paul did not view himself as the conquering General*** at the helm of his chariot with two white stallions pulling him along as the crowds cheered. Instead he viewed himself as God’s captive being led to death of self. We come to this view when we look at the only other time Paul used this word in Colossians 2:15. There God having conquered the rulers of this age has led the procession. God had conquered Paul at his conversion and was now leading him as a “*slave of Christ*” to death to self centeredness in Christ. It was in ***this journey from death of self to life in Christ that God’s power and majesty is on display***! In this “***death march***” of self the sweet fragrance of Christ is released to have an impact upon others.

Vs. 15-16a What does the “***Victorious Christian life***” look like? There are a lot of people who think, because they are Christians, they are going to be kept from every single pressure and danger of life; nothing is ever going to get to them. If that is the view of the “***victorious life***”, then Paul knew nothing about it. He went through terrible trails and great times of pressure. Yet he interrupts his pain and anguish with the truth that God was carrying out his purposes through the very weakness he was going through. With regards to Church which do you prefer to follow?:

1. **The procession of personality and performance, technique and technology?**
2. **Or the way of Christ where he says in Matthew 16:24 “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*.”**

Paul mentions what Ray Stedman in his book “***Authentic Christianity***” calls **FIVE MARKS OF THE “*REAL THING*”** and today we will look at four of them, the first three of them are found in verse 14.

1. 2 Cor. 2:14, *“Now thanks be to God…”* **UNQUENCHABLE OPTIMISM**: Radical Christianity is a thankful life even in the midst of trials and persecution. It is genuine, not fake or put on. It feels all the hurts and pains of life in this fallen, cursed world. Yet through all of the pain and sorrow, it looks past it all to see the end result. James 1:2-4, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*Acts 16:25, *“at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”*
2. 2 Cor. 2:14, *“…who* ***always*** *leads us in triumph in Christ…”* **UNVARYING SUCCESS**: Notice what **it doesn’t say** – ***sometimes***, ***occasionally*** or ***often***, but “***always***”. We see that radical Christianity is always successful. There is no failure **in Christ’s plans or goals**. For ALL things will be brought into fruition. This does not mean we won’t struggle or go through hardships because it is not our plans and goals that are in view, but God’s. The triumph spoken here is not Paul’s, but Christ’s. In Jesus, every obstacle becomes an opportunity and His plans will never be thwarted — success is inevitable.
3. 2 Cor. 2:14, *“…and through us diffuses (spreads) the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.”* **UNFORGETTABLE IMPACT**: The Christian life, lived as it ought to be lived (*in His strength*), is like a fragrance. Verses 15-16 tell how people will experience this scent. There are only two possibilities when people come in contact with the “REAL THING” – they will either be bitter or better, but never the same.

Vs. 16b-17 Paul asks a question with regards to these characteristics “*And who is sufficient for these things?*” Trying to answer this in the context of the “Five Marks” it is no wonder Paul asks, “Who is sufficient?” ***Who is able to maintain a consistent cheerful confident spirit, an ability to always come out on top, a powerful, positive influence over others, a complete trustworthiness, with such a realistic demonstration of these qualities that no one ever is in doubt about them in your life?*** Are you sufficient to continually manifest these characteristics? We might want to know of what book we might read or of what hidden power we might tap into that these might be produced. If you watch the TV commercials or read the magazine ads, you will be convinced that it is in the shoes you wear or the cologne or perfume you splash on. But once we have tried some of these products and nothing happened, we realize that it is all a marketing ploy. I will let you read ahead and answer that question as we will get to it next week.

1. 2 Cor. 2:17, *“For we are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”* **UNIMPEACHABLE INTEGRITY**: Note that this was not just spoken to Pastors, but to everyday Christians. Paul describes this characteristic in two ways – negatively and positively.

### Negatively: First Paul says that we are not to “*peddle the Word of God…”* A peddler in this context is a huckster or a street salesman. We don’t need to “hawk” Christianity to attract people to Jesus. Using those things that appeal to their old nature. Those that do this, don’t. Acts 20:27, *“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”* Those who choose to “hawk” Christianity pick out those things that appeal to our old nature. 1 John 2:16, *“For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world.”*

1. **Positively**: Four Qualities of **UNIMPEACHABLE INTEGRITY**
2. “…*but as of sincerity*…” Men of sincerity are those that “mean what they say and say what they mean”. This is one of the highest qualities in the world, but it should be, the very least, something one should expect from a Christian. We all ought to be a person who believes what they say by seeking to put it into practice.
3. “…*but as from God*…” This means to be commissioned like the military service. The idea is that we are a purposeful people, knowing that our authority and adequacy are from God.
4. “…*we speak in the sight of God*...” This describes openness to investigation because we are transparent. To walk in the sight of men means we can fake it. But if we recognize that we walk in the sight of God, then we are both transparent and trustworthy.
5. “…*in Christ*.” This quality speaks of authority. In Chapter 5:20, Paul says we are Christ’s ambassadors. That is to say, we are Christ’s authorized spokesmen and this is not powerless but powerful.

That explains Paul and Silas reaction in Acts 16:25 after being beaten and thrown in a dark damp dungeon and placed in stocks they could praise God. Those two missionaries didn’t react to the situation because they were too busy responding to what God was doing in their hearts. Their praise wasn’t based upon expectation of being set free their praise was because they were set free from the tyranny of the bars of self absorption! ***There is nothing that satan would rather do after encouraging a person to sin than to continue to remind them of that sin for the rest of their life until they long for hell for relief***.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 3:1-6**

**“*Perfectly imperfect*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-3 Living letters**

**III. Vs. 4-6 The person in the mirror**

**I. Intro.**

Paul faced a dilemma in addressing the Corinthian believers who had verbally attacked him:

* ***Say nothing in his defense and most certainly allow the work in Corinth to be destroyed by default.***
* ***Defend himself of their accusations and most certainly be accused of blowing his own horn***.

One author put it this way “*Self-defense*” is almost impossible without “*self-commendation*”! One wonders how Paul would rate today in the Mega Church media drenched Christian world. It is unlikely he would be considered a success, when you look at these facts:

* He spent most of his ministry in jail
* Never made enough salary to purchase a home
* Never built a church building
* Never spoke on television, or radio
* Had to get a job to support himself
* Admitted that he was a poor speaker and had a very unimpressive appearance

Perhaps it’s for this reason that he starts off this chapter with the phrase “*Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?*” One of the areas unique to fallen mankind is ***the feeling of inadequacy***. Watch the animal kingdom and you never see a dejected creature because their society has set standards upon a small percentage of them as being the “***ideal***” to which all other will be compared. If you have ever gone through the feeling of inadequacy then this section is for you.

**II. Vs. 1-3 Living letters**

Vs. 1-3 It is amazing that a man such as Paul who had founded the fellowship in Corinth, written three letters and visited another time would be asked by these Christians who he led to Christ if next time he came for a visit he could bring along letters of recommendation from Peter, John and James. ***Letters, letters we don’t need no stinking letters***!! God had worked through the ministry of Paul:

* ***To write not on parchment but upon their hearts***
* ***Not in ink but in the precious blood of Jesus Christ***
* ***Not by Paul’s power but in the power of the Holy Spirit***

And now they were asking for proof? Paul says, “*You all have it wrong I’m not the author I’m just the mailman*!” Paul had only delivered that which the Author had given him and the affects of this had already been described by Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 when he wrote: “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.* ***And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*.**” They could look in the mirror of their own soul and see the “***before and after photos***” as their lives were the only authentification needed.

 Paul says that they were, “*known and read of all men*”. What would happen if we applied this test to our churches today? How many would have a recommendation in the eyes of the community? The visible change that Christ has made in us that comes into contact with the people daily that say’s “*I’ve read your book man and if these actions and attitudes are what a Christian is than I want it*!”

**III. Vs. 4-6 The person in the mirror**

Vs. 4-6 This takes Paul back to the question he didn’t immediately answer in 2:16b “*Who is sufficient for these things*?” Self esteem is a very popular topic in educational arenas but that is not what Paul is speaking of here as his view is not feeling good about our self’s but seeing ourselves as Christ sees us. Confidence, we are told by the world, has to come from you. You have to somehow find in yourself the power to achieve and to be a success. The funny thing is that people who lack self confident suffer from the same problem as those who are arrogant and it is having our confidence in us instead of Christ! Paul offers a completely new view of confidence and security and tells us that it has ***nothing to do with me and everything to do with Jesus***! Paul offers a different reality that says, “*You don’t win the prize, you are the prize.*” Our sense of well being comes not from our accomplishments but rather through God’s by way of Jesus Christ. God hasn’t chosen me because He saw my potential; He didn’t pick me out to place me on His team because I was the best. NO, He chose me because He’s the best and my “*full potential*” isn’t achieved it’s a gift that is as wonderful and unique as every strand of my DNA! Oswald Chambers said, “***God can achieve His purposes either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance upon them***.” He has chosen to use “*Nobodies*” because of their unusual dependence on His power and grace. And He has chosen to us “*Somebody’s*” only after they have renounced all dependence on their natural abilities and resources. Consider Paul’s words with regards to Philip. 3:3-9 where he writes “*though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.* ***Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith***.” There is little doubt that as a Christian if I ask you what the basis of your salvation is; works or faith, you will say FAITH! But yet when it comes to see our self’s in this Christian life we often choose to base our sufficiency or lack thereof upon our works. That is the same problem the Christians in Galatia were having so Paul had to point out to them in Galatians 3:3 saying, “*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh*?” Paul sates ***two things here***:

* **The *inefficiency* of the Old Covenant compared the *sufficiency* of the New Covenant**
* **The *inefficiency* the flesh compared to the *sufficiency* of the Holy Spirit**
1. **The *inefficiency* of the Old Covenant compared the *sufficiency* of the New Covenant**: The trouble with the Old Covenant is though it is holy and good it has no power for transformation even though its information is correct. It doesn’t work for the same reason that posted speed limits don’t slow down cars, the truth posted doesn’t motivate the heart to always respond correctly. If the truth posted had an electronic chip tied directly to the car’s engine to regulate the speed correctly then people would always do what the law says. Thus the sufficiency of the New Covenant is aimed not at posting a sign to slow the car but rather Love to change the motivation to obey the command. ***The problem is the heart of man not the gas pedal of the car.*** Thus the New Covenant was aimed at changing the heart of man which is the problem. What all of mankind needs is a heart transplant! The first surgeon to ever do a heart transplant; Dr. Christian Barnard, after the surgery and some recovery spoke to the patient Dr. Philip Blaiberg and asked him if he would like to see his old heart. After talking a bit about the procedure Dr. Blaiberg just stared at the glass jar that contained his old heart realizing that he was the first man in history to hold his own heart in his hands. After a few more moments he took one last look at it and handed it back saying, “***So this is my old heart that has caused me so much trouble***!” He then turned away never to set eyes upon it again. That’s what Christ has done for us!
2. **The *inefficiency* the flesh compared to the *sufficiency* of the Holy Spirit**: The 2nd problem with the law is that it relies on the fallen flesh that has no power to do the right thing. It is unfair to expect anyone to obtain perfection and then to maintain that perfection for the remainder of their life. In the words of Scotty the fictional engineer of Star Trek’s USS Enterprise when commanded by Captain Kirk to go to warp speed, “*Captain we’ve got no* ***POWER***!” There is nothing wrong with the command, it is needed but with no way to perform it our lives will remain stranded in hyper space! Thus we now take the New Covenant which deals with our heart and we turn not to our inability to do the right thing but to God’s power given us in the Holy Spirit and ask Him to send us on our way. Hudson Taylor spoke of this truth saying, “*God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do His work by large committees. He trains somebody to be quiet enough and little enough and then He uses them*.”

Jeremiah in 31:31-34 described this in his prophecy 100’s of years earlier. The occasion of Jeremiah’s prophecy was the reign of Josiah in 600 BC when he had rediscovered the Law in the temple and national repentance broke across the nation only for the nation to again rebel. The problem wasn’t the law it was what it had to work with, humans! The problem with the law was that it was external (written on stone) and as such they provided no power to live out the truth they proclaimed. He said there was going to come a time when God would write his laws in people's hearts, not on tables of stone like the 10 commandments. It was the same law, but written in the heart instead of on some external demand. God would live with them, they would be his people and He would be their God. They could draw upon His wisdom, His energy, His power and strength for and demand they had in their lives. He would forgive their sins from the very beginning; and they could rest upon that constant washing and cleansing and forgiveness of God all through their lives. That is the new covenant as Jeremiah described it. That will change our motivation and outlook on life. God is not looking for gifted people or people who are self-sufficient. He is looking for inadequate people who will give their weakness to Him and open themselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the transforming grace of the New Covenant.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 3:7-11**

**“BC or AD?”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 7-8 More glorious**

**III. Vs. 9 Exceeding glory**

**III. Vs. 10-11 Excelling glory**

**I. Intro.**

Whenever we write a date unconsciously we are dividing history into two parts. Currently we are in the part known by its abbreviation AD (Anno Domini) or the year that refers to Jesus’ birth. And BC or before Christ! Interesting that history’s division is not a reference to a numerical midpoint, a war, or a discovery but to a person Jesus Christ! All of history and dating is calculated in relationship to His incarnation; things that happened before Him and things that have happened after Him. Come to think of it all our lives are on one side of the dating or the other. I definitely began life and lived it for 22 years in BC land where I didn’t live in relationship with Jesus. Ah but I have lived the last 31 years in AD after my Birth because of His birth! That is Paul’s point in looking at history as well as he will examine the law and Moses in BC time and compare it to Jesus and His ministry.

**II. Vs. 7-8 More glorious**

It is agreed by commentators that this section of scripture in Paul’s letter is a commentary on Exodus chapters 32 – 34 which is where we find the account of God’s response to Israel’s breaking its promise to keep the law. The word “*covenant*” is not a word we use today; the dictionary defines it as “*an arrangement between two or more people through which they enter into a relationship*”. In the biblical sense of the word it is the agreement by which God enters into a relationship with people. The word new means “*new in not only in point of time but in quality as well.*” Paul declares that the O.C. was deadly in that it produced a legal relationship saying in effect, “*If you wish to maintain your relationship with God, you must perform these laws.*” It killed three things in people under it:

1. ***It killed hope***: As there was never any hope that one could consistently maintain it.
2. ***It killed life***: As people under it could expect to live under constant judgment for failing to maintain it.
3. ***It killed strength***: Because though it could tell people what to do it offered no means by which what they were suppose to do could be done.

Vs. 7-8 Paul uses three comparisons in verses 7-11 that are the lesser to the greater in their view. Paul’s three fold logic is:

1. **That the ministry done through him by Christ is more glorious than Moses because of its unlimited exposure to God’s glory**.
2. **That this ministry is superior to Moses because it is a ministry that is based upon God’s righteousness not mans.**
3. **Finally it is better than Moses ministry because Moses was temporary where as God’s work through Paul is permanent.**
4. Vs. 7-8 ***The first example is a contrast between two types of glory one that fades and the other one never does***: They are characterized by two people Moses and Jesus and both are described as “*glorious*” although not equally, in fact now that Jesus has come Moses has no glory at all. From verse 3:7 through 4:17 Paul will contrast these two 16 times no doubt to counter his critics in the Jews who wanted gentiles to convert and practice Judaism. The problem for many with regards to Christianity is its age as some tend to think it not relating to today. But the problem with Christianity at the time Paul wrote this personal letter to the Corinthians was that it was a novelty and the Jews believed that a person needed to stay in the past BC. These Jews insisted upon Moses covenant still being relevant for salvation and Paul insisted as did the author of Hebrews in 8:13 that in “*A new covenant, He has made the first obsolete*.” As God descended in a cloud Moses hid in a cleft in the rock which allowed Moses to see only the afterglow of God’s presence. The result of this is that Israel would only see the presence of God in the face of Moses and they asked him to be veiled least they be destroyed by God’s judgment. As such Moses became the mediator of God’s presence and glory before the people. *What was passing away was not God’s glory in Moses face but rather God’s glory in His continual presence!* The veil allowed both God’s glory to remain among the people and was a sign of judgment because of the hardness of their heart. ***Thus the veil caused two things to happen simultaneously; it preserved Israel from being destroyed but also kept them from being transformed!*** It was attractive but it is ***temporary***. Furthermore ***it was dependent upon effort to maintain its splendor***, hence the veil to hide the truth that I’m not doing enough to keep it shining. Last Christmas my wife got me a stocking stuffer flashlight that is solar powered but also has a hand crank to recharge the batteries at night. If I crank for two minutes I can stop and get 2 more minutes of light before I have to crank some more. That’s the example in the face of Moses that caused the fading; he needed to crank some more to bask in the glow of self effort. The second example represents the New Covenant and its glory as seen in the face of Jesus which never fades but only becomes more glorious (2 Cor. 3:11 and 4:6). Paul speaks of a new principle of God-dependence Who will use the skills and abilities He gave us but will do so in His power. The benefits will be that it is ***not temporary*** ***neither is it dependent upon you to keep cranking to keep the glow going***!

**III. Vs. 9 Exceeding glory**

1. Vs. 9 ***The next contrast is a one that looks at what the two Covenants will produce***: The Old Covenant was marked by death and condemnation whereas the New Covenant was marked by the Spirit and righteousness. The reason for this is that we never know when enough is enough. We live under the tyranny of the “***would-of’s, should-of’s and could-of’s***”. And what is on display more than the temporary glory of our self effort is the lack of it and for this reason that we feel condemned. ***The New Covenant doesn’t mean that we do less; what has changed is that we aren’t using our effort as the basis of how God views us. We don’t crank it up to get love and acceptance; we crank it up because we already have God’s love and acceptance***. We received God’s rightness the moment we trust in His work and our sense of self worth and standing before Him is based solely upon His work with nothing to do with mine. I love my grandchildren but they aren’t doing anything for me to love them in fact at times they can be a little messy but I still chose to love them. ***The truth is our life always mattered to God, He always had a plan for our lives and He has always longed for a relationship with Him.*** The only thing that has changed is that we have realized this fact when we trusted in His work as seen in Jesus! Sense my security is based upon God’s work and not my own, than I can’t be deemed unworthy of His love because His love was never based upon my worth.

**III. Vs. 10-11 Excelling glory**

Vs. 10-11 ***The final contrast has to do with looking at the nature of the two glories side by side***: Paul says that when the glory of the temporary self effort is placed next to the glory that is God’s alone causes our self effort to not even be visible. Not only in duration but also in splendor. In Ephes. 3:20 Paul speaks of this saying that God is “*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*”. Paul says there was just no comparison between what he can do and what God can do in and through him. In fact Paul declares that seeing himself based upon his performance has lost its splendor all together. ***It was far more exciting to watch God work in his weakness then to do the work in his own strength and boast in its feeble results.*** The N.C. is different in that it is based upon a relationship of love and came into being based upon that sacrificial love. It is not a legal arrangement it is a relational one instituted by a loving Father for his children. It changes lives not by demanding people to do what they are not capable of doing in their own strength but by changing their hearts thus doing what they could not have done. Someone has well said that “***The 2nd best is always the chief enemy of the best***!” As people have always tended to cling to something old because it is familiar even when something is being offered that is far better. ***We must fear more not what we will lose but what we may not gain!***

The purpose of the law was to bring Israel to the knowledge of sin and understand that they were helpless to stop it in their own efforts, hence the sacrificial system of atonement. As we read in Hebrews 9:22 “*without shedding of blood there is no remission*.” Something that Paul also writes in his letter to the Romans in 3:20 saying “*for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*” Therefore as Paul so eloquently states in Gal. 3:24 “*the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*.” Our problem is that we still try to live by it only to consistently fail.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 3:12-18**

**“*No more lists*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 12-13 Free to be me**

**III. Vs. 14-16 I can see clearly now**

**III. Vs. 17-18 Freedom and transformation**

**I. Intro.**

Some of you old enough may recall that there was a radio show version of the “*The Lone Ranger*” where the question was always asked “*Who was that masked man any way*?” If Paul was asked that question his answer might be a surprise to many as he says that the unveiling of the masked man revealed that it was none other than Moses. Clearly the veil is not a good thing and has been damaging to the cause of Christ. This truth caused Bible Scholar William Barclay to proclaim, “***The greatest handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians***!” It reminds me of a story of two students of Duke University that were invited to a masquerade party and decided to go dressed in the school mascot of the “*Blue Devils*”. The problem arose when they had written down the wrong directions and ended up coming down the isle of a packed Church on Sunday evening. Folks were running for the doors screaming as they departed. All except one lady who got stuck in the pew. These two college boys didn’t realize that the commotion was about their costumes and went forward to help this poor lady and seeing their quick advance upon her she raised her hand, and rolled her eyes, as she said, “*Stop! Don't you come any further! I want you to know that I've been up standing member of this here church for 25 years”* she paused a moment lowered her voice and looked right at them as she continued*,* “*But I've been on your side all the time*!” I’m afraid unwittingly many in the church have been like this poor lady by their insistence of wearing their veils.

**II. Vs. 12-13 Free to be me**

Paul is still driving home the differences between Moses ministry and Jesus’ but here the focus of the comparison is on the effects of the two ministries. Paul lists ***four ways Jesus’ ministry of the New Covenant left a positive change in the lives it has touched***.

1. Vs. 12-13 **Boldness Verses Hiding**: Here the contrast is between the fact that Moses tried to hide what was passing away whereas Paul could have boldness. Moses had enjoyed the presence of the Lord been altered by being near the Lord in the tent of meeting but the veil hid the presence of the Lord as well as hiding the reality that such presence was fading and becoming dim. Typically you can count on two diverse responses from your flesh when confronted by what the Holy Law demands:
2. ***Obedience***: When Moses came down the mountain with his face aglow this represents the attraction we can have in our desire to do what the law demands. We want the opportunity to show what we can do to be better than the rest, we want to rise to the occasion and stand atop the podium and claim that we did it. That veil on Moses says, “*If he can do it so can I*!” Have someone tell us we can’t do something, aren’t good enough and there is naturally something in us that wants to prove that we can. There is a glory on the face of Moses that has to do with us basking in what we can do to show we are worthy!
3. ***Disobedience***: But there is also another side to this and that is we have and equal attraction to rebel against whatever the law is demanding and do the opposite.

Ah but Paul said that we don’t need to veil the presence of the Lord in our lives because it is ***not*** fading and becoming dim it is growing and becoming brighter. He says that that he came to a place where neither one of these responses was controlling him any longer because he realized that seeing himself in what God had done and would continue to do was far more glorious. The list of rules was attractive until it became apparent that we would never be able to climb the mountain that they demanded let alone stay there. Our sense of achievement is dashed on the rocks of failure that has only served to remind us that we aren’t “*good enough*”. So we either rebel at this time or promise to work harder next time. The Old Covenant is veiled, (hidden from view) because it is about mankind maintain a relationship. The New Covenant is unveiled and bold because it is about the Lord maintain the relationship. The Christian life was never meant for us to only experience the presence of the Lord based upon our performance that kind of life is empty as it is dependent upon us the maintain the relationship.

**III. Vs. 14-16 I can see clearly now**

The reading of the Torah on the Sabbath ought to have pointed the Jews to Jesus instead it caused them to put a veil over their eyes as to not see Him. Their blindness was due to ***prejudice*** and ***presuppositions*** not seeing what they didn’t want to see in Jesus and seeing what they wanted to see in their works as the basis of right standing before God. “***There is no one as blind as those who will not see***!” The greatest teacher that has ever been cannot persuade a person to learn anything if they have already made up their mind not to learn.

1. Vs. 14-16 **Unveiling Verses Blindness**: Please note though that the blindness though stated in verse 14 as being in their minds is clarified in verse 15 as affecting their hearts. The Jews would hear the Word of God but never let it penetrate their hearts. *The veil was* ***not just intellectual****, theirs was not just a problem of information it was* ***a problem of application***! They heard the truth weekly but hardened their hearts to it to avoid being transformed by it. That veil is removed Paul says in verse 16 the moment one turns to Christ. In Luke 24:13 after Jesus had appeared to those two disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus to a as yet “*veiled Jesus*” questioning the events of what had happened until He broke bread with them and their eyes were open when he expounded the word to them in Luke 24:32 “*Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us*?” This self righteousness veil isn’t limited to religious Jews but to religious Christians as well. A works based relationship appeals to our old self but **you cannot glory in self attainment and the work of Christ at the same time any more than the Israelites could fashion a golden calf and worship it and God at the same time!** There are some who continue to view the Bible as “*directing our hearts and minds to righteous living.*” But the problem is not the direction alone but the power to go in that direction! ***Once we become a Christian we receive the gift of salvation by faith. We thank God we have that, and then immediately we begin to set up rules of conduct.*** We usually submit to somebody else's for awhile, and then we begin to set up our own. We determine what is wrong and what is right and on that basis believe that God’s love and acceptance is based upon our list. Everybody has a list and most of us have some of the same things on the list murder, adultery etc. But then we get into areas where we have something that someone else doesn’t have on their list and they have something that we don’t have on our list. People have made their lists and “*checked them twice to determine who’s naughty and who’s nice*”. ***Pleasing God becomes and exercise of keeping your list perfectly instead of having the Lord keep you perfectly***! To the world this makes the Church appear either “*self righteous*” or “*hypocrites*” and to be honest if we are seeing our relationship with God based upon our lists than we are both at times.

**III. Vs. 17-18 Freedom and transformation**

There is one great area of hope; and you get this in the next two verses. Paul reminds the Corinthians that, **though the veil is over their minds, the Lord is still in their hearts.** Their hope of freedom comes from that great fact, for the one who is within them is God himself. The Spirit-led life is one in which Jesus Christ is very visible and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ***Freedom is being out in the open, it is having boldness, nothing to hide. The person who is free is one who does not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve about themselves***.

1. Vs. 17 **Freedom Verses Bondage**: Moses was unveiled before the Lord in the tent of meeting but veiled before the people but as believers we are truly free; unveiled before the Lord and people! We have freedom to truly be who we are before the Lord and people. Someone once said, “***I’m certainly not what I ought to be, and I’m defiantly not what I want to be but praise God I’m not what I use to be!***” The trouble with veils before people is that they not only serve to keep people from viewing us they keep us from ever changing. Soon the veils we have do more to keep us in then they do to keep others out. There are far more believers still living behind the bars of their own self protection even though “***Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is FREEDOM***!” Friends, ***love does what works could never do, surrender***! You do not have to earn it at all, and your performance is not going to affect it. You already have it. When you start looking at Jesus the One who is doing this in your life all your veils are taken away so you are not afraid to look at your own failures. We know we don’t deserve His love and acceptance, we aren’t trying to earn it so now out of love we do the things that we could never have done not to please Him but because we love Him.
2. Vs. 18 **Transformation Verses Stagnation**: The final comparison is the most important as Moses transformation was only *physical* and *temporal* where as the New Covenant transformation is *internal* and *eternal*. Moses was changed from the outside and it faded we are changed in the inside and become brighter as we are changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. Based upon verse 18 a wonderful thing happens when we do this without even knowing that we are doing it, we suddenly discover what other’s are noticing that we are becoming a loving person. In Romans 13:10 Paul wrote that “*love is the fulfillment of the law.*” ***With our lists gone and our veils removed we are suddenly free to love!*** We are fulfilling lists that we never made and this is because we owe no man anything “*except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law*.” (Rom. 13:8). When we speak we are doing so in truth and love as Paul said in Eph. 4:15. Our lists have been replaced by a mirror in which we reflect the image of Jesus upon all we meet and it leaves an impact! It’s a growth process as Paul states he saying that “*we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are* ***being transformed*** *into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*.” The way of pleasing Him is by accepting what he gives you. As long as you are trying hard, you never can lay hold of what he is ready to give. There are far too many of us with closed hands clinging on to our lists for fear of losing our identity but we can never lay hold of His gifts if we won’t let go of our lists!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 4:1-2**

**“*No towel to throw in*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-2 The ends do not justify the means**

**I. Intro.**

Paul’s critics in Corinth believed that his difficulties were an indication that God was not with him and they used those observations to heap insults upon him thinking that it would discourage him but here he writes that it didn’t have that effect upon him. Some see this passage as Paul’s answer to four charges of his critics:

1. Vs. 1 “*We do not lose heart*”: Has to do with the charge that some said that he had become apathetic and fickle to the ministry and that is why he never stayed put in one place.
2. Vs. 2a “*Renounced the hidden things of shame*”: They were saying that he was a dishonest man using things that furthered his reputation.
3. Vs. 2b “*Not walking in craftiness*”: This applies to the charge that he was asking for money not for the saints in Jerusalem but to line his own pockets.
4. Vs. 2c “*Nor handling the Word of God deceitfully*”: Here the charge seems to imply that Paul was diluting the message to support his claim of righteousness by faith in Christ alone.

Paul will tell them twice (first in verse 1 then in verse 16) “*Therefore we do not lose heart.*” I’m thinking of adopting that verse as the theme for this fellowship in this New Year 2012 what do you think? With all of us getting older, facing greater economic uncertainty, health, family and career difficulties by the world’s standards life seems to be on the decline but Paul says “*Not so fast*” as our hearts are growing closer to Jesus each and every day! “*Whom are you proclaiming, not only in your speech but by the way you are living*?” And let’s be certain that we understand the question it is **not** what “*theology*” but whose life and character is visible in our life?

**II. Vs. 1-2 The ends do not justify the means**

Vs. 1 The first six verses of Second Corinthians, Chapter 4, answers a lot of questions as to why so many people do not believe the gospel when they hear it, or even why many who do believe the gospel quit after they have been professing Christians. It also answers the question as to why some people whom you think will never believe it, suddenly do so.

The key to unlocking these 6 verses is Paul’s phrase in verse 1 where he says, “*Therefore, since we have* ***this ministry****, as we have received mercy,* ***we do not lose heart***.” The theme of this section is Paul’s assertion to these Corinthian believers that even though they had made him and his ministry something that they attacked it hadn’t had the effect that they wanted to have upon him. He didn’t feel like quitting, he hadn’t become discouraged and instead ***he was confident and encouraged***. Paul was using this situation as an opportunity to reveal to them what he had been ministering to them all along that his view of success was not how they or the world defined it. I find many Christians who are ready to quit; they are giving it all they can but are not seeing the results they thought they would with all the effort. They have come to the place like the great prophet “*Popeye*” where he would say, “***It’s all I can stands and I can’t stands no more!***” And unlike Popeye they haven’t been able to find the can of spinach. The problem is they just do not see themselves as Paul did instead their focus is on what they are doing for God. They do not understand the basis for this life is what Paul calls the “*new covenant*” which is all about what God has provided in Christ.

Vs. 2 Gone from Paul’s life and ministry was the worlds view of success and because of this he no longer needed to engage in the faulty techniques to compete! He didn’t practice the worlds mantra that “***The ends justified the means***” because ***his life and ministry was not the basis of God’s love and acceptance any longer***! Paul had been set free from the “*tyranny of the urgent*” that demanded that he perform or he was out of favor with God. Even more remarkable was that such freedom was being manifested all the while those in Corinth among the Church were still judging him along those lines! The seduction of the world’s popularity would come at the cost of God’s unconditional love and favor that were not earned nor could ever be they were a gift! And Paul was not about to let go of Someone so precious for something so fickle and elusive! In this verse Paul gives us two reasons why the new covenant does not allow for discouragement.

1. Vs. 2a “*We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully*”. Paul says that he “***had turned his back on the ways and practices that bring discouragement***.” He then goes on to describe the things that would cause discouragement; the hidden things of shame, walking in craftiness and handling the word of God deceitfully. Apparently there were folks in his day that defined success like the world did just like they do today. They were relying upon cleaver methods and even tampering with the word of God to get folks to follow what they were teaching. ***Paul wanted nothing to do with*** ***any attempt to compete for God’s love and acceptance based upon people’s responses***. It seems **based upon this text that these techniques followed two patterns**:
2. “*hidden things of shame… not walking in craftiness*”: We cannot be sure what exactly Paul was speaking of here but I know what would fall into this classification today. Last year at Easter I read about many church’s around the country that offered cash and prizes if you were the first 100 to church on that day. Here were ministries that were bribing people to come to Church by offering 60 inch flat screen T.V.’s and the like. But Paul wanted nothing to do with these gimmicks to manipulate people or to pad his stats***.*** Sometimes I think the Church has just become the “*greatest show on earth*” and you wonder where it will end. Years ago in California one Church became famous for its Christmas pageant and every year they made it even more spectacular than the year before. Live animals, a choir of hundreds finally they went to the air and got a specialist that was harnessed into a wire dressed as an angel who would hover over the manger singing “*Glory to God in the highest*”. They practiced for months and on opening night the 2 hour performance was ready and going great. Up went the angel but before he began to sing the guide wire snapped and he began to fly around uncontrollably banging into the walls. All the commotion drew the attention off of baby Jesus and onto the out of control angel who began yelling and cussing at people to get him the hell down. The more he thrashed about the more he began to spin faster and faster until he began to throw up on the audience. I think that is what can happen when we think we need to make Jesus about a performance: “***We just end up taking every body’s eyes off of HIM and onto us as we spin out of control hurling stuff that doesn’t smell very good.***”
3. “*handling the word of God deceitfully*”: Others just offer a “*feel good*” message and don’t say anything in the Bible that would ruffle people’s conscience. In 2 Tim. 4:3 Paul spoke of this time saying, “*For a time is coming when people will* ***no longer listen to right teaching****. They will follow their own desires and will* ***look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear*.**” Anyone who relies on this type of teaching may gain an appearance of success. But Paul says that he did not want to twist the scripture or use stories that played upon people’s emotions. He wasn’t a “*showman*” to attract people to come to Church. The most common way of twisting the Scriptures is to resort to what is called “*proof-texting*.” Which is coming to the Bible with an idea of something you want to teach and then going through it, picking out a few isolated passages here and there that sound like what you want to say, so that when people hear you, they will say, "*That it was biblically supported!*" ***These teachers use the Bible to inspire people to manipulate them not because it is inspired!***
4. Vs. 2b “*but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.” The first reason why he in the New Covenant wasn’t discouraged had to do with what he didn’t do, here in this second half of the verse it has to do with what he did. Paul did not get discouraged because he did not have to think through some new gimmick too get people out to hear the good news. He knew that truth is the most exciting and attractive thing in the world is Jesus. *When* you come to people with the truth about themselves, about their lives, about the world in which they live, when you strip off all the veils of illusion and the delusions by which people live and reveal the basic reality of what is true, you get instant attention. ***The test of any religion is not whether people like it or whether they are comfortable with it or whether it makes them feel good. The test is, "Is it true? Does it fit reality?*** In Matthew 7: 28-29 after Jesus had taught on the mountain that the people that heard Him commented that “*He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*.” When you have the word of God by the spirit of God you don’t need gimmicks, you don’t need to tickle peoples ears because it “*speaks to the conscience, and not merely to the mind*”. Paul says, “*I don't have to depend on my personality and my ability to persuade people. I can go with the simple teaching of the truth of the Word of God and the conviction that God is able to reach the conscience even though the mind and the emotions may reject what I have to say*.”

It was with great joy in his calling to present Jesus unhindered from view because Paul like John the Baptist before him had Jesus increase in his life to such a degree that he had decreased. **Paul presented an undiluted Jesus that was straight forward without any deviation!** That is what he meant by the use of the phrase, “*In the sight of God*”! There are far too many “***Super Star***” personalities in the pulpits today who crave the popularity to such a degree that they teach a “***synthetic gospel***” to appeal to the masses as “***relevant***” and “***intellectual***” all the while pandering to further boost their self worship. They fail to realize that their calling has nothing to do with making themselves more popular and richer; Jesus doesn’t need them and He isn’t lucky to have them!!!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 4:3-6**

**“Was blind but now I see”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 3-4 Behind the curtain**

**III. Vs. 5-6 The great secret**

**I. Intro.**

Ever wonder why not everyone becomes a follower of Jesus? I mean think about it: Receiving Jesus is a far better deal than winning the lottery, going on a dream vacation or even finding the love of your life. He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother, a Warrior King that guarantees the victory, the Groom that will always love you and will never leave you or forsake you. Why even at death He will usher you into the house that He has been preparing just for you. Not to mention the fact that He alone has wiped out our debt of sin past, present and future and has even made it possible for us not to live under the power of sin. With those truths it is just illogical not to receive Jesus, yet there are far more people who don’t accept Him than those that do. As Jesus Himself predicted in Matthew 7:13 when He said, “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*” The Bible speaks of two reasons why a person who has heard the gospel doesn’t receive Jesus as their Lord:

1. In John 3:19 Jesus said that He “***the light***” had come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Simply put the number one reason a person rejects Jesus is not a lack of evidence but they don’t want to stop living in sin.
2. The 2nd reason is what Paul touches on in this passage as well as 2 Tim. 2:24-26. In that passage Paul writes to Timothy of the qualifications of leadership in the local Church saying that, “*the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.*” Then in verse 25 Paul writes that the reason for these qualifications are so that, “*In meekness*” they will be able to “*instruct* ***those that oppose themselves***”. Clearly Paul viewed the rejection of Jesus as an “***opposition against one’s own self***”. Paul goes on to say that being “*apt to teach*” might grant those who are in “***opposition against one’s own self***” the opportunity that “*God might give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*” and in so doing that they “*may* ***recover themselves out of the snare of the devil****, who are taken captive by him at his will*.” Here in 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul writes of that “***snare***” saying in the NLT that “***Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe****, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them*.”

The fact remains that in spite of the power of the gospel some remain deaf to its appeal and blind to its glory. The question is what can we the Church do about that problem?

**II. Vs. 3-4 Behind the curtain**

 Vs. 3-4 Paul concedes this accusation against him as they said that he taught things that were hard to understand and didn’t produce the numbers as others did. His argument is that the lack of reception had nothing to do the message or the messenger but rather the hearers. There was nothing wrong with the gospel and Paul had not tried to “*water it down*” to make it palatable. The problem was those who didn’t receive did so because there was a veil in their minds and hearts that caused blindness to it. Calvin put it this way, “*The blindness of unbelievers doesn’t detract from the truth of the gospel any more than the sun is less real to a person who is blind and cannot detect its light.*”

Some of the commentators on this passage say interpret this saying that Paul is answering the question, “*Why are people perishing*?” and that his answer was, “*Because they are blinded by the devil*.” They then say that Paul asks and answers, “*Why are they blinded by the devil*?” and his answer is, “*Because they won't believe*.” **If it is interpreted that way then this means:** “*That the basic reason for people being lost is because they refuse to believe, and that is what gives the devil an* ***opportunity*** *to blind them.*” But that is ***not what Paul says***. It is the other way around: *People are perishing because they do not believe; and they do not believe because they* ***are blinded by the devil****.* The god of this age is behind the scenes of world events and has brainwashed them. Paul says that the devil's tool is the veil. He has described that “***veil as the delusion that we are adequate to handle life by ourselves, that independent sense of pride that says, "I don't need any help; I can handle it by myself; I need no religious crutch; I don't need a savior***.” In the words of William Henley's famous poem, *Invictus*: “*It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll,* ***I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.***” The devil's purpose is to keep people from seeing that Jesus Christ is the answer. One of the great proofs of the Bible is that it confirms that people everywhere, in any generation, in any culture or background, long to be like God. They want to be in charge; they want to run things; they want to make final decisions about what happens to them; they want to control others and the events of their lives and they are frustrated if they cannot. They long to be like God. It may surprise you that this was the intent of God from the very beginning that we on this earth we would manifest His qualities and His character. He has implanted that in the hearts of people everywhere. ***The problem lies in assuming that such God like behavior is self serving, arrogant and that in this prideful arrogance that we can do this by ourselves, by our own efforts, by our own power, by our own abilities.*** ***The great secret the devil seeks to hide is that Jesus Christ is the secret***. Jesus said it in John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father but by me*.”

**III. Vs. 5-6 The great secret**

Vs. 5 So what hope is there that anybody who has been blinded by the devil will ever believe the good news? People cannot remove the veil themselves only Christ can take it away. So how then can people be saved? Paul says, “*That is where preaching comes in. That is why I have been sent*.” In Romans 10:17 Paul wrote that “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*.” **But the question is**: ***What can we do about this condition that those who are blinded seem to be deaf as well?*** In Matthew 12:29 Jesus said, “*How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless* ***he first binds the strong man****? And then he will plunder his house*.” A few chapters later Jesus said in 16:19 speaking to His Church saying “***I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven****.*” So here is what the scriptures say we must do with regards to people’s blindness and spiritual captivity: **We need to go to God in prayer asking that God bind the “*strong man satan*” who has blinded the un-beliving’s eyes by veiling Jesus to them so that they will stay in captivity*.* We are to be praying that satan’s work will be bound and God’s work will be released which will enable those blind to see**. ***I’m afraid that the Church has abandoned the spirit led and empowered necessity of prayer as we continue to preserver for those who are under the snares of satan***. Paul says, “*It’s for this reason we don't come preaching ourselves. If you want to know where we fit in, we are your servants for Jesus' sake.*”

 Paul didn’t preach ***personalities, programs, principals or procedures***; NO he preached a ***Person*** who is **Jesus Christ as Lord**! He is **NOT** going to be Lord some day when he returns, He is Lord NOW! When he rose from the dead He said in Matt 18:18 to His disciples, “***All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth***”. He is in control; He is in charge right now; all the events that occur in the world today occur because He has permitted them or has brought them into being. A lot of people misinterpret salvation as, “***If you receive Jesus as your Savior, you will be saved.***” But you won’t find that verse in the Bible; **He must be Lord of your life in order for you to be saved**. Friend, Jesus is Lord whether you believe it or not, whether you receive Him as such or not. Your unbelief won’t change that but it will change whether or not you are saved. ***Lord is who He is; saving is what He does.***

Could it be in today’s world that in part people don’t see Jesus because all they hear is Jesus as “***Savior***” not “***Jesus Christ as the Lord***” who saves? People will receive a “***savior***” who will deliver them from messes, self made or otherwise, but they aren’t interested in a Lord who is over their lives! There are a great many who remain blinded because they only want a savior so that they can go back to the mess they have made out of their lives. ***They aren’t wanting a way OUT they are looking for away to REMAIN without the natural consequences of their choices***!

Vs. 6 Paul knew what it was to be blinded and to see the light as that had been his experience as told by Luke in Acts 26:13. It is God’s work to remove the veil as it was His work to bring like into darkness at creation. The God of creation called light out of darkness can alone bring light to blindness! *No one is beyond His love, no one has out ran His grace and no one is so blind that He cannot bring them into light*! Paul goes on to say that the moment a person sees that Jesus is Lord, God's creative power begins to operate in his life and light comes into their darkness and the veil is removed. He takes us back to creation, when the whole world lay in darkness. Nobody could do anything about it except God, who said in Genesis 1:3b, “*Let there be light*,” and suddenly, out of the darkness, light sprang up in obedience to the creative word of the living God. Where do you find the light of the glory of God? In the face of Jesus Christ. And where do you find the face of Jesus? The bible is all about Jesus:

* Old Testament is full of anticipations of his character and his being
* The Gospels give you the record of his amazing life on earth
* The Epistles explain the implications of that life, his death and resurrection, and his working for us

As you read through the Bible the Spirit of God interprets them, and the “*face of Christ*” comes clearer and clearer and light comes into a darkened heart.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 4:7-12**

**“*The Great Exchange*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 7-9 Common containers**

**III. Vs. 10-12 Blooms in the desert**

**I. Intro.**

Paul has been describing his ministry of warfare against the “*god of this age*”, who has, “*blinded the minds of the unbelievers*”, (2 Cor. 4:4b). This comes as no surprise to most of us as we are surrounded by evidences of this seen in the decay in society. But how does that stack up next to Matthew 5:13-14 where Jesus said to His disciples, “*You* ***are*** *the* ***salt of the earth****; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men*. *You* ***are*** *the* ***light of the world****. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*” Salt in Jesus’ time was a very important commodity; in fact it was so valuable that Roman soldiers were often paid with salt that is where we got the phrase, “*he is worth his salt*”. There was no way to preserve food accept by use of salt; used on dead things it kept them from spoiling. But salt does not change decay; it cannot change corruption into incorruption. All it does is prevent it from spreading. Jesus was saying that His Church is called to; *be the preservative to impede corruption.* Salt was also used in wounds as an antiseptic providing healing to those that were sick stopping the spread of decay so that healing can take place. The purpose of light is to illuminate. This is a positive principal in contrast with salt. Salt prevents the spread of decay, but light reveals what is present. Yes, it exposes what is hidden, but more than that it reveals what might be. It is clear what the Church’s problem is “*we have lost our flavor*” “*we are not a city set upon a hill*”. **Jesus is saying that if we lose or preservation then the world will use us to be able to continue on in the paths they are still on**. We cannot merely put on a front of being salty; we have to be salty! That is what Paul is writing about here as verses 7-12 are a detailed description of how to exercise the power of the Holy Spirit.

It reminds me of the plaque that is at the base of the great Hoover Dam dedicated to the 112 people that died during its 5 year construction; it reads in part; “***These died that the desert might bloom****.*” George Muller was once asked what his secret was as provider for 1000’s of orphans he responded by saying, “*There was a day when I died*” then he hung his head to explain what he meant “*Died to George Muller*.” That is Paul’s topic in this section as he explains the mystery of our weakness and God’s power that produces “***blooms in the desert***”.

**II. Vs. 7-9 Common containers**

Vs. 7 Clay jars were like plastic or paper bags today! They were used to transport goods and hide family treasures but they had a short life span. Every archaeological dig contains their fragments even though no one in their day considered them valuable. There are two things that Paul’s analogy tells us:

1. It was no big deal when one of them broke as they were cheap and easy to replace. Paul uses this as a metaphor for humanity and the followers of Jesus. Some clay is more refined then others but be it fine china or adobe it’s still just dirt!
2. The other thing that is very descriptive to me is that these pots are by design made to contain something. That is what all of humanity is by nature “*common containers*”. We are not “***super star entertainers***” but ***common containers***! We are by design meant to hold someone and as such we will either be full of Christ or full of ourselves! God's purpose in for our life is that we so live that people will look at us and say, “*I don't get it. I know that person they are ordinary yet when they go through life they live so remarkably, I just don't understand it*.”

The treasure he speaks of in verse 7 was described for us in verse 6 as “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*.” To many it is ***an utter mystery why God would commit the hope for fallen humanity in the gospel to insignificant fragile followers.*** But Paul tells us that the reason: We Christians were ***never*** designed to be powerful in ourselves we are only vessels in which God’s power is to be exhibited. It is important that we don’t misunderstand what Paul is saying: He is **not saying** that we need to embrace our weakness as a means to enhancing “***OUR POWER***”. The equation is NOT: My weakness + God’s power = My Power! It is about His power being manifested through our weakness! It is in our frailty and weakness that God’s power is most visible as we are designed to leak, as our weakness is essential and necessary for the display of Gods power.

Vs. 8-9 To illustrate this Paul gives **four paradoxes of his own personal experiences** and we know that they are his because he prefaces each of the four with the words “***WE ARE***”. And in each of these four personal experiences he contrasts his weakness with God’s power pulsating through his life by using the words “***BUT NOT***”. William Barclay translates these verses: “*We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in; we are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end; we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God; we are knocked down, but not knocked out*.” ***Here we are told of the things that bring out the weakness of our clay pots, these stresses cause us to realize that we are ordinary but they also cause us to realize that what we contain in Christ is extraordinary***. Nothing ever changes that weakness but in that weakness **we realize that we are a picture frame of God’s power!**

1. Vs. 8a “***Squeezed but not squashed***”: As much pressure that was exhibited upon Paul’s life he proclaimed that such squeezing was ever met with a filling of God’s Power that even with all of the pressure of the world pressed upon his fragile earthen life it was never able to crush him. Have you found that to be true dear saint? ***The Holy Spirit fills our clay pots with more strength than the world has stress, more power than the world has problems***!
2. Vs. 8b “***Bewildered but not befuddled***”: As weak as Paul’s life was at loss because of the work of the Hole Spirit he was never “***at a loss***”. He may have been driven to the place of confusion but he was never confounded! It was said of Napoleon that he had a magic for victory but no technique for defeat. But no so of Paul as defeat and weakness only meant that the surpassing power would be of God and not of himself! In 2 Tim. 4:5 Paul would encourage his young friend by saying, “***keep your head in all situations****, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*” Friend this is only possible in our weakness as God’s strength is perfected.
3. Vs. 9a “***Hounded by the world but hugged by God***”: Paul new literally what it was like to be persecuted as this word literally means to be “hunted down” but he had also found out what King David knew so well that God would never forsake him. Nothing and no one could ever convince Paul otherwise because God’s abiding presence was always with him.
4. Vs. 9b “***Knocked down but not knocked out***”: The word “*struck down*” means to be hit by a weapon but Paul said that he may have been ***put down*** but he was not ***put out***! In Acts 14:19-20 Paul experienced having people pick up rocks and strike him tell he was unconscious where they drug him outside the city thinking he was dead only to get back up and go back into that same city.

You can catch the intensity of Paul’s statements when you put them altogether: “***Squeezed, Bewildered, Hounded by the world, and Knocked down***”. That describes the weakness in the flesh doesn’t it? But look at God’s surpassing power on display through that weakness as we compile these words together: “***not squashed, not befuddled, hugged by God and not knocked out.***” These words describe God’s power not Paul reaching down and pulling himself by his strength. Paul’s weakness became the occasion for God’s power. Theodore Steinway who came to fame building the Pianos that bear his name once said, “***In one of our concert pianos, 243 taut strings exerting a pull of 40,000 pounds on an iron frame. This is proof that out of great tension comes great harmony****.*” I believe that this truth about pianos carries over to people as well. It is only as we go through extreme pressures that we gain the right tone in our hearts that God can play His tune of grace though us. There is a great principal in reaching others for Christ: “*It is through the breaking of the earthen vessel that light shines forth onto the pathway for others*.”

**III. Vs. 10-12 Blooms in the desert**

 Vs. 10-11 I know personally many times as a Christian I’ve felt afflicted and crushed; I’ve had the perplexities that have driven me to despair. I’ve felt abandoned and knocked out for weeks and months at a time. What has made the difference for me in those times so that I can walk in victory instead of defeat? It is to be found in these two verses here:

The death that Paul speaks of is the ***process of dying*** rather than the final state. Notice that the “*life of Jesus*” always rests upon the “*death of Jesus*.” We must have, in our experience, the “*death of Jesus*” in order to have the “*life of Jesus*.” In Col. 1:9-11 Paul prays for the believers in Colossae saying that he prayed that they may be “***strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power***”. But what was God’s power to be used for? Was it so they could do incredible miracles? Was it so they could exhibit a supernatural ability to proclaim the gospel? ***NO***, Paul tells us that it was so that we could live with “***all patience and longsuffering with joy***”! That is where the real witness takes place, God’s power is made the most visible where the world sees us cracked pots living in all patience and longsuffering with joy! ***We want to be free from anxiety but only if we can have the pleasure of worrying***! ***We want the kingdom of God but only if we can maintain our own personal rights as well***. But you cannot have both. That is where the new covenant brings us, “*always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, in order that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh*.”

Vs. 12 The “*cross*” says that we have to die; come to the end of our dependence on ourselves and rest upon the willingness of God to be at work in us, without any flash. That’s where we struggle, as our flesh wants the power of God, but we want to get credit for it too. “***So death is at work in us, but life in you***.” This then is the New Covenant as seen in the Cross of Christ: ***Jesus died that we might live we die to self that He might live through us***! That is ***the great exchange***: **Jesus’ life for ours and our life for His**! God’s power in our lives does not come from our pursuit of power: My weakness + God’s power = God’s power! The principal of the world is “*self-glorification*” the principal of the Christian is “*self-crucifixion*”. ***What a word for the Church***: With all our propensity to human idolatry and self exaltation we must be reminded that the power of the gospel comes in our weakness, not our strength or greatness. The fact is we are clay pots and cracked ones at that.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 4:13-15**

**“*Is this all there is?*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 13-15 Affected in the present by the past because of the future**

**I. Intro.**

Paul had just explained how our weakness framed God’s power using his own personal experiences he said and I paraphrase his words that we are:

* ***Squeezed but not squashed***
* ***Bewildered but not befuddled***
* ***Hounded by the world but hugged by God***
* ***Knocked down but not knocked out***

God’s power through our weakness principal was what moved Paul to new and joyous heights. But it was also this principal that motivated him to continue serving in the present. If there is one thing that humanity has become an expert (*albeit it would much rather not have taken the course*), its death! The great question everybody will ask at some point usually more than once is the question; “*Is this all there is? What happens after this life I’m living now?*” As you examine this you will see that humanity has come up with **only three answers to that question and people will be in one of these three categories**:

1. **First**: There are those who answer this question by one word ***NOTHING***! You simply pass out of existence, like a candle going out your life just flickers for a while then goes into darkness. ***There is nothing left, no experience, no feeling, no reaction, no knowledge****.* People who adopt this view believe that in the end they just simply perish, cease to exist, and that is the end of it. Most notably people who have embraced this opinion are atheistic in philosophy. Of course people can hold to this position if they want to but the trouble with it is that it offers nothing but despair. To hold this view especially as you near the “*end*” is to become fatalistic with no hope for anything meaningful. To come to the end of human personality with all its possibilities and wonders is to arrive at the end of hope. People who have come to this belief **live for now but only because they have no tomorrow.** As such they live a self centered and self absorbed life. All their philanthropic pursuits are in the sciences that try to extend the “*here and now*” because in their view there is no “*here after*”. People that have this philosophy on the extreme if they have the money will delve into cryogenics in the “hope” that at some future time humanity will developed a cure for whatever was the cause of their death. Life becomes about trying to shove everything into your “*bucket list*”.
2. **Second**: There is the answer that says that when you come to the end of your life ***anything can happen***. This position is so wide that the range of answers can’t possibly be addressed in a million books. They vary from eastern religions that say you are going to have to come back over and over again until you work hard enough to become good enough to reach the stage of perfection then you can enter into a state of Nirvana. Some of the extreme beliefs about this are that we don’t really exist now as we are all just players in someone else’s dream. Then there those that tend to the sci-fi that see things out of this world with aliens’ and other planets that we will populate with greater intelligence and technology. The trouble with these views is they have no historical basis for trusting in them. In the end they are at best just wishful thinking, and at worst, demonic delusion. Proof of this is seen in the fact that they are all contradictory of each other. The belief in any one of these possibilities is based upon personal “*experiences*” a “*burning in the bosom*” kind of encounter that interprets what happens next to “*feelings and emotions*” with no factual true evidence. Many of these beliefs have come from those who have claimed to have died then came back to life, angelic beings or those who have come in visions with words about the “*after life*”. These emotional experiences amount to nothing more than old wives tales, myths and fables that have been around for generations. People who hold to the “*anything can happen*” possibility despite their verbal conviction still live life upon a (pardon the pun) “***grave*** ***uncertainty***”. It is interesting that most folks that hold to this position have changed many times in their opinion about what happens in the end. That tells me that in reality they have no security, no certainty about the life to come. There may be such a life, but no one really knows for sure and in the end they are just as fatalistic as their above counter parts.
3. **Third**: Is the Christian answer which is based upon the Word of God and the eye witness testimony of many of proclaim that Jesus is the only man who clearly has risen from the dead differently then when He went into the grave. This testimony is supported by evidence of an even greater magnitude then eyewitness testimony in what Peter calls in 2 Peter 1:19 “*a more sure word of prophecy*”. By this Peter confirmed that even though he was an eye witness of Jesus resurrection that the Bible spoke of his coming, His death, burial and resurrections thousands of years before they ever came to pass. The only way that is possible is if someone existed outside of the realm of our earthly existence of “*time, space and matter*” and spoke of these things before they happened as if they had already happened. The evidence is confirmed in science, archeology and history all of which confirms that what Jesus taught and did is a fact. Furthermore our spirit agrees with the Holy Spirit with absolute certainty and security that we not only believe in a greater life after this life we can live like it now! With this security we can live a selfless life to the glory of God designed to make others lives better. Our philanthropy is towards others without the concern and uncertainty of the future! We know that at the end of our earthly life we will begin the “*great adventure*” not into the “*unknown*” but into a life that is so incredible that it can only be described in this life by what isn’t there in the life to come. The things that are missing are death, sorrow, pain, suffering, darkness, fear; hatred etc. these and many more will cease to exist in our future that will never have an end! ***The question I have for us who believe this to be true today is; are we living life now based upon that view***?

**II. Vs. 13-15 Affected in the present by the past because of the future**

Vs. 13 Here Paul quotes Psalm 116:10-12 which is a psalm about David proclaiming his trust in God despite his present circumstances. David declared that his trials and pressures that he was presently going through were going to have a great effect and impact in his life and those around him. In quoting this Paul is saying, “*I may not see life in you through me dying to self but I know it is coming. I’m going through the squeezing so I know it is going to have an impact on you*.” In quoting David’s trust in the Lord Paul is giving us another truth that: “***That our belief in the future changes how we live life in the present***!” Friends what we truly believe about **our future always determines the present**! **You can tell what a person really believes about “*life after death*” by the way they are living now!** The truth is most people spend far more energy and time in trying to enhance their wealth and health for how they will spend the final 20 years of their earthly life without spending any time or resources considering how they will spend eternity! ***Retirement ought not to be a matter of whether you are “saving” for it but whether you are living and spending for it***! Dear friends as believers all of us ought to realize that this earthly existence is not the place that we are retiring in!

Vs. 14-15 The first reason Paul was unwavering in his commitment to proclaim Jesus was his confidence in his future resurrection. To Paul the resurrection was not a belief it was a ***FACT***!

* ***It was because of the fact of the resurrection from the dead that Paul was willing to carry about in his body the dying of Jesus***
* ***It was because Paul looked forward to a life in heaven lived with His Lord Jesus that he was willing to die daily***

Paul lived like he believed and because of the fact of his future he could live life as it mattered! To Paul his view of the future was not theological it was practical. In verse 14 Paul says that such confidence came from looking at the life that was brought about through Jesus’ death. This ought to be seen in the body of Christ the Church as well when we give of ourselves sacrificially serving others we begin to see the life of Christ become visible in others.

In the 15th verse Paul says that the first place that you can look for this life to be manifested is in ***thanksgiving towards God***. People who have had their clay pots squeezed to the point where cracks have developed and have become broken an amazing thing happens, they begin to praise the Lord because they find that God’s strength has been more than adequate to the worlds stresses. And from those very stress fractures joy and praise leaks out onto everyone we meet. Years ago from Decision Magazine came a letter from a man that described this when he wrote: “*For a long time I had been bitter about life. It seemed to have dealt me a dirty blow, for since I was 12 years old I have been waiting for death to close in on me. It was at that time I learned I had muscular dystrophy. All I could see was what I had missed. My friends went away to college, then got married and started having families of their own. When I lay in bed at night thinking, despair would creep from the dark corners to haunt me. Life was meaningless*.” He went on to say what had caused the change was that his mother brought home library Billy Graham's book *World Aflame* and he started reading it. He said, “*As I read I realized that I wanted God. I wanted there to be a meaning to life. I wanted to receive this deep faith and peace. All I know is that now my life has changed and I now have joy in living. No longer is the universe chaotic. No longer does life have no goal. No longer is there no hope. There is instead "God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* ***I continue to grow weaker. I am close to being totally helpless and am in pain most of the time, but sometimes I am so glad I am alive that it is hard to keep myself from bursting at the seams*.**” Upon an old tomb stone were these words as an epitaph: “*Remember me as you pass by; as you are now so once was I; as I am now so you will be; prepare for death and follow me*.” Apparently someone had stopped by and read those words and considered their warning then wrote on the tomb stone a final stanza that said, “*To follow you I’m not content; until I know which way you went*!” At Christ Church cemetery in Philadelphia where Benjamin Franklin was laid to rest is his tomb stone that reads: “*The body of B. Franklin printer: Like the cover of an old book (its contents torn out and stript of its lettering and guilding), lies here, food for worms.* ***Yet the work itself shall not be lost for it will, as he believed, appear once more in a new and more beautiful edition, corrected and amended by its Author*.**”

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 4:16-18**

**“Living in light affliction”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 16-18 Becoming real**

**I. Intro.**

Given Paul’s recorded history and own statements with regards to his affections the phrase, “*we do not lose heart*” is amazing.

* One reason for this was that Paul looked to a future home that was a certainty.
* The other reason for this is that Paul saw that such squeezing was part of his preparation for this future home.

In other words ***his present transformation was security in his final transformation***. His old fleshly sin nature was being ***deconstructed*** while his new inward nature was being ***constructed***. Thus when he was being deconstructed he was also being constructed and that gave him hope! C.S. Lewis once said, “*Whatever is not eternal is eternally out of date.*” The tragedy of many in the church is that they have lost their eyes for the unseen because they have become blinded by what is only visible for a short time. This truth will be what Paul will cause him to write in 2 Cor. 5:17 “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*.” What constantly think that the “*old things*” that have “*passed away*” refers to the things of the flesh and sin but in the next few verses we see that Paul didn’t specify as he says “*all things have become new*.”

**II. Vs. 16-18 Becoming real**

Vs. 16-18 Paul starts this last section with a great conviction based upon the truths he just proclaimed, “*Therefore we don not lose heart*.” Paul has from the beginning of this chapter all the way through been able to look beyond his circumstances, beyond their accusations and be thankful. Paul describes this reality in three ways: ***Trivial***, ***Temporary*** and ***Transforming*** as he gives his reader’s three reasons why even though he was being squeezed to the point of death he leaked praise.

1. **Trivial**: In verse 16 Paul agrees that “*the outward man is perishing*”. The “*outward man*” should not be confused with that the “*old man*”; which is the flesh or old carnal nature. The “*outward man*” is the body and mind which if you haven’t noticed yet is slowly falling apart. The fact is that the outward man is deteriorating, growing weak and feeble. But Paul wasn’t discouraged by this because the inner man was being renewed day by day. And by the “*inward man*” Paul means “real me” the human spirit inside that has its conscious expression in the soul, that unique character, that combination of soul and spirit that marks mankind as different from the animals. Paul says that this is daily being renewed. Even as his outward clay pot was breaking away and falling apart he was becoming more like his real self. That is the hope of the believer. Even though their physical man is being squeezed the end result is God is leaking out through the cracks and we become more real all the time.
2. **Temporary**: In verse 17 Paul says our hope for the future is the basis for this kind of renewal. The amazing thing is that Paul links it directly to the afflictions and the struggles of our present time. ***There is a direct tie between the affliction and the glory*** one is preparing for the other. **That means that no matter how great the trial may seem to us to be, two things are always true of it**:
3. **It is not that bad**: When compared with what is coming for us in glory it is extremely light. Now, if that was all you ever read of Paul, you would be tempted to say, “*Obviously he didn't have to go through what I have had to go through*.” But we know this is not the case as chapter 11 of this very letter, he goes through a long list of his afflictions and there is nothing like it in the annals of literature. Nobody has ever gone through more than Paul, other than our Lord himself. He speaks of being beaten five times, of being beaten with a rod three times, of being thrown into jail many times, of enduring hunger and thirst, hardships as being shipwrecked. All this was part of his life experience, yet he sums it all up in that wonderful way, *"this slight momentary affliction*." In Romans 8:18 Paul put it this way saying, “*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us*.”
4. **It is preparing us for something great**: C. S. Lewis put it this way saying, “*The door on which we have all been knocking all our lives will open at last*.” Our present sufferings are preparing us for something so incomparable, so amazing, and so marvelous that there are no words to describe it. That means that no trial, no pain, no isolation, no heartache, no loneliness, no weakness or failure, no sense of being put aside is without significance. All of it is playing its part in accomplishing God's work in your life and the lives of others. It is building for us an incomparable weight of glory.
5. **Transforming**: In verse 18 Paul answers the question, “*How do we know that is true*?” It has always been difficult for men to believe that there are unseen realities, invisible to human eye and investigation, but, nevertheless, very real and very important. What are the real things? Paul calls them, “*the things that are unseen,*” the invisible forces at work which the world is almost totally unaware. The Bible tells us what they are:
6. **There is the Word of God**: God spoke and it was. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35 that *“Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away*”. The Word is the one reliable thing in the unreliable universe. We understand by the Word of God that all things are held together by him. He is the Creator and the supporter of all things.
7. **We learn that there are angels, both good and bad, working both for and against human beings**. We are part of a *great invisible conflict* in which we are both under attack and supported by invisible hands. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 6:12, “*we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*” These invisible forces are the ones that are behind headlines every day.
8. **Ultimately, there is God himself**. Invisible to the human eye, the Lord Jesus, Lord of earth and heaven and the created universe, and though we do not see him yet we love him and follow him. He is in control of history. As we approach the end of life these things will become more and more significant to us.

Paul’s basis of coping with his life’s experiences was twofold:

1. He experienced daily renewal of his inner man even though his outward man was perishing.
2. He had a different world that linked his affliction to eternal glory.

D. L. Moody’s last words were, “*Earth is receding. Heaven is approaching. This is my crowning day.*” That is looking at reality. Nothing is more encouraging to me than to realize that when I believe the Word of God, I am becoming more and more realistic. It is these truths that caused G. Campbell Morgan to write, “*Happy is the man on earth who lives in a tent not literally, but spiritually.*” Did you know that the Church is the only organization in the world which exists entirely for the sake of those who are not its members!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 5:1-5**

**“In Immanuel’s land”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1 The truth about tents**

**III. Vs. 2-4 Does anybody know what time it is?**

**IV. Vs. 5 On tiptoe**

**I. Intro.**

After speaking of afflictions in chapter 4 it’s no wonder that Paul takes up the topic of heaven in chapter 5. When Spain had ended its conquests to the ends of the known world they printed coins that reflected this minted with the Greek fabled “*Pillars of Hercules*” better known as the Straits of Gibraltar that 9 mile across narrow passage way between the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Next to the Pillars were these words “*Ne Plus Ultra*” or “***No More Beyond***”. These coins stayed in circulation until after 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue discovering the New World. Spain no longer could claim that she was the end of the earth so she took the coins and put an X over the word Ne and the coins now read “***More Beyond***” and Spain went from the “*ends of the earth*” to the “*gate way to the new world*”. Or in the words “*Looney Tunes Porky Pig*” it went from “*That’s all Folks*” to “*There’s Much More*”. In this passage of scripture Paul puts his X over the No as he tells his readers that there is “***more beyond***”.

**II. Vs. 1 The truth about tents**

Vs. 1 The use of the metaphor of a “tent” representing our earthly bodies is a natural one for Paul seeing that his vocation supporting his missionary endeavors was that of a tent maker. I’m amazed that at the start of this topic on life after death that Paul begins by saying “***we know***” and not “*we guess*, *we hope*, or *we think*”! When you read 1 Corinthians chapter 15:51-54 with the words recorded here it is easy to see that Paul is comparing the earthly body we now have with the future resurrection body we will have. Paraphrasing, Paul says that we who are in this present body shall enter in a “*twinkling of an eye*” a change whereby this “*corruptible will put on in corruption*” this “*mortal body will put on immortality*” and in this “*death shall be forever swallowed up in victory*”. In 2 Corinthians Paul is describing and contrasting these two bodies by saying:

1. **The present body is like a tent** (verse 1 and 4): By this Paul is saying that our earthly existence is a temporary one, an uncomfortable one. Tent camping can be fun for a few days but not if living in a tent is your permanent home. Consider your earthly body as a tent. It used to be new, sturdy and taught. It was able to withstand the harsh environment but lately it’s not nearly as attractive as it was 30 years ago. It seems that my tent stakes have become lose as the canvas sags in spots. My tent polls have some bends in them which allows the weather and cold to penetrate inside. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:2-3 “*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.* ***I go to prepare a place for you****. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*.”
2. **The future body is a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**: Look at the **three contrasts between these two bodies**:
3. **Construction Material**: The first is of the material used. According to Webster’s dictionary a tent is a “*collapsible shelter of fabric stretched and sustained by poles and used for camping outdoors or as a temporary building*”. Even if you use the highest quality tent fabric and take great care of your tent mending it when it gets a tear in it, cleaning it after every use, the fact remains that nothing you can do will prevent it from aging and wearing out. It is made of inferior materials. According to the sites I looked up the average tent can with stand only around 16-20 weeks of constant U.V. exposure which could be in actual usage anywhere from 2 years to 15 years depending upon the amount of use. Ah but a house’s material is designed to be permanent, larger and more comfortable to live in.
4. **Craftsmanship**: One can use the best materials but the house is only as good as the builder and here we find that the designer and builder is God who didn’t allow earthly hands to mess up His design as is the case of our temporary tent. Did you notice the way Paul worded this? He wrote, “*We* ***HAVE*** *a building from God*!” That is **our house is awaiting us, it’s already finished**. Paul could have used a future verb tense that would have said “*we* ***will have*** *a building from God*” but he didn’t write that. God won’t allow us any “*changes to the design*”. All our present earthly activity produces nothing to our home that awaits us. Man am I happy about that because if it was based upon my works than there might be a lot of unfinished rooms in my house.
5. **Location**: Finally the contrast switches to “*location*”. You can have a home of superior materials built by the best Craftsman but still be in a bad neighborhood or in a place you just don’t want to spend any time living in. Real estate experts will tell you that the driving force that raises the cost of a home has everything to do with location. And here Paul tells you two things about the future location:
6. ***Eternal***: This speaks of the fact that the home that awaits me is in a place that will never change. I won’t have moved into it one day and down the road find that they want to put a freeway next door. Our view from the home that awaits us will never have its view blocked, no worry about annoying neighbors moving next door. It will be pristine the day we arrive and will remain that way for eternity.
7. ***In the Heavens***: Finally Paul says it’s in the heavens which tells me that it will have perfect environment, incorruptible beauty, and breath taken vistas. Ann Cousins took Samuel Rutherford writings, (who lived in the 17th century) and made a hymn that became D.L. Moody's favorite song. It goes like this: “*There to an ocean fullness,
His mercy does expand and glory, glory dwelleth In Immanuel's land*.”

**III. Vs. 2-4 Does anybody know what time it is?**

Vs. 2-4 Next in these verses Paul is very careful as he explains saying, “*I don't want you to misunderstand me. I don't want you to think that we die and then float off to be with the Lord in a bodiless existence. We aren’t to be disembodied; we aren’t to be ghosts, hanging around waiting to get our bodies*.” Clearly Paul expected a new resurrected body, which he describes as an experience of not being disembodied, but being further embodied. **Three times in verses 2-4** he changes the analogy from a building to a body as he says when we receive our resurrected bodies it ***is like being further clothed, so that it is more than we have at the moment***. Then he says that that such clothing is like being, “***swallowed up by life***”. Paul said the resurrected body swallows in life the earthly body and by this he is saying that it is a furthering of experience, fulfillment and satisfaction.

Many people want to know, “*How can this be*?” I mean when our loved ones die and they or their ashes become interned you go out to the grave decades later you can dig it up and their remains are still there. So “*How could those people who died receive a resurrection body when their bodies are still lying unresurrected in the grave*?” There have been many explanations but ***three that are the most popular***:

1. “**We are disembodied**”: This view says, “*When we die we go to be with the Lord* ***in spirit****, but our bodies are buried in the grave so we have to wait incomplete until the body is raised. It may take centuries, but we are just waiting around in bodiless existence*.” The problem is **in the light of this passage, that teaching cannot be accepted**. Paul says he will not be disembodied and God has prepared him for the very opposite.
2. “**We are asleep waiting to be awakened**”: This suggests that what happens “*When we die is that both our soul and our spirit go to sleep within the body, and there is no sense of communication or experience.*” In this view we may be a sleep for centuries in the body and when we are wakened at the resurrection it is as though nothing has happened in the meantime. **But the problem with that suggestion is that it does not jive with 2 Cor. 5:8 where Paul writes that “*to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord***.” And in Philippians 1:23 Paul speaks of departing and “*being with Christ; which is far better*”. Every scripture speaking upon death of the believer tells us that we will have immediate access to the LORD.
3. “**We are given a temporary robe**”: There are some who propose that “*God gives us in the meantime an intermediate temporary body to use in eternity until our real one gets there. A kind of heavenly bathrobe which we wait around in while our real one is getting back from the cleaners.* But once again the problem is that there is **not one Scripture to support that as there is no reference to an intermediate body**.

The simplest interpretation is to take what Paul means and look at it out side of the constraints of our earthly existence. If we do this then what Paul means is that ***when we leave this body WE ALSO LEAVE TIME***. Our problem is that we project time into eternity and say it is the same thing going on forever, but it is not. The characteristic of time is that we are all locked into the same rigid sequence of events. We all experience 24-hour days because on this earth it takes that long for the earth to rotate on its axis and nobody can speed it up. This is simply not the case once we step into eternity! ***In eternity there is no past or future, there is simply ONE GREAT PRESENT MOMENT***. ***The events we experience in eternity are never anything we have to wait for; they are always what we are ready for***. This passage says that God has been spiritually preparing us for something, and that event is the coming of the Lord for his own, the return of Christ for his church, for each individual believer. Therefore, the Scriptures clearly teach that when a believer dies, what he experiences immediately is the coming of the Lord for his own. Paul describes that event in 1 Thess. 4:16 when he writes that “*the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first*.” **With Jesus will come all those who have been dead in Christ so that it will appear to those left on earth as though they had already been raised first when in actuality we are all raised together**, as 1 Thess. 4:17 says “*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*.” This is the experience that awaits us immediately upon our death.

**IV. Vs. 5 On tiptoe**

Vs. 5 A nine year old girl wrote her pastor one day a little note that read, “*Dear Pastor, I hope to go to heaven someday, but later than sooner.*” Paul’s view was different as he would say that He knew that he would go to heaven one day and he hoped it was sooner rather than later. Paul writes in Romans 8:19 “*For the earnest expectation of the creation* ***eagerly waits*** *for the revealing of the sons of God.*” J.B Phillips interprets this as “*The whole of creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.*” Paul’s groaning was like a child waiting for his birthday or Christmas. He wasn’t longing for death he was longing for LIFE as he was already in death.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 5:6-10**

**“*Earth’s Last Picture*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 6-8 What a difference Jesus makes**

**III. Vs. 9-10 Motive for now and eternity**

**I. Intro.**

These are times of crisis in the world and reading Ray Stedman’s commentary I came across a quote from nearly 30 years ago from Malcolm Muggeridge the English journalist and author. He was speaking at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in what he called the end of Western civilization saying: “*The final conclusion would seem to be that whereas other civilizations have been brought down by attacks of barbarians from without, ours had the unique distinction of training its own destroyers at its own educational institutions and providing them with facilities for propagating their destructive ideology far and wide, all at the public expense. Thus did Western man decide to abolish himself creating:*

* *his own boredom out of his own affluence*
* *his own vulnerability out of his own strength*
* *his own impotence out of his own erotic mania*

*Blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling. And, having convinced himself that he was too numerous, labored with pill, scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer, until at last, having educated himself into imbecility he polluted himself by drugging himself into stupefaction, keeled over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and became extinct.*” After speaking about the believer’s future home in heaven Paul anticipates a question about our present condition based upon our permanent home and that is “*What is there to live for now*?” Something that Malcolm Muggeridge would have apparently agreed with! But Paul’s “***More Beyond***” wasn’t limited to his future in heaven. Amazingly when you read the pages of the New Testament you never see that reaction. Instead there is a cry of victory running throughout even though their circumstances did not look any more hopeful than ours.

**II. Vs. 6-8 What a difference Jesus makes**

Vs. 6-8 Paul would write in Philip. 1:23 “*For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*.” The “*More Beyond*” reality changed Paul’s values and desires for the present. It is clear that Paul viewed this life as a race with the prize being eternity in the fellowship of God. But such a prize didn’t cause him to stop and sit on the sidelines of life. No, it caused him to run harder than ever to win his race. The harder he ran in this life the quicker he would complete the course God had set before him which meant the sooner he would collect his prize.

Paul says in this passage, “***So we are always confident***” and again in verse 8, “***We are confident***.” The key to understanding this is to be found in interpreting the little word “***SO***” found in verse 6. That little word tells us that Paul’s encouragement was based upon what he has been saying ***about the power, activity and availability of God***. The basis for Christian hope is found in the fact that God is going to act both in the future beyond death, and in the present. In this passage, Paul sees **two very practical present effects of the “*More Beyond*” principal of our relationship with God**.

1. **Vs. 6-8 Our Position never changes**: “*We are always confident*” and Paul sees two reasons for it:
2. Vs. 6 **The first reason is that no matter where we are (*on earth or in heaven*) we are always at home with the Lord**: The word is used both for our life in the body and our coming presence with the Lord. They are both said to be an experience of being “*at home*.” Can there be any finer description of life than being “*Home with the Lord*”? Home is the place with no restraint, we can relax, take our shoes off and be who we are in peace and ease. We are like children who are looking ahead to Christmas. At home the hustle and bustle of life lived in the fast land slows down as if time ceases. That is an encouragement to us that what we are headed toward in heaven is not something dreadful or even different but rather more fulfilling. We will be at home with the Lord, in his very presence, seeing him no longer only with the Spirit (*through a glass dimly*) within, but face to face.
3. Vs. 7-8 **The second reason is that we are in touch with the Lord by faith, not by sight**. We have His presence with us! No circumstance can ever leave us abandoned to ourselves. John 14:1, 14:18 and Matthew 28:20 all speak to this fact that we are not alone and better yet that Jesus is with us. As such we choose to walk by faith and not by sight having the full supply of love, peace and joy to keep us in the midst of anything. So despite our position changing outwardly it never changes inwardly and one day it will no longer change outwardly!

**III. Vs. 9-10 Motive for now and eternity**

Vs. 9-10 Paul’s “*absent from the Lord*” in verse 6 is to be understood by the sense that that his mortality had not yet been swallowed up by life. How this played out was that life was interpreted by faith not by sight! His goal did not wafer because it didn’t matter if he was in mortality or immortality the aim was always to be to live well pleasing to the Lord. The longing to be with Christ which was far better further solidified his resolve to live to “***Please Him***” now. Paul is saying, “*I’m sure of heaven, and because I’m sure of what Jesus has done for me I’m going to live with a greater resolve in the Holy Spirit’s power and dependence to live like it now*. ”

1. Vs. 9-10 **Our Purpose never changes**: Notice that it says in verse 6: Whether “*at home*” in either place the purpose and aim of our lives to please God. That is not something that is going to change when we leave this earth. The one real reason we have to be here on earth is to please God, to be a delight to him. Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem titled “***When Earth’s Last Picture is Painted***” in which he spoke of all the great things that people would be able to do in heaven. One of the stances goes like this: “*And only The Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame; and no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame, but each for the joy for the working, and each, in his separate star, shall draw the Thing as he sees it, for the God of things as they are*.” **There are three ways by which that is manifested:**
2. Vs. 10a **Motives:** This is where he brings in this whole matter of the “*judgment seat of Christ*.” Many people mistakenly think that Paul is revering to the 20th chapter of Revelation where all the dead, small and great, are standing before the “*great white throne*” of God where we are told that “*the books are opened*” and lives are reviewed and eternal destinies are settled. But this is not a judgment to settle destiny it is a ***personal evaluation*** given to each believer by the Lord himself of what his life has really been like. It is as though you and the Lord walked together back through all the scenes of your life and he pointed out to you the real nature of what you did and what you said. It is a time of disclosure to us of what has been hidden in the silent, inner reaches of our own hearts. I believe that this is what Jesus spoke of in Luke 12:3when He said “*whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops*.” In 1 Cor. 4:5 Paul said “*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God*.” God's concern is not just what we do but why we do it. The judgment was to be exercised by us now to sort out the motive behind or actions to see if what lay behind them was to be seen as well pleasing to the Lord or well pleasing to men who watched us!
3. Vs. 10b **Evaluation**: It is a helpful time of seeing the truth about ourselves. If that frightens you there is something you can do about it as 1 Cor. 11:31 says “*if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged*.” The judgment seat of Christ, has already started. The Holy Spirit is pointing out to us our wrong attitudes and motives. If we face the truth now, we do not have to face it at the judgment seat of Christ as it has already been dealt with.
4. Vs. 10c **Rewards**: The judgment seat of Christ is not only there for a time of ***honest evaluation*** and ***proper understanding of our motives***. It will also be a time of encouragement as we are told here in verse 10 “*that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*.” In 1 Cor. 9:25 Paul wrote that “*everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an* ***imperishable crown****.*” If you cross reference this with “*Crowns*” that will be given us in heaven there are **four mentioned**:
* 1 Thess. 2:19 Crown of rejoicing
* 2 Tim 4:8 Crown of Righteousness
* 1 Peter 5:4 Crown of Glory
* James 1:12 Crown of life

The analogy of a crown is only a symbol of the gift of God to us, which is eternal life. ***You never earn these crowns they are only symbols***! So what you win or lose at the Bema judgment seat of Christ is the opportunity to display the nature of these gifts that have been given you. The degree to which you have manifest that life now in this life will be what you display in heaven: rejoicing, righteousness, glory and life of God in this earthly life will be given you to manifest it in heaven. It is what he wrote of in First Corinthians 3:13 of, “*each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*” Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 that if a man succeeds, “*he shall be given a reward*”, a great opportunity to display that life, or, “*he shall suffer loss*”, as he will not have that opportunity. Friends the Holy Spirit hasn’t been given to us as a guarantee of a life of ease so we can take a nap. He has been given to us to empower us in our race to the finish line. Heaven therefore changes our ambition in life which is to be found in every way as “*well pleasing*” to God. Heaven and the Holy Spirit has refocused us, simplified our lives to one goal that asks one question, “*Will this action attitude etc. be well pleasing to Jesus*?” And to make sure that we understand this in the present Paul reminds us that this aim today will be the sole aim in eternity!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 5:11-17**

**“*The Radicalized Christian*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 11-13 The Fear Factor**

**III. Vs. 14-15 The Love Quotient**

**IV. Vs. 16-17 The Big Bang**

**I. Intro.**

Sense September 11 2001 the word “*Radicalized*” has become main stream as it is used to describe a person who takes their belief system to the extreme. Unfortunately the term has been acquainted with violence, terror and death. I’m reminded of a story of the Communist revolutionary Mikhail Borodin who sat in a hotel room in Canton China with a reporter and his personal Vietnamese secretary the infamous Ho Chi Minh in 1926. The discussion was about all the missionaries in China. After a long silence Borodin said, “*I use to read the New Testament. Again and again I read it. It is the most wonderful story ever told. That man Paul, he was a real revolutionary. I take my hat off to him.*” In reading the New Testament you can’t dispute Borodin’s assessment of Paul and for that matter the early church. Seeing how they lived their life my prayer is that all of Christ’s Church would become “*radicalized*” as He and they were. ***The radicalized Christian is not engaged in acts of terror but rather motivated by the terror of seeing people parish apart from knowing the love of Christ. As such we aren’t into killing others but dying to self centeredness***! The world needs us to become “*Radicalized Christians*”!

**II. Vs. 11-13 The Fear Factor**

Vs. 11-13 The question is what motivated Paul to live such a radical Christian life and here Paul tells us that two paradoxical truths “***fear and love***”. The old way of defining the terror or the fear of the Lord was that we were afraid that God would hurt us. But now our terror or fear is that our actions or attitudes would grieve Him. The thought of coming before the Lord caused him to want to persuade others of the benefits of living a radicalized Christian life. Looking at his own life in light of this Paul says, “*I find a tremendous motivation from this awareness that all the hidden motives of my actions are going to come out in the open before everybody.*” As humans we are used to “***subjective truth***” and interpreting our actions and motives to others that place us in a better light. But before the Lord none of us will be able to water down the truth about us, none of our reasoning or excuses will change the truth. In Acts 10:34 Peter said, “*that God is no respecter of persons*”. Because of this truth Paul didn’t want to waste any of his time “*pretending to be someone he wasn’t*”. ***Imagine what life would be like if we didn’t waste so much time trying to convince people we were better than they know we are***! Paul didn’t want to spend anytime having to defend his actions or motives before people and to do this he made certain that he did so before the Lord who alone according to Hebrews 4:12 “*is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*.” So his interest in answering his critics was not to defend himself but rather that they might ease their conscience.

**III. Vs. 14-15 The Love Quotient**

Vs. 14-15 Fear had motivated Paul but love compelled him. I find it interesting that what compelled Paul to live well pleasing to the Lord was?

* Vs. 11 The terror of the Lord
* Vs. 14 The Love of Christ

These two things seem contradictory don’t they? In September of 2007 the then senator Obama was asked how he expected to be able to defeat Senator Hillary Clinton to win the Democratic nomination, he brashly said “***To know me is to love me***.” I hate to disagree with now president Obama but from an earthly perspective **to truly know any of us is to not love us**. Much of our self deception and protection is based upon fear that if people really knew the truth about us they not only wouldn’t love us they would like us either. Paul is saying is that Jesus unconditional love for him drove him to set limits on what he would and would not do. The word “***compels***” is difficult to translate: Jamieson, Fawcett and Brown translate this verse by saying, “*There is an irresistible object which has so controlled the life of a Christian that he lives with one objective in view to the elimination of any other possible consideration; LOVE*”. The love of Jesus refreshed him, made him want to do the right things for the right reasons. There is nothing that can give us a sense of security, self worth and good self image more than the unconditional love of God.

 That truth caused Paul to realize that to experience this love that Jesus has for him that “*if One died for all, then all died*.” The death to his self centered, self protective former life was the key to experiencing the love that Jesus has for him more. People are obsessed with the “*what about me*” attitude that says; “*What about my needs*” “*I’m just not happy any more*”. **Here the revelation Paul is giving us is**: *The reason people aren’t happy isn’t because they aren’t having their needs met, they aren’t happy because they are looking to have someone or something make them happy and their concern is their happiness instead of others happiness!* Friend, **Jesus Christ died to set you free from that syndrome. You do not need your needs met because He has already met them**. So if you are seeking to lay this upon people, you will find yourself suffering rejection because no one can meet your needs but Jesus. Paul says, “*Christ died for all*,” and that means “*all have died*”. This enables us to live no longer for ourselves. After having our needs met by Christ, we turn and try to meet the needs of others.

**IV. Vs. 16-17 The Big Bang**

Vs. 16 At one time Paul had judged Jesus as nothing more than a *messianic pretender* who pushed too far and ended up getting what was coming to Him. The irony is that Paul was now viewed as a traitor and was hated and persecuted just as he had done to others for their belief in Jesus. There are **two things that fear and love will produce in us**:

1. **Vs. 16 First, it will make you see everybody else differently**: We don’t look at them the way we once did. We were once impressed with people who had power, money or fame. We followed them around, imitated them, and wanted to be near them. We would even dropped their names around to be associated with them. Then there were other people we thought were of no value and we treated them like dirt. We wanted nothing to do with them. Paul once thought of Jesus as being nothing more than a low class, uneducated street preacher. He thought because Jesus had no political standing, no family position, no training and no education that he was worthless. But now Paul says, “*I see Christ for who he is, the Lord of Glory, the King of the Ages, the Prince of Life, God himself become a man.*” And because Paul didn’t see Jesus that way anymore He could no longer treat other people that way anymore. Instead Paul saw people for who they are, men and women who were made in the image of God but have fallen from that view. They are victims of the lies of the devil but they are important, significant people because God's image is in them and it can be awakened to life again. Everybody, even the most obscure and the lowliest and the weakest among us is a possible child of God, made in the image of God, and is significant enough that God sent His only Son to die on their behalf.

Vs. 17 This verse ought to be the opening line of ***the biography of every Christian***. The term “***In Christ***” sums up the significance of our redemption as it speaks of our ***security*** in Christ. It speaks of our ***acceptance*** in the only ONE who is and always has been well pleasing to the Father. It speaks of our ***assurance*** for the future; it speaks of our ***inheritance*** as Christ is the sole heir. It describes ***the explosion of new creation*** the true and only “***Big Bang***” as in “*If anyone is in Christ* “***BANG***” *he is a new creation*!” And what does this new creation look like? Well, as the NIV renders this “***the old has gone, the new has come***!” The New Man has not merely changed a few practices ot habits; Paul says that if he be in Christ he is a totally different kind of person. And this leads us to **the 2nd thing fear and love has produced in us**:

1. **Vs. 17 Secondly, it will make you treat them differently**: Therefore, no matter who it is, it is possible that they may be born again. No matter how violent they are in opposition to the gospel, they can be changed. God can reach the most hopeless, the darkest, the lowliest, the worst, and the farthest away. And, when they are reached, we never need to give up hope for them because they are part of a new creation. God has started a work that he is going to finish. We are prone to writing people off but what He has begun as a good work in them will not fail until the day of Christ. So there is always hope, even for me and you. This is the hour to become a “***Radicalized Christian***” above all other hours in history.

**2 Samuel 9:1-13**

**“What is Reconciliation?”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-6 Dropped, crippled and barren**

**III. Vs. 7-13 What the kindness of God looks like**

**I. Intro.**

This week as I prepared to speak on 2nd Corinthians 5:18-6:2 on our “*ministry of reconciliation*” I had a wonderful time of devotion in studying the passage. On Wednesday as I wrapped up my notes, reading the very last commentary (H.A. Ironside) I heard from the Lord and wrote in my notes these words: When dealing with important theological terms it is important that we understand their meaning and here is a clear case of it:

* **Justification** means because Jesus (*my rightful Judge*) has taken my punishment upon Himself the outcome is that He has decided in my favor and declared me not guilty.
* **Reconciliation** means that not only am I declared not guilty (*because divine justice has been forever satisfied*) He has taken me as His own child; I am now forever joined to His love, peace and joy.

Dear ones ***we are not just acquitted and released to go back and live in our squalor we are released to live with Him in his palace as His heirs!!!*** I sit at His table now with His banner of love over me!! (Song. 2:4) In 2 Sam 9 we are given the story of David and Saul’s grandson Mephibosheth through Jonathon. After reading that passage I was pressed into teaching it as an illustration of our “*Ministry of Reconciliation*”.

These 13 verses are a story that serves to illustrate what “*Reconciliation*” looks like. There are two main characters in the passage David and Mephibosheth the only surviving son of Jonathon Saul’s grandchild.

**II. Vs. 1-6 Dropped, crippled and barren**

Vs. 1 David has been on the throne for close to 15 years by the time we come to the 9th chapter of 2nd Sam and we see that:

* He clearly remembered the covenant he made with Jonathan. (1 Sam. 20:12)
* He clearly understood the goodness that had been given him by the Lord.

In 1 Sam 20:15 Jonathan said, “*You shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.*” David found himself in the place where God had cut off every one of his enemies, so he asks, “*Are there any family members left from Saul*?” He didn’t ask if there were any alive from the house of Saul that he might take **vengeance** upon them, that he may **eliminate** them, but that he may show God’s kindness upon them. Only a man who has himself experienced the kindness of God can act like this. Consider this in light of David experience; “*Is there any alive from the family of the man who twice tried to kill me with a spear, any alive who robbed me of my wife, who pursued me for 15 years seeking to kill me. Any alive from the man who made my life so miserable that I turned my back upon my God?*” The desire to bless his enemy’s grandson was based upon a promise made to another.

Vs. 2-4 The fact that David looked up Ziba reveals that Mephibosheth was in hiding and had no idea of his whereabouts. As we look at this fellow Mephibosheth *pay close attention to him as you find that he fit* ***the profile of the person today whom God desires to distribute His kindness towards***.

A. First is name, Mephibosheth: It means Idol killer but originally it was Meribbaal or “*Baal contends*” but was changed “*killer of idols*”. Here was a young man whose name extolled the virtues of an idol and so it was changed to killer of idols. In the Hebrew it came to be recognized as “*shameful one*”.

B. Second he is the son of Jonathan and was lame in his feet: He had been dropped and the result of the fall had left him lame in both feet, as his nurse took him up in her arms upon hearing the news that his father and grandfather were dead. Gone from his memories and hope was that he was the son of a prince and himself an heir to the throne. Have you ever been dropped and the resulting fall left you lame crippled? I don’t think there is a one of us who at some time hasn’t experienced the sensation of being dropped in this life. Dropped by a boy friend or girl friend, dropped from a job, dropped by a parent who has left or died! The resulting fall has affected you, you still can’t put full wait on those legs, you still can’t get up and dance with joy or trust as you once did. “*He said she said they loved me*!”, “*They said they would always be there for me*!” “*They promised me a raise*!”

C. Third his whereabouts: “*the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar*.” Machir means to “*be sold*” while Ammiel means “*people of God*” and Lo Debar mean “*no pasture or barrenness*”. The picture is Mephibosheth living in someone else’s house in area called “***barrenness***”, on the other side of the Jordan river, in Gilead, where the tribes of Manasseh, Gad, and Reuben, had settled. It was a place where anybody that was in trouble, would run to. Mephibosheth is living apart from the people of God in a barren wilderness, the only heir to his grandfather’s throne is living with some friends in Lo Debar.

Vs. 5-6 David wants to show the goodness of God. So he takes a person that has been dropped by this world and it has left him crippled and afraid. Mephibosheth is a picture of all of fallen humanity, dropped by life, living in bareness where not even those close to us care to know where we are.

 Verse 6 says that David sought him out and called out his name, “*Mephibosheth*”! Mephibosheth must have thought that things had gone from bad to worse as he know comes in before the man whom his grandfather had sought to kill and ruin. But David saw in Mephibosheth the resemblance of the man he loved more than a brother. That is what God sees when he sees us in our struggle and failure. Look at Mephibosheth reply, “*Here is your servant…such a dead dog as I*”. Oh the heaviness of hopelessness!

**III. Vs. 7-13 What the kindness of God looks like**

Vs. 7-9 I believe when David called out to Mephibosheth that in his tone he communicated love. Though he could hear the excitement and love in the voice of David and should have brought comfort based upon Mephibosheth’s reaction he was still fearful of David’s intentions as David tells him not to fear and then gives the reasons why he has no worries.

That’s the way our Lord treats us; He seeks us out while we were yet lost then gives us back all that we lost from His inheritance, then invites us to sit at His table forever and provides for the well being of our future. In the 3rd verse David declared that he was going to show the descendant of Saul the “***kindness of God***” and here we see what this looks like:

1. Vs. 3-6 It is towards those least likely to be its recipients but yet need it the most
2. Vs. 7a Its first order is to move the person from fear to security
3. Vs. 7b It is distributed not upon the value of the person but upon the promise made to another.
4. Vs. 7c Its aim is restoration, to give back all that God wants to give the person
5. Vs. 7d Its heart is reconciliation, not just about returning lost items but reuniting broken relationships
6. Vs. 10-11 It is not just after an immediate change but provision forever, changing our location and our sustenance, that which sustains us.

**Four times in seven verses David say’s that Mephibosheth shall “*eat bread at my table*”** **continually**, **always**, **like one of his sons**. Those three descriptions serve to qualify the meaning David’s words towards Mephibosheth of “*eating bread at my table*”. Clearly, *the greatest thing that David was giving was time with him daily, time with the king:*

* **Continually**, not just on a whim or when the king was in a good mood.
* **Always**, even when Mephibosheth had blown it, messed up.
* **Like one of his sons**, not a 2nd class citizen but treated with all the rights and privileges of a full heir.

Do you hear the heart of God in the repeated phrase of David to Mephibosheth of “*eating bread at my table*”? **The Kings table is the place that throughout eternity will hide crippled legs and imperfect walks. We will sit down at Our Father’s table and His banner over us is LOVE**!

What a great exhortation this is for us to administer the “*ministry of reconciliation*”. What would happen in a world where those who have missed treated us were paid back not with hatred or like kind but kindness of God? **Hate cannot exist in a world where love and kindness are the only weapons**. Now that we have sat at the kings table we ought to be like David to Mephibosheth:

* Seeking out our enemies to bless them
* Looking for the poor, weak, lame, and hidden to bless them
* Blessing others when they don't deserve it, blessing them more than they deserve
* Blessing others for the sake of someone else

Vs. 10-12 Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants according to 19:17 but the 16th chapter as David is fleeing Absalom he comes with a tall tail saying that Mephibosheth doesn’t want to come and that he wants to be king but it’s all a lie as we are told in the 19th chapter that Ziba said this so he and his family could have all that David had given to Mephibosheth. There will always be those who will do what they are told but will change their tone when they have a chance. Don’t let it “*eat at you*” cause it won’t change the truth that you still get to sit at the kings table and they will still have to be tilling the fields.

Vs. 13 Take a close look at verse 13, Mephibosheth simply made a choice to receive the king’s offer and moved to Jerusalem and ate continually at the kings table. There are a great many who do not take the King up on His offer and instead remain crippled living in Lo Debar. **Yes Mephibosheth was lame in both his feet but he didn’t need to be crippled living apart from the king**! I can’t help but wonder how many of the promises of God go unclaimed simply because we refuse to believe in the kindness of God that has been bestowed upon us from the Son of David.

 That’s what reconciliation looks like! Dear ones “***The church has forfeited much of the Spirit’s power and blessings, the day we went from being the Church to just attending a church***!”

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 5:18-6:2**

**“Serving those separated”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 18-19 Tell them what they have won**

**III. Vs. 20-21 Other people’s treasures**

**IV. Vs. 1-2 Don’t put it off until tomorrow**

**I. Intro.**

Paul has been describing what a believer ought to look like amidst a dying world:

* They are to be someone whose life is filled with great hope both now and for eternity
* They are aware that life's difficulties are not without purpose and plan albeit we may not fully comprehend this until we see Jesus face to face
* They are to be a people with only one aim and purpose to be living to please God, motivated by the terror of the Lord of the love of Christ
* They are to people who don’t see or treat people the way the world sees them and treats them

Now in this section after having given his readers an accurate description of who they are he now tells them what they ought to be doing as Paul describes the ministry that God has given all of us as the “*ministry of reconciliation*.” The words “reconcile” and “reconciliation” appears five times in this section. **The “*ministry of reconciliation*” is not telling people to make peace with God; it is telling them that God has made peace with them**. Notice that Paul uses the words “*we*” and “*us*” throughout this passage. This is what God has called each one of us to do; it is why He has left us here in the world. There are five things about this ministry in this passage that we illustrated last week:

**II. Vs. 18-19 Tell them what they have won**

1. Vs. 18 **First, the ministry comes from God himself**: That means that we are responsible to him to do this. The Church, (the original disciples) didn’t give Paul this commission, God did. And as such he didn’t have to check with others to get permission or send in monthly reports on how he was doing. There is no “*board authority*” over the “*ministry of reconciliation*” as it is a calling from God to His people. That’s true today, you don’t need permission from me to exercise the “*ministry of reconciliation*” you have received that from the Lord. So go head and invite folks over to your house do a VBS for your neighborhood, start a ministry to reach out to your co-workers etc. If you want help let me know I’ll see what I can do to help you. When Carl and Jennifer wanted to start a ministry to reach out to those who have lost loved ones they told me about it now they host it each week. The great thing about this is that God places these visions and passions in unique ways with in each individual. Because God first reconciled us to Himself our experiences can be useful in reaching others as some will be able to relate to our experiences. Others won’t but those who may not be able to relate to me may be able to relate to you.
2. Vs. 19 **Second, I realize that this ministry is all inclusive**: When we see the word “*reconcile*” it immediately suggests to us that someone is separated or apart. There is no need to reconcile that which is still together. The “*ministry of reconciliation*” is ***the service of reuniting that which has become separated***. What has become separated is people from their Creator. People are stumbling around trying to find themselves and have no sense of purpose, no identity. It’s amazing that people can live in a home with a bunch of other people, live and work amongst people all day long, go to entertainment events and look you in the face and say, “*I feel all alone*”! People feel estranged because they are estranged from God! God takes care of this separation by **sending those reconciled out with a twofold message to those who need to be reconciled**:
3. First, the message **will not start out trying to scare people to become Christians**: To make them believe they are going to hell, with flames burning beneath them, so they will repent of their evil ways is not the ministry of reconciliation. Paul tells us that the message starts out ***NOT*** ***with what we have done wrong but with what God has done right***! “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself*.” Obviously it is alluded to as you have no need to reconcile someone who isn’t apart but the message of reconciliation ***starts with what God has done to fix that separation***, as there is nothing mankind can do to fix it. God desired to “*no longer count people's sins against them*.” He wasn’t “***making a list and counting it twice, so that He could see who had been naughty or nice***”! God is ***NOT*** pointing out all of my mistakes and faults; instead the message of reconciliation presupposes that I already know that I’m a mess. Instead of starting out trying to scare them into the kingdom, God would have us speak of how He wants to love them into His arms from the brink of disaster. In Isaiah 1:18 God says, “*Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*”
4. Second, we read that, “*This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others*.” **God has entrusted those who have been the very recipients of His goodness to tell others who have been weighed down by their own sin and failure about how good and willing He is to do the same for them**. Have you gone shopping on the internet yet? I’ve noticed that not only can you get the specks about what you are looking to purchase you can read what others thought about the model of brand and even write in what you thought about it if you’d like. Folks, we don’t have to go to each person and convince them of how messed up and horrible their old life is. No, we need tell them is how God has provided a brand new life for FREE and how superior it is.

**III. Vs. 20-21 Other people’s treasures**

1. Vs. 20 **The third thing about the ministry of reconciliation is that it requires a voluntary acceptance**: Nobody is automatically saved as verse 20 says literally “*We beseech on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*”. **There is no universal salvation; that is why God sends us as ambassadors.** Ambassadors go to countries because countries don’t always relate very well to each other. Things need to be explained and approached with diplomacy. An ambassador lives in a foreign land as a representative of another government conveying the message that his government seeks to give. The message that we are to be conveying as “*ambassadors for Christ*” is “*be reconciled to God*”. **Look at the way our King wants us to convey His message**: By ***pleading*** and ***imploring*** the citizens of our host country. Paul said that God didn’t want him to communicate reconciliation as an “***act of war***” but ***a response to LOVE***. There can be no better picture of this than Jesus Himself who according to Matthew 23:37 wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not*!”
2. Vs. 21 **The fourth thing about this ministry is that it achieves the “righteousness of God”**: Deep down people want to be right and if you accuse them of not being right you will start to hear all the excuses. **Our ministry is to tell people that they can be right with God and they don’t have to justify why you aren’t**. *God isn’t interested in the reason you aren’t right with Him, He is into providing the only way you can be right with Him.* The declaration is that Jesus took our place, the only truly innocent man that there has ever been choose to take our sentence of death. ***This “rightness” before God didn’t come about because God takes sin and rebellion lightly in fact the death of Jesus in our place proves this truth.*** God hasn’t compromised His holy nature to establish His loving nature Jesus death establish the one while demonstrating the other. Furthermore this “*rightness*” is not future; as long as I do good the rest of my life. **It’s not something I’m going to become, it is something that I am the moment I receive Jesus**!!! Dear ones we start our Christian life “***right with God***” and because of this truth we don’t have to earn it or try to keep it because then it would be based upon our works instead of Jesus sacrifice. Ray Stedman rightly says, “***It’s no "good news" to come to somebody and say, "Christ forgave all your sins up to now, but from now on you'd better watch it. You are going to have to pay for all those.***” The “*good news*” is we are forgiven of our sins, the moment we received Jesus and that includes the sins I haven’t even done yet.

**IV. Vs. 1-2 Don’t put it off until tomorrow**

1. Vs. 1-2 **The fifth and final aspect of the ministry of reconciliation is when people should respond**: The term the “*grace of God*” is a general term that covers all that God has done for us in Christ. So Paul is saying this to people who are already reconciled, “*Now, don't let that be in vain, empty, worthless, in your life*.” Paul is saying that when you received Christ He came in to live within you to do two basic things:
	* **To show you the difference between right and wrong**
	* **To give you the power to do the right and to reject the wrong**

Furthermore Jesus intends to have us use that in every area of your life. So if there are some areas where we haven’t listened to him, not drawn our strength from the Holy Spirit than though we have Jesus we aren’t living in that area as if we are. In that area of our life we have received “*the grace of God in vain.*” God is at work to change that, but until we agree with God in that area, according to Galatians 5:2 “***Christ has profited you nothing***” in that area. The timing to act both for us as well as those who have never met Jesus is NOW, Paul says. The face of God’s watch dial is blank accept for one word on it with regards to our need to get right with God, ***NOW***! Satan also has a watch and his dial is also blank accept for one word, **TOMORROW**! Satan wants you to put it off hoping that you will never make it to “*tomorrow*”. Saints when we are administering the “*ministry of reconciliation*” make sure your watch is set to the right time. The Christian’s privilege and responsibility is the honor of their King Jesus and of His kingdom the Church and both are in our hands. By every action and word, we can make others think more or less of both!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 6:3-7**

**“The Well Pleasing Life”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 3-5 Ministry without misery**

**III. Vs. 6-7 Ministry is a character profession**

**I. Intro.**

Paul has written to the Corinthians and through them to us about “*Radicalized Christianity*” the “*living to be well pleasing*” life. Then Paul spoke about the outward mission of this well pleasing life which he called the “*Ministry of reconciliation*”. We took two weeks on this first to give an example of just what “reconciliation” is then the “*how too’s*” of how to employ it. Now in this section Paul moves of to address the fact that we will have opposition in this ministry, it won’t be easy if we try to employ radicalized lives seeking to be ministers of reconciliation. This passage breaks apart in three parts:

1. Vs. 3 Paul shows how careful he was before men.
2. Vs. 4-7 Paul reveals how his ministry was approved by God.
3. Vs. 8-10 Paul, in a series of paradoxes, reveals how his life confounds and confuses the world.

I’m reminded of Fanny Crosby who was blind her whole life, lived 95 years yet had such a joyous heart that she spent her life writing hymns; at the tender age 8 wrote:

Oh, what a happy child I am
Although I cannot see,
I am determined that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot and I won't.

On her tombstone in Connecticut under the name Aunt Fanny are these words, “*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.*”

Vs. 3 Paul writes in this section that his endurance through so many trying things proves the authenticity of the message of reconciliation because if it wasn’t true why would anyone endure so much trials that go with the message? The temptation is to do what the psalmist sang about in Psalm 55:6 “*Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest*.” It is a very important that we have an awareness of what we look like to others, that we are careful not to allow anything in our lives to turn someone off from becoming a Christian. Paul lived continually with that objective in view. Paul lived in this continual awareness that he was being examined by men. Therefore, he is very careful to see there is no fault found in his ministry. It is interesting that the record of Paul endurance is introduced by three words “IN” and “BY” (or through) and “AS” (YET) these 29 words provide the basis of endurance:

* It because we are **IN** Christ that we endure
* It is **THROUGH** Christ we endure
* It may appear **AS** we are defeated **YET** in Christ we have already won

Vs. 4 Paul says that this was done in “*much patience*” which tells me that he was speaking of endurance. Here we are given the university in which Paul received his doctorate the school of “*Hard knocks*”. His classes were not in homiletics (*the art of preaching*), hermeneutics (*the principals of biblical interpretation*), and biblical languages. No they were in tribulation, needs and distress! And the passing of those classes had to be in longsuffering, kindness and sincere love. How many would pass those classes that way in seminary? Having passed the classes his career didn’t take off instead most thought of him as unsuccessful and having nothing. Crowds of admires didn’t follow Paul as he traveled. Based the story in Acts 19:15 where he was involved in casting out demons an “*evil spirit*” informed the sons Sceva that he was far more famous in hell then he was on earth. No matter what came Paul’s way he stuck with it. The word is literally to “*stay under the pressure*.” The mark of a Christian who has learned how to walk with God is that they stay under the pressure; and do not quit. There were certain pressures that ***Paul lists in three groups of threes***, (***tough circumstances, tough opposition, and tough commitments***) that he faced.

1. Vs. 4b **Tough circumstances**...***tribulation, needs, distresses***...:
	1. ***Tribulation*** is the normal problems we face. The literal word is "*distresses*." It describes the normal circumstances that stress you out like finances, relationships, illness and a host of other things that can cause disappointment.
	2. ***Needs*** literally means “*necessities*” and describes the things that you cannot help but face and cannot get away from. Something that may fit this would be that your mother or father has taken ill and you now have the responsibility to help them and you have to put your life and plans on hold. There is nothing you can do about them; you have to live with them.
	3. ***Distresses*** and word here means “*narrow places*”, where life kind of presses in on you and squeezes you to the point where you feel stuck. But in all of these Paul says he hung in there, and, thus, glorified God. He did not quit; he stayed with it;
2. Vs. 5a **Tough opposition** …***stripes, imprisonments, tumults***…: The next three were beyond tough circumstances they were tough opposition.
	1. ***Stripes***, in chapter 11:23-27 Paul will write that at present he had been beaten five times and he uses a word that described corporal punishment which meant that he had 39 lashes laid upon his back. He had felt the pain of 195 stripes. Then there were three times he had been beaten with rods which were and inch in diameter. Once he had people stone him and leave him for dead outside the city of Lystra.
	2. ***Imprisonments***, according to Clement of Rome, (*who wrote just a few years after Paul died*); Paul had been in prison seven different times in his life, although we only have three of those times recorded in the Scriptures.
	3. ***Tumults***, which describes riotous mobs where Paul was overwhelming by people beating on him with no one to help.
3. Vs. 5b **Tough commitments** …***labors, sleeplessness, fastings***…: These were certain commitments that he had undertaken, things he chose for himself. His work of supporting himself making tents at night so that he wouldn’t be an economic burden upon the Church. But in making that choice it meant long sleeplessness nights and many missed meals. Paul didn’t have to do this but he chose to because it was the most efficient to get the gospel out to people.

So in these three categories of, “***tough circumstances, tough opposition, and tough commitments***”, Paul faced continual conditions of pressure; yet he never quit. This is the thing that challenges us today when so many want to quit, throw in the towel, and give up when God sends us into tough circumstances. But Paul didn’t as he had already stated in 5:9 that his aim was to live “***well pleasing to God***” not to live well pleasing to himself.

Vs. 6-7a Not only did he face (***tough circumstances, tough opposition, and tough commitments***), but in the midst of them he displayed godly characteristics. Here again we are given two divisions, each containing four parts. The first part we take up today and the rest we will look at next week.

1. Vs. 6a The first four are consistent qualities of the apostle's life.
	1. ***Purity***: Paul put purity first even though he like us lived in an immoral age. He traveled and lived in the midst of a people given over to the pursuit of sexual immorality, yet he says he was careful to see that his mind and his thoughts were pure. Wherever he went he was guarded and stood by the conviction that he was possessed by the Holy Spirit.
	2. ***Knowledge***: What enabled him to be pure according to Romans 12:2b was that he constantly “*renewed his mind*”. Paul kept himself in the Word of God to remind himself how God saw things.
	3. ***Longsuffering***: The word implies patience particularly with other people. Mel Trotter, the great evangelist, used to say, “*There are a lot of people I know who are wonderful Christians. I know they are going to go to heaven some day, and, Oh! how I wish they would hurry up*!”
	4. ***Kindness***: The word means thoughtfulness, courtesy, warmth in our words -- no coldness, no sharp, cutting sarcasm.

It is not the endurance alone that authenticated Paul’s ministry for many have done so; no it was the way in which Pail endured that proved that it was real. Ministry is a character profession!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 6:6b-10**

**“The Real Deal”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 6b-7a Essential equipment**

**III. Vs. 7b-8a The right uniform**

**IV. Vs. 8b-10 A complete makeover**

**I. Intro.**

Last week we took note of Paul’s words describing the way he was on display before the world. His education in Christ had been in the school of hard knocks where he describes three of his classes as “*tribulation, needs and distress*” yet he had passed those classes not by receiving a letter grade but rather by demonstrating that ill respective of ***tough circumstances, tough opposition, and tough commitments*** he operated in “***purity, knowledge, patience and kindness***”! I left off last week with us wondering how such grades were possible in these classes and we shall find out that Paul was given **essential equipment** and the **right uniform** that allowed for his **complete makeover**.

Sigmund Freud would have taken no doubt an alternate view; this view I might add is the world view. In his 1927 book called “*The Future of Illusion*” in which he describes his *interpretation of religion, its origins in human thinking and its future* a view that he believed was a false belief system. Freud said that religion provided for humans a necessary threefold task of:

1. Exorcizing the terrors of nature
2. Reconciling men to the cruelty of death
3. Compensating them for the sufferings of life

Having rejected God Freud opted for what he described as a “*civilizing and developing government.*” Thus making man and government his god! Freud would have had nothing to do with what Paul has written here and probably would have Paul committed after he psychoanalyzed him. Yet Paul would have everything to do with Freud and would have gone to the ends of the earth, endured every persecution and trail in the attempt to deliver to him his treasure of Jesus’ love for him. In comparing the two the apostle Paul and Sigmund Freud I know which one is the sane one and which one isn’t!

**II. Vs. 6b-7a Essential equipment**

1. Vs. 6b-7a Paul shows how those qualities were possible as he relied on these four things:
	1. ***Holy Spirit***: The moment you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit came to live in you, but in Acts 1:8 Jesus went on to say that the Holy Spirit will come upon you and we shall receive power to be witnesses. You cannot continually manifest these characteristics apart from the baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit and I believe that is why Paul lists Him first.
	2. ***Sincere love***: In 5:14 Paul said that “*the love of Christ constrains me*”. As Jesus spoke to the Church in Philadelphia that He was the One “*who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens*” that is what the “*sincere love of Christ*” will do in and through us. The things that stop others won’t stop the Love of Christ in our lives as we will just plow ahead. Then sometimes we will try plowing ahead and the love of Christ will stop us. I realize that this is a “*no brainer*” but ***we will never be able to exhibit the Love of Christ if we aren’t experiencing the love of Christ***. The reason for this is that we don’t manifest the love of Christ we merely reflect upon others.
	3. ***Word of truth***: Paul is speaking about the Scriptures or as we are learning in the “Truth Project”, the knowledge of how God sees life. The Bible tells you what reality is really like. The bible brings us back to what is relevant, what is true and right. It is so sad that folks today feel that they have to do something the Word of God to make it relevant.
	4. ***Power of God***: Wow twice in these four things that Paul relied upon to produce Godly characteristics in the midst of difficult things we are taken to the work of the Holy Spirit. That tells me that the Holy Spirit is not an “***option***” He is a “***necessity***” if I’m going to be able to live in this world. So much of the time well meaning people try to motivate us to do the work of the Spirit in the energy of the flesh. If we are going to have an impact the world we live in then we are going to need the Holy Spirit empowering us to do so.

**III. Vs. 7b-8a The right uniform**

1. Vs. 7b-8a Finally Paul mentions the conflict its self. In chapter 10:4 he will say in this regard that the “*weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.*” Paul handled these strongholds, these injustices of drug and human trafficking, erosion of morals, the breakdown of the home, the rise of crime, etc. with spiritual weaponry.
	1. ***Armor of righteousness***: Paul didn’t employ worldly tactics to correct these injustices. He didn’t rely upon the government to change the moral evils of his day. I’m not saying that it is wrong to try to pass a legislative bill or elect a different government official. What I’m saying is Paul saw those things as a spiritual battle. Paul relied upon prayer, faith, love, godly living the word of God to pull down those strongholds. He says that he did this in honor and dishonor, whether he was popular or unpopular. “Honor” is what people say to your face; “dishonor” is what they say behind your back. But Paul says it didn’t make any difference because he was living a life that was “***well pleasing to the Lord***” not one that was “*well pleasing to man*”.

**IV. Vs. 8b-10 A complete makeover**

This armor of righteousness enabled Paul to do six things seen in these contrasts.

1. Vs. 8b ***Evil report and good report***: Some were calling him a fake but now he was of good report with the Lord.
2. Vs. 8c-9a ***As deceivers, and yet true***: At one time Paul had been an up and coming Rabi superstar yet he was untrue to God. Now he was true to God but those he used to run with not saw him as a deceiver.
3. Vs. 9b ***As unknown, and yet well known***: Once Paul strived to be well known among his peers but in so doing he wasn’t known by God. But now it was the other way around.
4. Vs. 9c ***As dying, and behold we live***: Before he saw himself as a live when he was in reality dead now he died daily and had never been more alive.
5. Vs. 9d ***As chastened, and yet not killed***: Paul had learned not to despise the discipline of the Lord for whom the Lord loves He disciplines. The instruction of the Lord in his life was a sign of love not a sign of elimination.
6. Vs. 10 As ***sorrowful, yet always rejoicing***: The world considered Paul as “*sorrowful…poor…and having nothing*” yet it was in his poverty that Paul found the most “joy”. It was in his absence of the world that he made all rich and it was in the emptiness of what this world had to offer that he possessed all things.

What a magnificent life we can experience no matter what we face! At the beginning I quoted the world view as pinned by Sigmund Freud now hear what A. W. Tozer wrote: “***A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for one whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest; and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge. The man who has met God is not looking for anything; he has found it. He is not searching for light, for upon him the light has already shined. He is not a copy, not a facsimile. He is an original from the hand of the Holy Spirit.***”

 I think I’ll stay with Tozer’s view!!!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-7:1 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 6:11-13**

**“Restricted Affections”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 11-13 Restricted Affections**

**I. Intro.**

When I was a young heathen doing stupid things at night we would take street repair signs that were intended to warn cars of road repairs and put them on people’s yards. We thought it was fun to hear the kids talk about the flashing yellow lights that awaited or awoke them in their front yards. For better then two summers we did this never thinking of the void that sign left in the street for motor vehicles driving at night. It wasn’t until we read in the paper that someone had damaged their car because they hadn’t any warning of the repair. Our fun had sent someone on a dangerous path because we removed the warning. Paul’s love for the Corinthian believers caused him to warn of two obstacles that can hinder people from the love of God.

Paul has given the Corinthian believers our **purpose** as Christians in this life in 5:9 which is in every way to “*live well pleasing to God*”. Then he told us what our **vocation** was while here on earth in 5:18-20 we have been given the ministry of reconciliation and we are to **operate that ministry** as ambassadors for Christ. Paul then went on to write about the **opposition you will experience in this** in chapter 6 by saying that he went through tribulations, needs and distress while thus employed. We are very prone to think of ministry as singularly a “*speaking*” profession but according to Paul it isn’t so much what we say that speaks to people it’s our conduct of holiness, knowledge, patience and kindness in the midst of trying circumstances and difficult situations. In John 16:33 Jesus told His disciples “*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*.” Opposition is certain but so too is our victory because of Christ! That was Paul’s thought last week as he noted for the Corinthian believers that such personal character traits were only possible for the believer because of the resources God has given us by way of the Holy Spirit, sincere love, and the Word of God. Paul moves on to talk about **two more** dangerous obstacles (verse 12 and verse 14) and these are even more difficult to deal with because they deal with our own flesh.

**II. Vs. 11-13 Restricted Affections**

Vs. 11-13 The first one is easy to find in Paul’s words as we read in verse 12. There are folks who wonder why I don’t read out of the KJV of the bible and here is one reason as this verse reads “*Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own* ***bowels***.” Compared with the NKJV which reads “*You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own* ***affections.***” I’ve had “*straitened bowels*” and it has changed my “***affections***” but somehow I think something has got lost in translation. Pardon the pun but with that “*out of the way*” I believe that what Paul is speaking of here is better understood as the KNJV renders it “*restricted affections*”!

 One of the amazing aspects of this 2nd letter to the Corinthian believers once you know the reason he is writing them is his genuine affection and love for them. It is for this reason alone that this letter brings such conviction to my heart personally. Like most of you I find it easy to have affection and love towards those who exhibit like sentiments towards me but I don’t fare so well towards those who don’t like me. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 5:46 where he said, “*If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much*.” Paul demonstrated that affection towards them in two ways:

1. Vs. 11a “*Spoke openly to you*”: By this I believe Paul is talking about full communication by which he hid nothing personally from them. He was “***transparent***” about his failures and fears, stresses and struggles. One of the things I’ve noticed as a pastor is how guarded people are in their speech about themselves and how unguarded in their speech they are with regards to their opinions about others. Friends, that reverses is very unloving! If you want to be loving you will say nothing negative about others and be very open about your own failures. The church ought to be a place where we can: James 5:16 “*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*.” Galatians 6:2 “*Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*”
2. Vs. 11b “*Heart is wide open*”: Here I think Paul is speaking of the fact that ***he showed no favoritism in his love and affection***. Paul wasn’t just loving those who thought well of him, he loved all of them even the difficult ones. Paul knew what some of them had said about him, and yet he still accepted them in their weakness and resistance to his love. There is a problem when it comes to love most of us humans experience and that is when we are hurt we tend to close ourselves off to protect ourselves from further getting hurt. But love can’t function in a “***closed system***” it will die if all it does is receive love and not respond in like kind. Paul says in verse 12 that they had become “*restricted by their own affections*”. When a person becomes “restricted” they protect themselves from further hurt but they also limit the amount of love they can take in and over time that which started out as a protection becomes a prison of selfishness and bitterness. What is even a greater tragedy is that we also close ourselves off to experiencing the Love of Christ and we can become cold as we don’t experience the riches of Jesus love for us. To love is to be vulnerable and to risk heartache. Ray Stedman made an amazing statement that caused me a great time of reflection as he wrote: “***Even God cannot love beyond what we let him love us. He loves us and he is constantly displaying that love in a thousand and one ways, but we do not feel that love until we respond to what we already have***.” **If you do not respond to love, then do not wonder if your life remains cold, barren, lonely, empty and meaningless**. C. S. Lewis said, “*Love anything and your heart will continually be wrung, and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your own selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and annoyances of love is hell.*” **The problem isn’t that the person isn’t being loved the problem is that they aren’t being loving back**! That’s why Paul is admonishing them to not be “*restricted by their own affections*” then goes on in verse 13 to say “*I speak as to children, you also be open*”.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to “*open up*” and be “*transparent*” to all people so that when you are loved, you will love back and in so doing you will continue to grow more and more in love. Friends it’s not our lack of being loved that hinders us it’s having been so loved out of fear being hurt we close ourselves off and become cold that hinders us from receiving more of God’s love. We far too often have become “***hoarders***” instead “***distributers***”! It is only in are giving love away that we can receive more. It is like Manna that fell from heaven to sustain the Israelites while in the wilderness for 40 years. There was enough supplied for each day except for the Sabbath but they couldn’t store it up. It had to be consumed and distributed or it would become rancid and breed worms.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**B. 2:12-7:1 Dying To Live**

**2 Corinth. 6:14-7:1**

**“Unequally yoked”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 6:14-7:1 Unequally yoked**

**I. Intro.**

In chapter 3 Paul began his teaching of the New Covenant and here he will conclude it. It was given in part to answer those legalistic Judaizers who had come and corrupted the believers in Corinth and turned them against Paul and his teaching. But it took on much more than that as it described Paul’s philosophy of life and with that what our philosophy of life ought to be. Paul had spoken of the natural opposition that we believers would have in employing our vocation of the “*Ministry of Reconciliation*”. You can bet that Satan isn’t just going to roll over and let us win the world to his enemy Jesus. But in the end Paul said that ***our two biggest obstacles come not from without but rather from within!*** The first we saw two weeks ago Paul called “*restricted affections*” and by this he warned against not loving folks by not being open and transparent about our own failures and needs. The second warning is when we begin to close ourselves off from hurt. We become a funnel of love instead of a tube and we no longer get the volume of God’s love for ourselves simply because we are restricting it in an attempt to protect ourselves from getting hurt. That’s what C.S. Lewis was warning against when he said, “*The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and annoyances of love is hell.*”

**II. Vs. 14-7:1 Unequally yoked**

Vs. 14-16 Paul next takes up yet another obstacle that can hinder our ministry of reconciliation and he says it is being “*unequally yoked together with unbelievers*”. **Remember the context of these words is obstacles that can hinder us in distributing the treasure of Jesus to those who have not yet received Him**. Here Paul is warning believers that we must be careful because in doing this as we can “*compromise*” our ministry by what he describes as being “***unequally yoked together***”. To simplify this Paul states to us that:

1. **The 1st problem was not being loving enough**
2. **The 2nd problem is in loving the wrong things**

The key in interpreting what Paul is talking about is in understanding the phrase “***unequally yoked together***”. This is a phrase that every Jew would know as it is a reference to Deut. 22:10 where we read “*You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.*” A yoke is a wooden frame or bar with loops at either end, fitted around the necks of two animals which tied them together and forced them to function as one. It is clear that ***God was concerned that they not tie together two animals of a different nature***. ***It is a cruel thing to yoke together two things that aren’t compatible.*** When I was kid I’d dig up ant nests of red ants and place their nest right next to a black ant nest and watch these to nests fight, as clearly they had ***incompatible natures***. **Yokes have two characteristics by which we can always identify them**.

1. The **first:** A **yoke is not easily broken.** It is a kind of ***permanent relationship***. When you yoke two animals together they are bound together; **they do not have any choice**. Uncomfortable as it may be, **they must do things together**.
2. The **second:** A yoke **constrains someone**; **it does not permit independent action**. There is something that forces you to comply with what the other one wants to do, whether you like it or not. Kind of like a “***three legged race***”.

Clearly Paul is talking about, getting involved with unbelievers in ways and associations that limit us and keep us from distributing the treasures of Jesus. To further clarify what he means Paul uses **four contrasts**:

1. Vs. 14a “*For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness*?”: What partnership can person who loves right have with a person who wants nothing to do with what is right? There can be no team work or partnership when one person loves what is fair and just and the other person refuses all authority and does only what pleases them.
2. Vs. 14b “*And what communion has light with darkness*?”: Christians are said to be light where unbelievers are in darkness. Imagine knowingly joining yourself to someone who sees and lives life in ignorance and illusion. That is a formula for disaster, pain, suffering and heartache.
3. Vs. 15a “*And what accord has Christ with Belial*? *Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever*?”: Belial is another name for Satan and the word means “*worthlessness*”. It refers to Satan and his activities. Here, are the two great captains of the opposing philosophies of life, Jesus Christ and Satan. A Christian joined in a permanent relationship that doesn’t permit independent action lives with the reality that someday their loyalties will clash with the person they are joined with and they will have to decide who will be their “captain” in that area Jesus or satan.
4. Vs. 16 “*And what agreement has the temple of God with idols*? *For you are the temple of the living God.*”: This is one of the most beautiful descriptions of the glory of Christianity, the fact that God dwells in his people. The glory of Christianity is the revelation that our bodies are the temples of God. Therefore, we are guided by His principles in worship and in service. Imagine a person who, as the temple of God, is joined to another person who is the temple of an idol.

***The great unanswered question is what specific human relationship constitutes a yoke***? Is it a business partnership, a union membership, a marriage, dating non-Christians? There have been some who have taken it to mean that Christians should live in a commune or a monastery withdrawing from the world and from contact with non-Christians; a complete Christian life from the womb to the tomb without making any friends or even contacts with non-Christians. But that would be inconsistent from our ministry of reconciliation. Jesus said as much in Matthew 10:16 saying “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves*”. Clearly we are not to withdraw from the world and not all associations are yokes only those that are “***permanent in nature and do not permit independent action***.” We are called to be **IN** the world but not **OF** the world! The church has long taken this to mean marriage and I can see why they do so as the “*two become one flesh*” and biblically marriage is seen as “***permanent in nature and does limit independent action***.” That is why Paul wrote in First Corinthians 7:39 that marriage is to be “*in the Lord*”! But there are some who are already “***yoked***” in relationships what about them? Well the wording in the Greek of verse 14 literally says, “*STOP forming yokes*”. In other words “*don’t continue doing this*” because a yoke is not easily broken.

Vs. 16b-18 No one person is the keeper of another man’s conscience, we must all hear from the Holy Spirit and decide for ourselves what is compromise being “*unequally yokes*”. Paul’s quotes are from Lev. 26:11-12, Isa. 52:11, Ezek. 20:34, 37:27 and 2nd Sam. 7:14 and does so to show that God hasn’t changed His mind on this issue as He warned Israel of the this danger in Isaiah 42:6 the Lord spoke saying, “*I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles.*” Paul is not advocating a total separation from unbelievers as he has already stated in 1 Cor. 5:9-10 “*I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*” er

So what constitutes being “*unequally yoked*”? I would say that: “*Any kind of relationship that does not permit a believer to follow his Lord in all things is a yoke*.” ***A friendship can be a yoke, if it is the type of friendship in which you cannot do what God wants you to do because you will offend your friend***. God's love is saying to us and through us, “*I am here to bless you, to make you my royal son and daughter. I want to be a Father to you, a tender, loving, powerful Father to you, but I can't do it while you are still giving all your affection and all your ties to something else.*” Bob Dylan sang “*You're gonna have to serve somebody, Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord But you're gonna have to serve somebody*.”

Vs. 7:1 Breaking that yoke before it becomes permanent or making sure that you don’t continue to make yokes that you shouldn’t is what the Lord is saying here. But look carefully here how God is saying this to you as Paul writes “***beloved***”. God’s love is waiting to bless us and envelope us but the choice is up to you. You may need to “*come out, be separate and touch no unclean thing*” before you can experience His welcoming love and realize that He is a Father to you and you are His sons and daughters!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**C. 7:2-9:15 Perfecting Holiness**

**2 Corinth. 7:2-16**

**“Sorry seems to be the hardest word”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 2-4 How to get people to say there sorry**

**III. Vs. 5-10 Two types of sorrow**

**IV. Vs. 11-16 Godly sorrow** **verses** **worldly sorrow**

**I. Intro.**

Paul’s appeal is for personal reconciliation with and he reminds them that ill regardless of what some have claimed he has “*wronged no one, corrupted no one, and have cheated no one*”. I think Bernie Taupin had it right in the Lyrics sung by Elton John “***Sorry seems to be the hardest word.***” We all hurt people by our actions and words. Oh we may attempt to justify it by saying that they hurt us first but the truth is that we know that has not always been the case has it? Repentance means a change of mind, a change of attitude and like Elton sang, it “***seems to be the hardest word***”. Here in this passage is a study on ***how to get people to say their sorry so that they can heal and be restored***.

**II. Vs. 2-4 How to get people to say there sorry**

Vs. 2-4 These first three verses gives us the “*right way to bring about repentance in others*”. Paul had gone to Corinth to try to clear things up, but that had made matters worse. Then he sent Titus there to see if that would help and while Titus was on gone Paul became so disturbed that he started out towards Corinth leaving a great opportunity of ministry in Macedonia. Somewhere along the way Paul met up with Titus who gave him good news that they had, changed their minds and hearts towards him. There were still some things they needed to work out hence this letter. The first thing to notice is what Paul doesn’t do to get them to repent. ***He doesn’t attack them, condemn them or accuse them***. Instead he does **three things to bring these Corinthians to repentance**.

1. **Vs. 2 First, Paul starts with himself**: He assessed the situation, had the Holy Spirit examine his heart and declared to them that with regards to his dealings with them he had a clear conscience. He had no doubt heard all the rumors and accusations made about him and stated that before the Lord he had done none of these things. We can’t always do that can we? Sometimes we have done things that have caused broken relationships but the point Paul is making is the same one Jesus made in Matthew 7:5 where he said “*First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*” If you want to lead someone to make a change start with yourself first!
2. **Vs. 3 Second, when he addresses them he affirmed them**: “*I do not say this to condemn you.*" It is clear that ***Paul’s words were to bring about repentance not condemnation*** but such a result is a fine line. Oftentimes when we try to get someone to admit they have done something hurtful we start out with harsh words ourselves. We rip into them using words like “*always and never*” as we address the truth of their hurtful ways. To be frank, ***we are often more interested in getting even then we are in getting them right***! What we say may be true but if it lacks love it is brutality! ***Confrontation without affirmation will not bring about transformation***! If a person is treated that way they will become defensive. Paul is very careful to say, “*It doesn’t make any difference if we live or die, I’ll always love you.” “I’m going to be for you and support you. I’m not going to abandon you, or write you off*”.
3. Vs. 4 **Third, Paul communicates that he is confident that they will do the right thing**: He had heard from Titus of some attitudes that had already changed and he acknowledges this even though they haven’t gotten all their ducks in a row. Friends **that is so important when people are making some changes that we start with what they are doing right instead of just mentioning what they are doing wrong**. If all we do is speak of what remains to do they will think you haven’t noticed that they have already made some changes. Be their “***cheerleader***” not their “***executioner***”! Folks are much more receptive to change when they see us noticing their progress instead of reminding them how far they have to go.

**III. Vs. 5-10 Two types of sorrow**

Vs. 5-7 Paul goes on to show them how he understood the need to be comforted and that repentance is the quickest way to get there. He says he was, “*troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears*.” Paul says in verse 6 if you ever go through seasons like this remember that “***God comforts the downcast***!” The believer sees that God has allowed such things and because we know that He cannot do wrong and always loving towards us we know what Paul said in Romans 8:28 “*that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*.” As Paul already wrote in 2 Cor. 4:17 “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*”.

Vs. 8-10 This is a reference Paul's earlier more “*severe letter*.” In it Paul was straightforward and to the point. He knew it would hurt them when he wrote it, and he says that when he sent it he was stressed by that fact (2:4). He confess that he regretted sending it at first because he knew it would hurt but that he doesn’t regret it now because of what it produced. Sometimes being hurt is the only way we can learn the truth. Oft times the person we are afraid to hurt is none other than ourselves as we don’t want them to be mad at us or not like us. If you are willing to risk their friendship in order to tell him the truth, you must really love them.

Next Paul brings out two reactions people will have either “*godly sorrow*” or “*worldly sorrow*”. ***Godly sorrow is the pain of becoming aware of something about yourself that was hidden prior and Paul says this leads to repentance***. You may be defensive and argue but deep inside you know that is true. It makes you change and alter your behavior. Let’s make sure we understand that repentance isn’t “*feeling sorry*” that may be a hurt feeling but if it is the right hurt it will lead to a change of action. Isaiah put it this way in 55:7 saying “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*” The salvation Paul is referring to here is the freedom from self. The result of worldly sorrow is hurt but no permanent change. There may be a temporary change until the ruckus dies down, but no sense of being wrong.

**IV. Vs. 11-16 Godly sorrow** **verses** **worldly sorrow**

Vs. 11-13 There are **three clear-cut indications** of whether your hurt is ***godly sorrow*** or a ***worldly sorrow*** beyond the obvious lasting change in behavior.

1. Vs. 11a “***What clearing of yourself***”: **How free are we to face the problem**. If we have godly sorrow there will be an eagerness to be completely clear of all of it. A willingness to deal with all the wrong and not just admit it reluctantly and move on. Often when people are hurt they will admit they are wrong but then say, “*Let's drop it, I don’t want to talk about it anymore.*” A person who has godly sorrow has dealt with this and isn’t afraid of it any more.
2. Vs. 11b “***What indignation, what fear***”: This indicates that there will be **anger over our own stupidity and failure**. Listen to the psalmist in Psalm 73:21-22 where he says, “*Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You*.”
3. Vs. 11c “***You prove yourselves to be clear in this matter***”: Finally there **will be a resolve to be more careful in the future**. We won’t want to do this again and the “***scar***” will cause us to change our behavior next time.

In contrast, those who have worldly sorrow are unwilling to face the whole matter. They are the people who want you to drop it, and if you do not forgive them get upset and angry. This shows a worldly sorrow that has no repentance in it.

Vs. 12-13 There are **four things that happen when there is godly sorrow that leads to repentance**:

1. Vs. 12 **A renewed awareness of our relationship in Christ**: Paul says, “*The real reason I wrote was not to straighten out this problem.*” The reason they had gotten into this was that they had forgotten who they were in Christ. When we repent the first thing we recover is a sense of our own Christ like identity.
2. Vs. 13-14 **A reestablished confidence**: All the positive things Paul had felt and communicated to Titus about them was proven by their action. That is one of the joyful things about repentance -- it reestablishes lost confidence in people who have lost it.
3. Vs. 15 **An awakened respect**: Titus was impressed by the Corinthians change of heart. The godliness of a person goes up in my eyes when they can publicly say, “*You're right and I was wrong attitude*.” Instead of fighting back and getting defensive they acknowledge the truth and change their behavior.
4. Vs. 16 **Increased joy**: In the end when repentance takes place it increases everybody's joy. That’s the purpose for the Holy Spirit working in these situations.

Godly sorrow that leads to repentance is a sorrow that leads to change of purpose, intention and action. The sorrow of the world is a sense of remorse and failure, a sense of defeat but this sorrow leads to despair and unbelief.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**C. 7:2-9:15 Perfecting Holiness**

**2 Corinth. 8:1-15**

**“As poor, yet making many rich”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-5 Spending God’s blessings**

**III. Vs. 6-9 Two examples**

**IV. Vs. 10-15 Two principals**

**I. Intro.**

If I’ve heard it once I’ve heard it a thousand times: “*All the Church ever talks about is money*!!!” Second Corinthians chapters 8-9 are all about Christian giving what Paul calls “*hilarious*” giving (9:7). Yet in these two chapters ***he doesn’t mention the word money once***! This section of scripture isn’t about tithing it’s about a onetime gift to help the needs of another church. The word grace appears 8 times in these two chapters and Paul uses the word in conjunction with the giving of the Macedonian Church which was “*dirt poor*”. These chapters don’t speak of how ***much*** we give but rather “***How We Are Too Give***”. Many Christians don’t know how to give and as such are either doing so for the wrong reasons or are not giving at all. If the Church is going to arise to the tremendous opportunity in these days it will only be as we know the grace of our Lord Jesus who though rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich (verse 9). Henry Crowell the founder of the Quaker Oats Company viewed all things as a stewardship from God. In whatever he did, he sought to honor God whether it was through business or his 40 years as chairman of the Board of Moody Bible Institute. He gave away nearly 70% of his earnings for more than 40 years. Today, over 75 years later, the Trustees are still dispersing funds blessing hundreds of ministries every year all around the world.

**II. Vs. 1-5 Spending God’s blessings**

Vs. 1-5 The reason why Paul is bringing up the topic of “*giving*” is because there was a famine in the land of Israel where many were unable to provide for their needs and were going hungry. When Paul heard about it, he was determined to do something about it and went about asking for contributions from all the Gentile churches he had been a part of for the relief of Jewish Christians in Israel. Here was a particle way of demonstrating the love of Christ and breaking down the barriers many of the Jewish believers had towards the gentile believers. Such was the case when he went to the Macedonian churches which would include the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. The response of those in Macedonia was tremendous, and Paul tells the Corinthians that he was blessed by their giving and as such ***they provide an example of proper giving***.

1. Vs. 1 **Origin of Giving**: There are a lot of reasons that people give.
2. Some do so as a tax write-off and I’m thankful that they prefer the church to the government! But if that is the only motive for giving it is a wrong one because although the Church will receive the contribution the person who gave won’t receive a blessing in heaven.
3. Some people give to Him with the motive of a bribe, to get Him to look the other way with regards to their life in hopes that they will earn points to get to heaven without turning their life over to him. God loves people to much to settle for their bank accounts and wallets.

Those Macedonians gave according to Paul because they were “***well aware of the unmerited favor God had bestowed upon them***.” They weren’t giving to ***GET*** they were giving because they ***GOT***! You will never be able to joyfully and abundantly release to the Lord what you believe is yours by right or effort. I bet you have recognized this truth in your kids as they have no problem spending your resources! It is always easier to spend someone else’s resources just look at the government they have been doing it for 100’s of years. ***You aren’t giving what is yours you are giving what God has given you***. In 1 Chron. 29:16 God gave David the opportunity to collect the resources to build the temple and the people gave so willingly that David was reminded where it had all come from saying, “***O Lord our God, even these materials that we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name come from you! It all belongs to you*!**” The only true motive in giving is the understanding that what you are giving hasn’t originated from you and was never intended for you to hoard. In Matthew 6:19-20 Jesus admonished us saying, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal*.” Jesus didn’t have a problem with “***laying up treasures***” only the location in which we store them: ***earth verses heaven***! The Bible’s focus isn’t upon what we give it is upon what God has blessed us with; so give to the level you feel you have been blessed! If God has not done anything for you, then don’t give him anything. But if he has, then give to the measure you have received. The New Testament principal of giving is that it is a privilege that we can partake of to express the gratitude of our hearts for the grace that God has already given.

1. Vs. 2-5 **Affects of Grace**: Look at how the “***unmerited favor of God”*** had affected the Macedonians. Paul says in verse 2 that their giving was despite the trial of affliction of ***deep poverty***. Paul says, they were going through “*a great test of affliction*”, they were being persecuted. ***It would have been natural for them to try to hang onto as much of their income as they could because they might need it but they ignored the normal excuse for not giving***. But they didn’t because they had personally been touched by ***God’s abundant blessings which caused them to see their situation as a glass full and over flowing instead of empty***. Instead their lack enabled them to see God’s abundance all the more and they gave to help others because they personally knew what it was like to be in need. In verse 3 Paul points out that they not only gave “*according to their ability*”, they gave “*beyond their ability*”. They dug deep, and according to the words of Paul in verse 4 asked for the privilege of doing so. Paul was reluctant to tell them about this need in Jerusalem because he didn’t think they could afford to give. But, when they heard about it, they told him they couldn’t afford to not give to those needy people in Jerusalem. What was the key to this view that they had? Well verse 5 tells us “***they first gave themselves to the Lord***”. These Macedonians first gave themselves and with it everything they had as well to the Lord. There are only four verses in the New Testament where you read the word “***tithe***” and each time it is in reference to the Old Testament. The tithe was a tax levied upon people for the purpose of supporting priesthood, a separate body of people who did religious things. When you come into the New Testament you find that every Christian is a priest (1 Peter 2:9) so there is no special tax to support it. Thus it is upon us to give as our hearts are stirred and moved by the grace of God.

**III. Vs. 6-9 Two examples**

Vs. 6-8 Notice how carefully Paul avoids pressuring them into to giving. He doesn’t say they have to give neither is he saying, “*Hey let’s see if you can't outdo the Macedonians! We are going to have two thermometers one for you in Corinth and one for those in Macedonia so we will see who will raise the most!*” Paul’s words are an encouragement saying that, “*The Macedonians gave out of love as they were moved by the grace of God. So if you’re going to give on that basis, then do so*.” Giving is “***a manifestation of a heart that has been touched by the love and grace of God.***”

Vs. 9 The highest example of giving, is to be found in Jesus. There was a time according to Jesus that He was rich! Oh not on this earth, He himself said that He had no place to lay His head. In John 17:5 during His prayer to the Father Jesus said, “*Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.*” In Col. 1:15-17 Paul says that, “*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.*” Jesus laid that aside to give to you His life, He wasn’t forced too, or manipulated to. No Hebrews 10:5 tells us “*That is why Christ, when he came into the world, said, “You did not want animal sacrifices and grain offerings. But you have given me a body so that I may obey you.*” In Philippians 2:8 we read that Jesus “*being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross*!” Paul reminds us, that Jesus did this in order that we might be rich.

**IV. Vs. 10-15 Two principals**

Vs. 10-15 In these verses we have some wonderful principles of giving. Apparently, when Titus first visited them in Corinth he announced the need of the saints in Jerusalem, and many had promised to give to that need, but it was never taken, so now, a year later, Paul is reminding them of this.

1. Vs. 10-12 ***Give what you can***. If it is not as much as you said you would give, God understands. He knows your heart and he is not requiring something that you do not have. He delights in one who gives all that he can. Later on in 9:7 Paul will say, “*God loves a cheerful giver*”.
2. Vs. 13-15 ***Give now not later***: Some have taken the mention of the word “*equality*” here as justification for a kind of ***Christian socialism*** that some have devised so that wealth is redistributed so that everyone has an “*equality*”. But that is not what Paul says. He is **not** speaking about the equality of the amount; he is speaking of the equality of the response as he says, “***Now at this TIME***”. “*It’s your time to give now because it may be your turn to receive soon*.” Paul isn’t saying, “*I want you to give to me, and I (like the government) will take 80 per cent of it for my expenses and deliver 20 per cent of it to Jerusalem.*” Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 “*he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need*.” That comes out of the story of the manna falling in the wilderness to feed this around 2 million people. When they went out to gather it, some were able to gather more than others. The amazing thing was that when they got it all together and started dishing it out, those who had more than they needed gave to those who had less so that it came out exactly even; everybody had exactly what he needed. God gives to some more than they need in order that they might have the joy of giving to somebody who has less. And perhaps someday it may be gone and they will be the ones that have need and will have to receive.

The little tax collector Zacchaeus gave away 50% of his wealth to the poor, then from the remaining 50% pledged to make restitution of 4 times the amount of what he had extorted. As such he went into that night as a man mastered by the passion to get and left mastered by the passion to give! What caused such transformation? Well he met the Master Giver, Jesus!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**C. 7:2-9:15 Perfecting Holiness**

**2 Corinth. 8:16 – 9:15**

**“The Giver and the Gatherer”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 16-24 Concerning the Collection**

**III. Vs. 1-5 Grace for the gatherer**

**IV. Vs. 6-15 Benefits of benevolence**

**I. Intro.**

In the first 15 verses of chapter 8 Paul’s focus was on the right heart in giving and he gave to wonderful examples of giving from two opposite ends of the scale:

1. The churches in Macedonia: Who were “dirt poor” but begged for the opportunity to give beyond their means.
2. Jesus: Who out of His incredible riches of His glory gave everything up and became poor that we might be rendered incredibly rich.

**Those two examples are given to reveal to us that giving has nothing to do with WHAT you have and ever thing to do with WHO you have**! But what I hear most from folks with regards to money that is either **taken** in the form of taxes or is **given** as an offering is that **they object to HOW it is spent**. I was watching a program that looked at some of the well known Tel-Evangelists and their wealth and I realized that many people look at their life styles and saw nothing wrong with supporting it especially when their message is centered on ***how to achieve that wealth yourself***. One such Tel-evangelist said, “*Jesus came to give us the abundant life, I can’t be a blessing if I’m poor broke and depressed.*” Another said, “*Don’t let people tell you that God wants to give you enough. His name is El Shaddai and El Shaddai means more than enough. Why would a God whose name means more than enough stop at enough*?” But for me and many others we would see this kind of giving just as going to line their pockets enriching a few at the exploitation of many. I once heard a story about a very wealthy man that was on his death bed who called three old friends (a Doctor, a Lawyer and a Tel-Evangelist) in with an odd request. He said, “***You’ve heard it said that you can’t take it with ya, but I aim to do just that!*** ***I’ve*** ***got three envelopes with a million in cash and just before they close my coffin I want each of you to toss in your envelope.***” Each of the three agreed to do it and after the funeral as they rode back together the Doctor confessed, “***I got to tell ya I didn’t put in the full amount like I promised, you see I want to start a free medical clinic so I took out a ¼ million to get it started.***” The Lawyer said, “***I got to admit as well I didn’t put all of it in either as I wanted to be able to offer free legal services for folks that can’t afford it so I took out a ½ a million***.” Both of them turned to the Tel-Evangelist waiting for his confession and instead he said, “***Shame on you both for taking his money like that, why I wrote him a check for the full amount***!” Having already dealt with ***the heart of the giver*** the rest of this section he deals with guide lines for the ***heart of the gatherer***.

**II. Vs. 16-24 Concerning the Collection**

Vs. 16-19 The principal changed from the heart of the giver to that of the gift being administered properly. I find it interesting that Paul distanced himself from the actual gathering of the gift and by this he diminished his enemy’s opportunities to say that he was applying pressure to get them to give or that he had his hand in the till. The responsibility in handling the gift didn’t fall on just one person but rather on a group of people, (*in fact Paul lists three here in this passage*). **There was accountability that was left in the hands of people of high integrity.**

1. Vs. 16-17 The first person Paul mentions in this regard was Titus a man who they already had experienced his genuine care for them as he was the one that Paul sent to reach out to them. Titus had not only manifested integrity before Paul he had done so before the Corinthian believers as well. They wouldn’t see Titus as a person trying to manipulate them into giving and they wouldn’t reject his exhortation to do the right thing and finish what they committed to do a year earlier.
2. Vs. 18-21 Many commentators view this person as none other than Luke though we are never told his name. What we know is that his character was famous among the churches as all who knew him praised God on behalf of him. The fact that he was praised for “*the gospel throughout all the Churches*” reveals that his heart was towards reaching the lost and it was evident wherever he went. In verse 19 we are told that he was “***chosen*** *to travel with them with the gift*”. There was a “*show of hands*” by which he was elected to go and deliver the gift to the believers in Jerusalem. Paul’s critics could not say that Paul hand selected those that had charge over the money. In verse 20 Paul admits that this was done to avoid, “*that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us.*” Few things will destroy the integrity of the church faster than money so Paul took special precautions in this.
3. Vs. 22 Paul had reached the age of around 60 and perhaps he suffered from what many of us do as we are around that age; a lapse of memory! So he could not think of the brother's name and decides to describe him instead, “*He's the one whom we've proven and tested.*” Sometimes I think it would be better to remember the character of a person more than their name, don’t you?

The extra care in gathering the gift gave the assurance that their giving would be used to further the Lord and not those that received the offering.

Vs. 23-24 Paul summarizes all three but specifically Titus who had been Paul’s colleague since the Council in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1). Having spoke so highly of the three men Paul concludes by asking the Corinthian’s to treat the three as he had described them and as such they would be showing that they were of the same character. What does this say to us about our giving? Only that what we do with our treasure is a demonstration of where our heart is! Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 19:9 at the response of Zacchaeus giving as He said “*Today salvation has come to this house*…”

**III. Vs. 1-5 Grace for the gatherer**

Vs. 1-5 I see **three more things for the gatherer to apply**:

1. Vs. 3a It is apparent that Paul wanted the giving done before his arrival so that no one would think that his coming to them was predicated upon him getting money. What a difference this attitude is when compared to many in the ministry today who won’t come unless you guarantee them money upfront.
2. Vs. 3b Paul didn’t want his presence to stir up an emotional response as it would take away from “*the spirit of grace*” that they already had. Quite frankly I’m turned off by the “*Madison Avenue*” marketing to the Church to get believers to participate in something that only the Holy Spirit should motivate us out of an awareness of the goodness of God lavished upon us. I wonder how much more of the money could get into the hands of those that need it if they didn’t send out weekly add campaigns to get me to give?
3. Vs. 2, 5 Paul didn’t want the collection to be a “*last minute thing*”. There was to be no pressure in the giving and when folks feel like they have no time to make a decision they are apt to feel squeezed into giving an amount that they hadn’t prayed about. Paul states up front that these Corinthian believers were already committed to giving and in fact it was their willingness to do so that caused the Macedonian Churches to ask for the opportunity to get involved.

**IV. Vs. 6-15 Benefits of benevolence**

Vs. 6-15 Finally, Paul turns to **five benefits to our benevolence**.

1. Vs. 6 Paul borrows an analogy from agriculture to tell us that ***giving is more than the giving away of your funds or resources, it is a process that will return something to you as well, like a farmer who sows seed in the spring***. The farmer goes out to sow and it appears as though he is throwing it away, he cannot gather it up again, he has given up control of it. But Paul says “*It’s not lost it’s a gain, because each tinny seed that is thrown away will produce a plant that will have hundreds or thousands more seeds*!” God’s design is that “***The return is always proportionate to the sowing. If a farmer sows a little amount of seed, he will get back, a smaller amount in the harvest.***” Ah but if the person sows bountifully he will receive a bountiful harvest in return.
2. Vs. 7 Paul again emphasizes that they are to do **without any outside pressure as the Lord has lain upon their heart**. I think far too much giving is done so that the person giving can claim that they have done so. Jesus said in Matthew 6:3-5 “*If you give to be seen of men, you've got your reward. You were seen of men. That's it; don't expect any more*...” Giving must come from a desire to give to meet the need, not a desire to gain a reputation.
3. Vs. 8-10 ***Giving must be expectant***. The quote is from Psalm 112:9 which speaks of the righteous man and his ability to meet others needs. Men may over time forget the gift but the true Giver will remember it forever. You are dealing with God and it is impossible to out give Him. ***There is nothing selfish about recognizing that you will be blessed with more when you use what you have been blessed with to bless others***. People who give for right reasons become more generous, gracious and godly-minded.
4. Vs. 11-14 Paul says that God will give back to you two ways:
5. Vs. 11 It will awaken **gratitude** in those to whom you give.
6. Vs. 12-14 It stimulates them to **pray** for you.
7. Vs. 15 Most importantly **it glorifies God**: People will praise God for our faithful giving. It blesses God to see his people generously respond to the needs of others! James said in 1:27 that “*Pure religion and undefiled before ... the Father, is this, that you visit the widow and the orphans in their affliction*...”

Giving is godlike, and we are reminded in Scripture that we are to give because we have been given to. Based upon verse 7 I think we need to change the old adage that says that you need to “***Give until it hurts***!” to” “***Give until it’s hilarious!***” “*Don’t give until its painful, give until you can party*!” Giving should not be heavy lifting it should be happy lifting! Jesus said in Matthew 10:8 “*Freely you have received, freely give*”.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 10:1-2**

**“*The cuts of a paper tiger*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-2 A call to arms**

**I. Intro.**

On June 6th 1944 General Dwight D. Eisenhower made a decision that signaled the greatest military invasion the world had seen, known as D-Day. 155,000 soldiers hit the beaches of France with the code names of Utah, Sword, Juneau, Gold and Omaha. 10,000 brave men lost their lives on Omaha beach alone that day but they kept coming until they over took the German strongholds their success ensured eventual victory. Over 2000 years ago there was an even greater evasion upon enemy soil take down the strongholds of the enemy but it was made by one Man, Jesus Christ has He single handedly defeated the forces of Satan on Calvary on what ought to be known as C-Day. As you begin the 10th chapter it is obvious that the subject changes from what Paul has been talking about in Chapters 8 and 9. The last 3 chapters of Second Corinthians contain strong words from Paul against people that were espousing false teaching while accusing him. The harsh words he uses are not addressed against the church as a whole, but against a special group of teachers in the midst of the Corinthians who were teaching false doctrine. This is a very helpful passage to us because there are false teachers in the church today. The difficulty in teaching this passage lies in applying it today as we will need to identify some of the false teachings around today in order to understand the necessity to implementing the spiritual weapons at our disposal. Ah, but too much of identifying the battlefields can cause us to get caught up in the fight before we understand the weaponry. It is with much prayer that I walk through this passage!

**II. Vs. 1-2 A call to arms**

Vs. 1 One of the things I appreciate in Paul’s words of warning against false teachers is the obvious care that he exhibited towards those in Corinth. Paul was a faithful shepherd who like David before him took up the rocks to chase away the attacks of the bear and the lion that were seeking to devour God’s sheep. In the case of the Corinthian Church the predators were among the sheep appearing as Christians, but were teaching some very destructive lies. Paul does not normally speak this way a fact in verse one he admits to the description of himself that these false teachers we saying about him in Corinth. They were saying that Paul was a “*paper tiger*” sounding powerful when he wrote his letters, but when he came personally he was meek and not impressive. His only comments on this is to say that he was in great company as that is what people said about Jesus as well. People forget that the same Lord that described Himself in Matthew 11:29 as “*Gentle and lowly in heart*” is the same Jesus that in John 2:15 “*made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple*”. I believe most parents can understand this truth as we become very different people when our children are threatened. But what is different is seeing a pastor stand up to defend the truths of God’s word to protect God’s sheep!

I’m afraid that far too often God’s shepherds are as by His prophet Jeremiah saying in 23:2 “*You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings, says the Lord.*” Or as in Ezekiel 34:7-10 God says, “*you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: "as I live," says the Lord God, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock"-- therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand…*” Lease you think that is only an Old Testament thing James 3:1 says, “*Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*”

Vs. 2 According to passages in the gospels like Matthew 5:10-12 Jesus made it plain that His calling upon His disciples was not to be a life of ease but a call to arms to join the battle. He told them that t***hey would win the battle by apparent defeat, by crucifixion they were to be crowned!*** Paul says that he would prefer to be meek except towards those who are endangering the sheep, to those false teacher he intended to employ all the mighty weapons of warfare in God’s arsenal for the pulling down of every stronghold that exalts its self against the knowledge of God. He would keep at it he says in verse 5 until “*every thought would be brought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus.*”

 Just what are these weapons that Paul is saying is at the believer’s disposal? **How**, **when** and to **whom** do we employ them? These are the questions that Paul will explain to us in these three chapters. First we need to understand what today are the “*strongholds, arguments, every high thing that exalts its self*”? Perhaps you have noticed that God’s Church is under siege with an on slot of world view arguments directly opposed to the truth in the Bible. Some of these are in the arena of “*human sexuality*” as the world is trying to convince us that immorality should not only be accepted it must be protected with rights that will cause the majority to be forced into not only accepting the “*life style*” but to comply with employment standards as a civil rights issue. If we in the Church rise up in descent we are attacked as uneducated bigots. These arguments will affect not only employment in our Churches they will affect us with regards to public bathrooms no longer being “*gender sensitive*” which will mean that men will be able to go into women’s bathrooms and vice-versa because they were inwardly “*born that way*”. There are those; “*Shepherds*, that are embracing this argument that exalts its self. Some have not only disregarded the clear teaching in God’s word on this matter they have taken it even further by ordaining into the ministry those who are actively practicing this immorality.

We have Marxism masquerading as compassion that is being shoved down our throats at our public educational intuitions as people are “occupying” while our political leaders are engaged in “*Class Warfare*” and “*Income Redistribution*”. What fascinates me is that those that are the most boisterous are the extreme liberal wealthy entertainment industry. This causes me to believe that they are either ignorant of the message they espouse or like in the history of other socialistic nations in on the fix where their wealth won’t be a part of what is “*redistributed*”! To this many “Shepherds” are in agreement with their ideology even proclaiming that the Jesus and Church taught this philosophy.

We have legalization of drugs getting yet another generation “*turned on and tuned out*” at $350 or better an ounce without any way except illegal means to be able to get the “*med’s*” to numb and dumb the pain of the hang-nail aliment that maligns them. And again many “Shepherds” who are outraged at “tobacco” and the effects it can have on those who partake seem to be unaware that the drug they want to legalize has a greater amount of cancer causing ingredients then does the tobacco they despise.

The sexual revolution of the 60’s has evolved into enslaving many to pornographers, pedophiles and predators with the worldly solution of termination of the innocent through what they tout as “*Planned Parenthood*”, which is anything but **planned** or **parenthood**. And to this so called “Shepherds” endorse the solution instead of addressing the problem. These are just a few of the issues that affect us today. How can we “*speak the truth in love*”, (Ephes. 4:15) on this and many other issues? It seems that looking out at the Church we have either “spoke the ***TRUTH***” or acted in what some consider being in “***LOVE***” but not both.

 To further understand what faces us we see that the battle is in the individual thought life. We must understand that such a fight is a fight of two opposing ideologies and that only the believer in Christ is equipped for the fight. Friends at the conception of Christianity unlike any other religion self sacrifice was the banner of victory and love! Time today does not permit me to address our spiritual weaponry nor the effectiveness of the weapons towards these strongholds but we shall take up this next week.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 10:3-6**

**“*The world verses the word*”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 3-4a Our Weapons**

**III. Vs. 4b-6 Their Aim**

**I. Intro.**

After last week’s message on false teaching and infiltrating the world’s views into the Church I had many comments most of which was thanking me on being bold enough to teach the truth. That got me to thinking what if while I was away a teacher came in and taught you all that I was a religious phony, that I had been teaching you false doctrine for the past 6 years, introducing unbiblical ideas into your mind, teaching things only to line my own pockets. What would your response be? If you were anything like the Corinthian believers you would have responded one of three ways:

1. Some would say, “*I knew it all along! I had a feeling about that guy from California.*”
2. Others would say, “*Now hold on there a minute, let's give him a chance, he has helped me out and I like him*.”
3. My prayer is that most if not all of you would say, “*Really well let’s check out the Word of God and see if what he has been teaching us the last 6 years is true or what you have been telling me the last 45 minutes is true*.”

This is exactly what had happened to the Apostle Paul and the reason for the writing of this 2nd letter the Corinthian’s.

**II. Vs. 3-4a Our Weapons**

Vs. 3-4 Kenneth Wuest in his “*expanded translations*” renders verse 3 similar to the NIV saying, “*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does*.” Dr. Tackett speaks in the Truth Project regularly talks about the war between the “world view” and the Biblical View. *The world view has been developed by a lot of self-centered individuals in an attempt to work together to govern a fleshly society apart from God*.

 First we need to ask: “*What are the weapons the world uses to solve the problems in society*?” Looking out we can see things employed like: **Corrosion, manipulation, Media pressure, compromises, demonstrations, and strikes**. All these are used in an attempt ***to pressure people into doing what others want***. Those who are governed by the flesh employ fleshly weapons to get things done. Yet history tells us that in spite of these worldly techniques they have not succeeded. Even though the media is biased, the educational institutions are heavily slanted the enemy has not been able to win the war, they have only been able to lengthen the battle.

Ah but Paul makes it clear that these are not the things that Christians need to use our weapons, are mighty and powerful, they able to bring about lasting change. They will destroy strongholds of evil. Notice that in this passage that Paul doesn’t list “*What these weapons are*” he assumed that his readers would know exactly what he was referring to. It is only when you read the Bible that you see a pattern for these “*spiritual weapons*” that are mighty against these forces of darkness.

1. ***The Bible***: We Christians have a unique insight into life and reality that others do not have. We know what is behind the forces at work in our society today, as Paul put it in Ephesians 6:12, “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood*...” **Our problem is not people**, it’s “*principalities, powers and wicked spirits in high places, the world rulers of this present darkness*...” We wrestle with spiritual powers behind the scenes. The wonderful thing about the Word of God is that when you read it empowered by the Holy Spirit, you are looking at life the way it really is. In Ephes. 4:20-24 Paul writes “*But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*” In the Bible we can have our minds “*renewed by the Spirit*”, and we will be able to see this as we won’t be acting like the people of the world. Jesus described Himself as the Way the Truth and the Life and we need to activate the truth the way Jesus did in love. Treating people tenderly, even though we oppose the convictions that they are trying impose upon us. Truth is on our side but it will take love to activate it into hearts and lives.
2. ***Faith***: The faith that I’m talking about as a spiritual weapon is the understanding that **God is at work in the present as He was in history**. Jesus has not left us alone to stumble on our own way; God is at work! Jesus still is the only One that “*opens and no man shuts. He shuts and no man opens...*” (Revelation 3:7 RSV). We expect Him to do something! He will use us common ordinary people to change the course of history through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. ***Prayer***: The power of prayer is everywhere in Scripture. We are constantly exhorted to expose the situations in which we find ourselves prayer, both individually and corporately, praying together that God would move in and change things. Most often I find the longer I’m a believer that my prayers are changing me! Reading through our bible reveals that events and lives have been forever altered by Christians who pray.
4. ***Faithful service***: Scripture says, “*Do good to those who hate you; pray for those who despitefully use you...*” (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28). Galatians 6:9 tell us to “*not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*” This is something that each of us can do. Recently at our Monday night men’s group I encouraged a couple of brothers to take to difficult folks out to lunch with no other purpose then to be a blessing and I can’t wait to see how God will use it. Returning good for evil is a powerful weapon we can employ that the world never does.

**III. Vs. 4b-6 Their Aim**

Finally let’s look at what these spiritual weapons will do:

1. Vs. 4b They will pull down “***strongholds***”: Paul uses a word that is taken out of the time period and the military and is used only here. It describes a castle with moats, walls, turrets and towers. Many times a castle could hold out for weeks, months and years against an attacking force (Masada Rome’s legion). This word very accurately describes some of the evils we have talked about but here we see that these opposing obstacles don’t stand a chance against the “*weapons of our warfare*”. As impressive as these manmade “*strongholds*” of the world are in Rev. 19:15 we are told of Jesus that “*out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*.”
2. Vs. 5 They cast down “***arguments***”: The word *argument literally means* “*reasoning*”. The idea is ***to rationalize things to support and defend error***. Have you ever noticed that people use this when they are confronted about some worldly view? By doing this they hope to divert the attention away from the real issue by side tracking the conversation. “*Don't all people have a right to love? To not allow some to have that right in their lifestyle is narrow-minded and bigoted*.” I’ll answer it this way: Yes and in fact we are commanded to do so but the bible talks about three primary ways in which we are to love. Friendship, intimacy and Godly. Why is it that the interest is only in the one area that obviously biologically doesn’t work? But the spiritual weapons that God has given us enable us to cast down such arguments. In John 4 Jesus used this spiritual weapon in dealing with the women at the well who was attempt to change the subject when she said to Jesus, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is where one ought to worship.” Jesus said, “*God is Spirit, and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.*”
3. Vs. 5b ***Every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God***: Paul just blazes a broad trail with this phrase which can be specific to some ones personal worldly view to something as generic as evolution or humanism. The common denominator in all of them is the reliance of self and the denial of God. Boiled down they are arrogant and emphasize the ability of man far beyond reality. Again the weapons of our warfare just make more sense than does the world views.
4. Vs. 5c The final thing Paul mentions here is a very personal as we see that the battle is really in the thought life as Paul says we must “***bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ***”: The word Paul uses is a word that deals with the imaginings of our minds. These are the things that we allow to fantasize and daydream about. Power, accomplishment, lust all of which we attempt to satisfy inward desires. Friends, ***we will not win the battle as long as we indulge these fantasies***. That is why Paul says we must bring these things captive unto Christ, and no longer permit them to engage our minds and hearts. These are conquered by truth, by love, by faith, by righteousness, by prayer and service. These are the weapons of our warfare.

Vs. 6 Once these things are no longer permitted to govern our lives we must be quick to deal with not allowing them to return. Many people struggle for years against because they are trying to stop the act, not the inward thought that precipitates it. The battleground is our thought life, Paul says. It is up to us in the church to appropriate the spiritual weapons at our disposal. If try to use the worldly approaches to legislate our lives then we will be defeated. The cause is not hopeless and we are not helpless. Let’s begin with the truth contained in the Word of God appropriated by faith and prayer applied by faithful service in love and we will see the stronghold crumble in our life and in the world we live.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 10:7-18**

**“God authenticated”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 7-11 Three marks of ministry**

**III. Vs. 12-18 Four marks to tell who’s in charge**

**I. Intro.**

Corinth by A.D. 56 had become a Greco-Roman boom town and was the entertainment and culture capital of the known world. The sad consequences was that it made the newly formed Church susceptible to false teaching that centered upon the assumption that we could have all the future benefits promised to us at Christ’s return now! If this sounds familiar you may recognize it by its modern equivalent known as the prosperity movement! The popularity of this movement cannot be denied and is visible in television pastor Joel Osteen number 1 New York Times best seller called “Your Best Life Now”. This kind of philosophy permeates the Church today as we see the dangers of enfolding the present values of society into the Church. In Paul writing to these Christians in Corinth he does so because a small group of men had come down from Jerusalem and were charging the apostle with five things that we can derive from his replies:

* They were claiming that he was a self-appointed apostle.
* They claimed that, because he was not one of the original twelve that his whole story about having encountered Christ on the Damascus Road was made up.
* They were suggesting that his teachings were not in line with the other apostles therefore he was not to be believed.
* They said that he was a moral coward in that he could write powerful letters to scare them, but that when he came in person he was as meek as a lamb.
* They said that the kind of freedom he taught would set Christians free from any obligation to keep rules or guidelines to behavior.

To boasters these claims this small band was quick to point out that this could be substantiated by the fact that Paul had to work making tents because no one wanted to support him financially. That argument had been quite successful in Corinth despite the fact that Paul had founded the Church and had labored their 18 months. The observation with regards to Paul’s work was correct but their conclusions were false. Often today folks well use the opposite observations to determine the health and viability of a church or ministry as they count nickels and noses.

 To counter these false but affective views Paul paints a portrait of what a true servant should look like. This snap-shot is what every ministry or minister ought to be measured against to determine what are truly ***God-authenticated*** as well as the ***marks of a counterfeit***. In verses 3-6 we saw the spiritual weapons we are to employ here in this section we see the credentials that are required in order to use these weapons in a right way.

**II. Vs. 7-11 Three marks of ministry**

Vs. 7-11 One of the greatest needs in the body of Christ today is what Luke described in Acts 17:11 of the Bereans and how they “*were of more noble character*…” “*for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*” Far too many people in the Church are more impressed with the performance than they are the content of the message and I believe that the Church could use a good dose of spiritual skepticism. Paul’s admonishment; “*Don’t look at things according to outward appearances*!” Paul moves on to give **three authenticating marks of Christian Ministry**.

1. Vs. 7b **He must belong to Christ**: Now you may be thinking that’s rather obvious but Paul say’s “*If anyone is convinced in himself that he is* ***Christ’s****…just as he is* ***Christ’s*** *even so we are* ***Christ’s***”. The point Paul is making that you can’t be a servant for Jesus if you don’t talk about Jesus! There are teachers that set aside the ministry and the work of Jesus. They may talk about “God” but they don’t talk about Jesus and what He has done. Paul placed his authenticity upon his own relationship with Jesus in saying that he was “in Christ”.
2. Vs. 8-11 **Look at the visible results**: Paul says, “*Even if I boast about* ***our authority****, which* ***the Lord gave us****…I shall not be ashamed*”. How can we tell if some ones authority is from the Lord ot not? Paul tells us that it ought to visible as something that the Lord gave. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20 “*By their fruits you will know them*”. When you observe the lives of those that listen to their teaching are they becoming more like Jesus? Are they dying to self centeredness? Are they being set free? Are they growing into wholesome, happy, loving people? Paul invited an investigation into what he taught by an examination of the people who heard his teaching. He had already written them in 1 Cor. 11:1saying, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*” In verse 9-11 Paul explains what he meant by authority which had nothing to do with telling folks what to do. His authority wasn’t for tearing people down it was for building them up. That’s what you watch for in the ministry of any spiritual leader, “*What’s happening to the people who are listening to him? Are they being set free or are they being destroyed*?”

**III. Vs. 12-18 Four marks to tell who’s in charge**

1. Vs. 12-18 **Examine who is in charge**: The paragraph is summarized by a little phrase in verse 13, “***within the limits of the sphere which God has appointed us****.*” Jesus said in John 15:16 “*You did not choose Me, but I chose and appointed you*.” If Jesus is in charge than the person in leadership won’t have an agenda other than Christ’s. He won’t be looking for bigger and better things to climb the latter of success, trying to make a name for himself. There are **four marks to tell who is in charge of a ministry that is authenticated by God**:
2. Vs. 12: **It is not a self-commending or boastful**: There is a lot of boasting about what individuals are doing for Christ and it appears by the amount of promotional literature that I get that Jesus is awful fortunate that He decided to team up with some of these folks otherwise His work of transformation would have never gotten off the ground. Right under their smiling full-color photograph is all the accomplishments with wonderful adjective such as “*dynamic, international, world renowned etc*.” In contrast to this Paul says he would not “*dare to compare himself with those who commend themselves*.” “*But they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves*.” To which Paul adds a bit of a commentary on their behavior by saying they “*are not wise*”! This is a mark that a person has not understood that their ministry is given to them by God, and it’s only God's commendation that counts. “*There are no great preachers. There is only a great God.*”
3. Vs. 13 **It goes where Jesus guides**: By this I mean to say that it is not by nature seeking notoriety. Trace Paul’s steps in the book of Acts and you will see that he only went where God opened the door and was not on a mission to world fame! There are some in the ministry that treat it like they are acquiring companies and as soon as they get a good following they have to do another “*Satellite Church*” with a T.V. feed of them preaching a few miles away. I wonder where the making of disciples is that Jesus said we were to be engaged in. Recently we decided not to air a “live feed” of a well known evangelist who wanted us to air his stadium crusade and instead are encouraging you to reach out to your friends and family and not bring them to “church” but rather to bring them to Christ instead! I’ve served on some of these crusade events in California and over saw the budgets just to reach out to the community and it was in the 100’s of thousands of dollars. Many wouldn’t come to the area unless there was a guarantee that a certain dollar amount had been reached. Compare that to where Jesus and his disciples went and you will see that they went to a woman at the well and an Ethiopian eunuch in the wilderness!
4. Vs. 15-16 **Its concern is reaching the unchurched**: Simply put it will mimic Jesus passion to reach those who aren’t enjoying the blessings of fellowship with Him. Most of what passes as “Church Growth” today is nothing more than sheep changing pastures. What is more disturbing is that the individual fellowships market their ministry to do just that. Paul makes it clear in verse 15 saying, “*Nor do we claim credit for the work someone else has done. Instead, we hope that your faith will grow and that our work among you will be greatly enlarged*.” What Paul was saying was that his investment had been in them to do the work not in doing what those who were accusing him had done just take credit for the work Paul had done while in Corinth. The mark of an authentic ministry is, it is always reaching out.
5. Vs. 17-18. **Its boast is only in what God is doing**: That wipes out all the proud evaluations some ministers make of their own ministries. You never hear that from Paul. In the very next section he is distressed that he has to talk about what God has done through him. The only reason he does is because of the argument that that small band of false teachers had been feeding the Corinthians believers. The only thing that counts is what Christ does in us, not what we do for Christ. It is not what I do for him that makes any difference. I can do things that are a complete waste of time in God's estimation. What is never a waste of time is what God does in me and through me. The true evaluation of a ministry is to look back and say, “*Thank God that happened, though I didn’t see it at the time His work in me and through me transformed not only me but those around me*.”

How do we spot the phonies? They will be the opposite of these **authenticating marks of Christian Ministry.** They will be impressed with themselves, boasting of their accomplishments. Oh they won’t do it themselves they will let others do it for speak for them. They won’t be interested in furthering God’s kingdom as they are too busy building their own! Most of all, it will appear as though God is lucky to have them on his side. That is the mark of a counterfeit minister or ministry. I’m not saying they are necessarily a counterfeit Christian, but they are most certainly a counterfeit ministry. Now this passage isn’t just so you can evaluate others it’s so you can judge your own ministry in the light of this.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 11:1-15**

**“If I were the Devil”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-3 Jealous FOR you**

**III. Vs. 4-15 A true Pastor’s heart**

**I. Intro.**

In human warfare one of the most successful attacks against a nation or country is infiltration. We can affectively arm against the threats from the outside by counter measures but how can we effectively defeat an enemy we believe is one of us and on our side? You can drive around any city in America and see multiple Churches and come to the conclusion that we are a “Christian Nation” but is the number of buildings in any given city an accurate determination of the state of the Church in the nation? In 1964 Paul Harvey originally published an article called “***If I were the devil***” years later in 1999 it was altered by others to include undated events. Here is what Paul Harvey originally wrote in 1964 48 years ago:

“If I were the devil, if I were the prince of darkness I would want to engulf the whole earth in darkness. I’d have a third of its real estate and four-fifths of its population, but I would not happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree. So I should set about however necessary, to take over the United States. I would begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve, “Do as you please.” To the young I would whisper “The Bible is a myth.” I would convince them that “man created God”, instead of the other way around. I would confide that “what is bad is good and what is good is square.” In the ears of the young married I would whisper that work is debasing, that cocktail parties are good for you. I would caution them not to be “extreme” in religion, in patriotism, in moral conduct. And to the old I would teach to pray – to say after me- “Our father which are in Washington.” Then I’d get organized. I’d educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting so that anything else would appear dull, uninteresting. I’d threaten TV with dirtier movies, or vice-versa. I’d infiltrate unions and urge more loafing, less work. Idle hands usually work for me. I’d peddle narcotics to whom I could, I’d sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction, I’d tranquilize the rest with pills. If I were the devil, I would encourage the schools to refine young intellects, but to neglect to discipline emotions; let those run wild. I’d designate an atheist to front for me before the highest courts and I’d get preachers to say, “She’s right.” With flattery and promise of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favor of pornography. Thus I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the House of Congress. Then in his own churches I’d substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan I’d make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were the devil I’d take from those who have and give to those who wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. Then my police state would force everybody back to work. Then I would separate families, putting children in uniform, women in coal mines and objectors in slave-labor camps. If I were Satan I’d just keep doing what I’m doing and the whole world would go to hell as sure as the Devil.”

Reading Paul Harvey’s article 48 years later is pretty eye opening as it seems Satan has done just this by adopting the method, “*If you can’t beat them, join them*!” The satanic process of infiltration is gradual and evasive slowly deviating from the gospel. Here in the 11th chapter Paul writes about a strange tactic to counteract this threat to the church at Corinth.

**II. Vs. 1-3 Jealous FOR you**

Vs. 1-3 Rather remarkable is that Paul mentions in reference to a tactic against satan infiltration into God’s church is “***Jealousy***”. It is important to define the meaning of this world as it relates to the context in which Paul is using it when compared with our normal comprehension of the word. **God’s jealousy is NOT a human jealousy OF people but rather a holy jealousy FOR people!** God, like parents, is fearful that his people would set their affections on some alien thing or some other master that would destroy them.

1. **Jealousy in the world**: False jealousy is **always selfish**; it is concerned about our feelings. It **is possessive**; it wants to control another person. It is dominating, cruel and tyrannical. It usurps the rights of others and insists on its own way. It imposes upon someone else whether they like it or not. Jealousy is one of the most destructive forces in the world today.
2. **Godly jealousy**: Arises from a deep passion for the welfare of another. It always manifests in tenderness and thoughtfulness about someone else. In Paul’s day it was the responsibility of the father of the bride to make sure that that his daughter was a virgin on her wedding day. So Paul uses this as a spiritual analogy that it was his responsibility to ensure the Corinthian believers remained spiritual untainted from the false teachers who were trying to take them away from the simplicity they had in Christ. Eve was not seduced to take a peek, puff or a pop she was seduced by the lie of the potential to become more spiritual. So to theses Corinthian saints as the false teachers were saying that there was a deeper truth, a greater knowledge a further experience they could have if they followed them. This is a rather startling analogy to use for these Corinthians as in 1 Corinthians 6:11a Paul tells us that they had come out of immorality.

But now Paul sees a threat to this transformation as he says in verse 3, “*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*” Literally this reads, “*from the simplicity and purity which is in Christ*.” Paul wasn’t willing to stand by and allow false teachers to come in a steal the simplicity that they had in Christ. Religion always wants to come in and make things more complicated than simple trusting in Jesus. When Christianity becomes complex it is a sign that it has departed from the simplicity in Christ to religion. Thomas 'a Kempis said, “*By two wings man is lifted from the things of earth -- simplicity and purity*.” Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: “*The fact is, that as we get further away from God life becomes more complicated and involved.*” Paul was jealous for them to maintain the simplicity of the relationship that they had in Christ. Karl Barth, that great theologian who wrote a study of the book of Romans which revolutionized theology a few decades ago, was once asked, “*What is the greatest theological thought that has ever crossed your mind*?” His answer was: “*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*” Here in Corinth the believers were being exposed to teachers who were causing them to move away from the simplicity of knowing Jesus.

**III. Vs. 4-15 A true Pastor’s heart**

Vs. 4-6 Notice how Paul puts it in verse 4 “*If you, without question, take all the false teaching these so called teachers are feeding you, how much more should you be listening to me? I have taught you the truth. You submitted to them, now submit to me.*” Paul uses gentle sarcasm appearing to agree with something some had said about him, but in an attitude that conveyed that he didn’t agree. Paul acknowledges that he wasn’t a trained professional speaker but he wasn’t going after “*style points*” he was after content. There are far too many today occupying pulpits that captivate their listeners with the way their words sound instead of transforming their lives by the power behind their words.

 The amazing thing is to consider Paul’s words in light of history as we have had 2 thousand years of examining the truth of what Paul wrote and there has not been one word that people have been able to add on to or subtract from! Even more amazing as Paul didn’t dodge the tough questions in life.

Vs. 7-12 In a further use of sarcasm Paul deals with the charge that he did not love the Corinthians enough to even let them support him. He had taught them the principle that he who preaches the gospel has a right to live by the gospel. It was Paul who taught them Deuteronomy 25:4 “*Do not muzzle the ox that treads the corn*”. Yet when he came to Corinth he would not accept any support from them and apparently his tent making business didn’t do all that well at times as he could barely make it as the churches in Macedonia stepped up to the plate and helped so he wouldn’t be a burdened to them. But instead of being humbled by Paul’s working and the poor Macedonian’s help the false teachers used this to support their view that Paul wasn’t anointed, didn’t graduate from the right school. But Paul tells, them the real reason he did this in verses 7-8 is that he wanted to demonstrate to these wealthy Corinthian’s that “*the Gospel of God is free of charge*”. “*God does not ask anything back from you; He offers it freely in Christ*”, Paul says.

Vs. 13-15 Paul goes on to say that he had no intention change his practice of not accepting payment from those that he was reaching with the truth as he didn’t want to be like parasite false teachers that weren’t teaching the truth instead they were just living off the people. Paul exposes these false teachers calling them phonies and impostors, masquerading as apostles of Christ but they were not sent by Christ and they're not teaching what Jesus taught. Paul says that these people are like their invisible master, Satan. The devil doesn’t come into human lives and say, “*Good morning, I'm the devil. I've come to ruin your life. I want to trip you up and destroy all your relationships and fill you with hatred and violence and I'm going to start today*.” If he did you’d shut the door. Instead he puts on a disguise and says, “*Hey, I'm your friend. I've come to help you. I want to introduce you to something so wonderful, so exciting, so fulfilling that you can't afford to miss it*.” In C.S. Lewis’s 1942 classic “*The Screwtape Letters*” Screwtape gives council to Wormwood saying, “*Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one ----the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without turnings, without mile stones, without signposts*.” To many people today have enough of Christianity to prick and sting their conscience, but enough to make them forsake their sin or bend their wills in submission to God’s will and say “NO” to the thing wrong. D.A. Carson writes: “*We like to be told how special we are, how wise, how blessed….We like to have our Christianity shaped less by the cross than by triumphalism or rules or charismatic leaders or subjective experiences*.”

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 11:16-22**

**“Basket Cases for Christ”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 16-21 The Silence of self**

**III. Vs. 22 No human “*coat tails*”**

**I. Intro.**

Paul had been driven reluctantly to speaking about what the Lord had done through his ministry which 5 times in this section he refers to such talk as “***boasting***”. He follows up 6 times clarifying such “***boasting***” is “***foolishness***”. He will start out detailing his ancestry and upbringing in verse 22 then move to God’s work in his life to which he again says to speak of such things is to speak as a fool (verses 23-29). Finally, in verse 30-33 Paul speaks of the blessings and work of God as he boasts in his weakness and failures. The amazing part of this “***boasting of Paul***” is that even in his boasting he mentions items that few of us would consider worthy of bragging about things like:

* Stripes
* Prisons
* Deaths
* Beatings
* Shipwrecks
* Perils
* Weariness and toil
* Hunger and thirst
* Cold and nakedness

The fact that Paul didn’t bring up things like:

* The conversion of the Proconsul on Cyprus
* Or that the whole city in Antioch in Pisidia (modern day Turkey) came out to hear him preach and we are told that “*as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*”. So much so that the “*word of God was being spread throughout the whole region*”.
* In Lystra a crippled man was healed instantly and left such an impact that the folks in that area said of him that the “*gods have come down to us in the likeness of men*.”
* He doesn’t mention the conversion of the Philippian Jailer.
* Or the fact that at Thessalonica his adversaries said of his ministry that “*These who have turned the whole world upside down have come here too.*”
* Paul doesn’t even give a foot note to the unusual miracles done by his hands when sweatbands and work aprons which were swiped from him were being used to heal the diseased and demon possessed while at Ephesus.

**The conclusion we can draw in Paul’s boasting is that what he was most proud of wasn’t the work that God was doing THROUGH him it was in the work God had done IN him**! And yet even that was foolish to talk about. Why? Because Paul didn’t even want to talk about what the Lord had done in him, he only wanted to talk about the LORD!

 The sad reality is that many of the Corinthian believers had been swept away by a group of men claiming to be apostles of Christ who had come from Jerusalem, boasting about all their tremendous accomplishments for Christ. As a result, the Corinthian’s were in danger of following their false teachings rather than listening to the apostle who had won them to Christ and who had so faithfully taught them and prayed for them and loved them. Paul finally resorts to boasting, because it’s the only thing that will impress them, and win them back to the simplicity of the gospel.

**II. Vs. 16-21 The Silence of self**

Vs. 16-18 Notice verse 17 where Paul says, “*What I speak,* ***I speak not according to the Lord****, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting*.” Paul says, what I’m about to do is not right “*for a Christian to do*”. **Christians aren’t to brag about who they are, what they have done, where they have been, who they know and what their accomplishments are.** Some of the Corinthians had swallowed these false teachers' line and had put up with arrogance and insult from them without protest.

Vs. 19-21a **Any ministry that requires arrogance and bragging in order to get people’s attention is at best giving people the wrong focus for excitement**! I find that such ministries are very subtle in how they boast as they inter mix glorifying God with the worship of the ministry or the style in which God has worked. I recently sat through a study where the speaker made mention that he was surprised that he had been given the opportunity to speak and wondered if they had made a mistake in asking him. At first I thought that this was an admission of humility until he went onto say that because he thought that someone had made a mistake in asking him to preach he intended to preach like a man who stole a car (“*fast and reckless*”) before someone changed their mind, (*this by the way drew a loud laughter and applause*). I would have been far more impressed if he would have said after thinking that they may have made a mistake in asking him to preach that because of this he was going to drive the car like a man who had caused the death of a loved one in that very car, “*broken and unworthy*”. As exciting and entertaining as “*fast and reckless*” is to **watch** I would much prefer to **ride** with the “*broken and unworthy*”.

 That is the back drop of Paul’s boasting (which he still refers to as foolishness) but ***Paul’s boasting was on the “things that had caused him to be broken and unworthy”***. These Corinthian false teachers were using outward things as marks of success and credibility.

**III. Vs. 22 No human “*coat tails*”**

Vs. 21b-29 As we read 2nd Corinthians Paul is in Ephesus which means that he is only in the 19th chapter of the book of Acts, thus the events that surround him in the rest of Acts have not happened yet. But still reading these **23 accounts** of his life is beyond comprehension. Furthermore comparing the list that Paul puts forth here compared with the Acts account reveals that the book Acts only records 1/4th of what is recorded here. *What that says is that Paul suffered for more than what was recorded and Acts just skims the surface*. Such actions cause us to ponder what ought to be the truth for each of us concerning the lost: ***The desperate tides of the whole world’s anguish out to go through the single channels of our hearts***! Here Paul takes up **three things they were bragging about** “***ancestry, activity and anxiety***” and we will take up two of those next week:

1. Vs. 22 ***Ancestry***: “***Are they Hebrews***?” The first thing they were boasting about was their ***ancestry***. It is amazing how much stock people put upon the family they were blessed to be born into as if they had a choice. Others seem to think that because they can trace their linage to famous people that have left an impact, that somehow genetically those “*blessed jeans*” have been passed down. Consider Nathanael’s estimation of Jesus in John 1:46 where he said to Philip, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth*?” Paul admits that bragging upon ancestry is foolish and to show it so he says, “*If you think that those kinds of things are important, they say they are Hebrews related to the chosen nation speaking the native tongue, well, so do I. Are they from the chosen nation, so am I? Do they trace their roots back to Abraham and God’s covenant with him? Well, so do I*.” It’s clear that Paul no longer believes these things matter. In Matthew 3:9 during an exchange with the religious leaders who were thinking that their ancestry was what mattered the most Jesus said to them, “*do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*” ***There are some Christians who like to brag about their spiritual ancestry as they brag about what school they attended, church they went too or pastor they sat under.*** But these things have no value before the throne of God. **There are no human “*coat tails*” in the kingdom of God**. And when an individual drops these names, schools or places the only thing about the individual it reveals is their arrogance!

Next week we will conclude the 11th chapter but by way of application this morning allow me to make **two points**:

1. First to us servants, be that pastors or anyone else actively involved: It is an ongoing temptation to use one’s **position** and **gifts** to create a circle of admirers but these two things were not given to us for our own ego trip. They are not given to prop up our own need of being needed. They are given that we may lay down our life's to reach souls, lost, hurting and needy souls in the Church and outside of the Church. To do our calling the greatest thing the servant must have is brokenness and humility least what he endeavors to do FOR God becomes more about his fame. Remember the most efficient pitcher for the distribution of “*Living Water*” is the not the famous pitcher, the fancy pitcher, nor the fantastic pitcher; No it is the “***empty pitcher***” that is the most useful to the Master! Let us by way of the Holy Spirit pray to by empty of self and full of Him that He may pour us out upon whom He wishes!
2. Generally to all of us: When we consider the 23 things listed here of Paul’s sufferings we have to ask ourselves this single most important question; “*What would cause a person to suffer so much, for something that he didn’t personally benefit from?*” I suggest to you that Paul’s suffering speaks to three things that we must ask ourselves as Christ’s followers if we too understand:
3. **He had learned the value of a soul**: There are only two possibilities either the value of the lost is far greater than I realize or Paul was insane. Paul valued the lost soul more than anything in this life and in fact he valued souls more than his own life.
4. **He knew the power of the gospel**: Paul understood that what he had the privilege of proclaiming was not “A” message but “THE” message. Apart from the gospel mankind has no hope and the individual person has no hope. Paul knew there was no plan “B”, no short cut; the Word of the gospel is the only Word that can change a soul now and for eternity!
5. **He had experienced the victory of love**: Paul had already proclaimed in the 5th chapter what compelled him to keep going when he declared to the Corinthians that it was none other than “*the Love of Christ that constrained*” him. He understood the absolute certainty that the LOVE of Christ will have upon each and every soul that turns to and trusts in Jesus!

 2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 11:23-33**

**“Giving up on gifting”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 23-27 Activity**

**III. Vs. 28-29 Anxiety**

**IV. Vs. 30-33 Taken to the curb**

**I. Intro.**

Allen Redpath took the tile of his commentary on 2nd Corinthians from this very section titling the book “*Blessings out of Buffetings*”. But when you consider the Lords words to in Acts 9:16 to a reluctant Ananias whose house a blinded Saul landed when the Lord told Ananias: “*I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*” None of Paul’s experiences of suffering should have been a surprise to him. The conclusion we could come up when considering the success of the gospel in our lives is that the only thing necessary for us being useful in God’s work is our failure and suffering. Last week Paul spoke of the first of three things that the false teachers wrongly boasted about, “Ancestry”. Today we will take up the next two along with the secret of a successful servant.

**II. Vs. 23-27 Activity**

1. Vs. 23-27 ***Activity***: “***Are they ministers of Christ***?” The next thing that these false teachers were boasting in was their ***activity***. Notice, here that Paul explains what he had in mind in this verse when he says “***in labors***”. In that day “*labors*” didn’t always mean a larger church or greater numbers of “*decisions for Christ*”. It often meant more stripes, more time behind bars and more difficult situations to endure. I can imaging these fellows getting together and taking off their shirts to count scars instead of talking about how many people filled the chairs in their churches or came forward at the invitation. And just like today numbers seem to matter as you would get an audience simply based upon the amount of time you were sent to jail or beaten for proclaiming Jesus. Oh today it’s different; you will get to speak before your peers when you have good enough numbers but they are counting different things. But if that was the case Paul said he had better stats and most didn’t know because he never talked about them. **Here foolishly he speaks of five of them**:
2. Vs. 24 Five times I received 40 stripes minus 1: This was purely a ***Jewish form of punishment***. The Law of Moses prescribed that for certain offenses you could be publicly whipped with forty lashes. But it also said that if more than forty were inflicted the man who did the whipping had to receive forty lashes himself. So to prevent that they were careful not to go quite to forty; they made it thirty-nine, “forty less one.” **FIVE TIMES**, Paul said his own people had applied the severe punishment of the Jewish law to his back and if you could see his back you would count 195 stripes. Yet other then this statement here these beatings are never mentioned.
3. Vs. 25a Three times I was beaten with rods: Now this was ***Roman punishment*** and even though Paul was a Roman citizen and as such it was against Roman law to beat a citizen with rods Paul had endured such a beating three times. Mobs would get so angry with him as he shared the love of Jesus that they would take matters into their own hand and lawlessly beat him. Amazingly there is only one record of Paul being beaten by rods in Acts 16:22 in Phillipi and we know nothing of the other two times.
4. Vs. 25b Once I was stoned: The stoning Paul is talking about here is not by drugs but by rocks. This is recorded for us in Acts 14:19-20 outside the city of Lystra. It was the ***most severe punishment in the Jewish law and would be the death penalty***, so Paul says that he literally was a “*dead man walking*”, and had it been an official punishment he would have been dead.
5. Vs. 25c Three times I was shipwrecked: There is an account of a shipwreck in Acts 27 but it happens 4 or 5 years later then this letter which means that Paul’s three shipwrecks aren’t recorded for us. I think after surviving three shipwrecks I’d stay out of boats, I don’t think I’d even take a bath even if you provided me water wings! Remarkably, this is the only place Paul mentions the other three ship wrecks and one of them caused him to spend a night and a day in the deep.
6. Vs. 26-27 In journeys, perils and toils: I read through this list and I ask myself what do I know of hard ship? What do I know of heartache and suffering in my activity for the gospel? As I reflect upon this personally I wonder how I’d respond to such things if required of the Lord for the blessed privilege of proclaiming the gospel. Would I willingly go through such hardship to proclaim Jesus’ love to a dying and desperate world? The second thing I wonder is if such “***activity***” was a sign of anointing and I was called upon to endure such things would I ***not*** speak of such “***activity***” so that I could proclaim God’s goodness and greatness instead of my own?

**III. Vs. 28-29 Anxiety**

1. Vs. 28-29 ***Anxiety***: “***My deep concern for all the churches***”: I’ve had the blessing of pastoring for just shy of 24 years and I have had the blessing to bear some of the burdens, the sorrows, the pain, the heartache and tears of many of those I’ve been called to serve. And I confess that I have not always done so very well and at times I have stumbled under the weight of human suffering. This makes me even more amazed at Paul who bore under the burdens of dozens of churches that he founded. He wept with those that wept and rejoiced with those that rejoiced. Heard their needs and prayed for them daily. What a tremendous ministry of mercy Paul had! What empathy he showed what care he demonstrated! As you read a list like this you wonder: “*Why would anyone put up with this kind of life*?” Paul put himself through a gauntlet of personal agony because of his love for God’s people. Why? Well he answered why back in 2 Corinthians 5:14a where he wrote “*the love of Christ constrains me*”. It was his sense of gratitude to the risen Lord who not only had forgiven him and filled him and restored him but who went with him into these trials and sustained him in every one of them, turning them into experiences of joy rather than hardship. That love flowed through Paul to reach out to those around to whom he was ministering.

The point of Paul bringing this out is to remind them not of his works but to remind them of his love as he had done all of this out of love for Jesus and them.

**IV. Vs. 30-33 Taken to the curb**

Vs. 30-33 Now, he turns to ***the things that a Christian can truly boast about***. We are not to boast about what we have accomplished, or even how much we have had to bear for Christ's sake, but there are some things we can boast of. In doing so Paul looks back at 20 years and says, “*If I must boast, this is the kind of thing I am going to boast of, the things that show my weakness*.” “*I’m going to speak on the things when I didn’t look so good, the pictures in my blooper reel*!” He then says in verse 31 that what he is about to share is the solemn truth. So what was Paul’s biggest blunder the biggest mistake that God used to turn his life around? Well it was the incident in Acts 9:23-25 when he was let down over the wall in Damascus in a basket to escape. **Listen up Christian**: ***Paul’s life changing moment didn’t come on the heels of his greatest accomplishment or success but upon his greatest failure and defeat***. He had been a believer some 4 years, studied at the ***Arabian Desert University*** and was now able to prove that Jesus is Lord not just proclaim Him as such. Paul had a new zeal and looking at his years under Israel’s famed Rabi Gamaliel he just knew that his gifting and callings made him a perfect fit to go to the Jews and reveal Jesus as Messiah to them. He had all the qualifications, he lists them in Philip. 3:4-6 saying, “*though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*.” Yet in spite of all these things he just seemed to fall on his face. It all culminated one night in Damascus when the governor, at the instigation of the Jews tried to find him in order that they might seize him and put him to death. On hearing this, his friends took him out to one of the houses built on the wall of Damascus, and through a window in the dark of the night they let him down in a basket.

A few weeks back I told you about what that meant. You see in that time they didn’t have toilets and garbage trucks and this is how they disposed of unwanted waste. So when Paul says that, “***This night he became a basket case***” in today’s terms this was the night that all he thought about himself and his gifting was “***flushed down the toilet***”, “***taken to the curb***”. ***Amazingly Paul looks back and says that his greatest moment in his life after becoming a follower of Jesus was the day that all his plans and dreams of glory for Christ went down the toilet***! It wasn’t his natural gifts and talents, his experience and education that qualified him as a servant of Christ. Oh, that Christians everywhere today would understand this! We are elevating natural abilities, strong personalities, and speaking talents but that’s a bunch of stuff that belongs in a toilet Paul says. News flash Christian: ***God doesn’t need you and your talents and gifting even though He blessed you with it in the first place. He needs you broken and humble and out of the way so He can work***! Listen to Paul again in Philip. 3:7-10 “*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..*” In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said to His disciples “*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*” That is what Paul is talking about here the things that caused him to “*lose his life*” were the things that caused him to “*find what life was really all about*”. That is where we will pick this up next week in chapter 12 as Paul will speak of the things that will continually cause you to lose your life. Paul is giving us all the secret of being useful for the kingdom of God and it is not surprising to find out it is the very thing that Jesus taught His disciples: John 15:5 “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*.”

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 12:1-6**

**“Caught up into Paradise”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1 I had a dream**

**III. Vs. 2-4 Paradise**

**IV. Vs. 5-6 At home while away**

**I. Intro.**

The remarkable thing about Paul’s boasts (*which he willing admits is foolishness*) is that they are not in the things that most folks would brag about. There was:

* No mention of impressive degrees from prestigious schools.
* No mention of the long list of books and papers he has written.
* No mention of the numbers of people who have become followers of Jesus.
* No mention of famous folks he was associated with.
* No mention of the sizes of the churches he has pastured.

It was the contention of the false teachers in Corinth that the reason he didn’t speak of these things is because he didn’t have anything to brag about. But that is simply not the case! Instead what Paul boasts about is the things that caused him to become humble and broken: beatings, fastings, imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, dangers from every side. He then included the one event that caused him to see ministry from a completely different view; when all that he had dreamed about all of his accomplishments, education and experiences that he had thought made him successful was flushed down the toilet, kicked to the curb. I believe most Americans are suffering from an identity crisis that seems to be getting worse. I further believe that we Christians are not immune from this disease in fact we may be in some ways more susceptible in catching it. We long to find our identity in something other than Jesus; the church we attend, the denomination, the ministry we are involved in etc. It is time that we flush all that down the toilet like Paul had 20 years earlier in Damascus.

You would think that this would have settled the issue with these false teachers but Paul in chapter 12 describes a personal experience that finally sounds like something that others would see worth boasting about the time he was caught into Paradise and heard things that he declares is not lawful for a man on earth to speak about. Why does he mention this? Well the answer will be revealed in verses 7-10 as Paul speaks about a thorn in the flesh to buffet him from pride.

**II. Vs. 1 I had a dream**

Vs. 1 In Acts chapter 1 after the ascension of Jesus into heaven prior to Pentecost the Church faced its first crisis and it was of leadership, specifically who would fill the position vacated by Judas? As they gathered Peter outlined the necessary qualifications to be an apostle and in verse 22 Peters says that they from the “*beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection*.” I mention this to explain why Paul now felt it necessary to share this experience of being taken up into the third heaven. You see these false teachers knew Paul had come to Jesus after all these events so how could he be an apostle? So he starts this by saying in verse 1 “*It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord*:” Paul actually saw the risen Jesus therefore he was a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps you are thinking well didn’t Paul have that encounter with Jesus at his conversion of the way to Damascus? Nope, as we read that account in Acts 9 Paul only says that He “HEARD” the Lord not that he “SAW” the Lord. So the event Paul mentions here is the time he physically met the Lord and saw and heard from the Lord. We get a further clarification from Paul on this encounter in Galatians 1:12 where Paul says concerning the gospel he preached that; “*I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ*.” Then in Galatians 2:6 speaking of a meeting Paul had with the “Who’s Who” in Jerusalem, the leadership of the early Church (James the ½ brother of Jesus, Peter, John and others) Paul says, Galatians 2:6 “*But from those who seemed to be something--whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me*.”

**III. Vs. 2-4 Paradise**

Vs. 2-4 I call your attention to several things:

1. First Paul refers in verse 1 to “*vision****s*** *and revelation****s***” which is plural and means that Paul had more than one encounter with Jesus.
2. Second note that Paul in his humility is reluctant to say, “*Hey, I had many encounters with the risen Jesus*” instead he says, “*I know a man who 14 years ago… was caught up into the third heaven.*” So how do we know that Paul is making reference to himself? First we have statement in verse 6 where he says “*lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.*” Then in verse 7 he says that because of the “*abundance of revelations*” a thorn in the flesh was given to me.

So what do we know of this encounter? Well we know that it occurred 14 years earlier but we don’t know if he was taken up bodily or not and we don’t know what he heard or saw. Now if I was to write out a commentary on what Paul saw and heard 14 years ago it wouldn’t be worth the paper it was written on. It is interesting to me that he calls the location “*the third heaven*” and also calls it “*paradise*.” The word “*Paradise*” comes from a Persian word which means a “*walled garden*”. When a Persian King wished to bestow a special honor on someone dear to them, he made them a “***companion of the garden***” and gave them the exclusive right to walk in the royal gardens with him in close companionship. That is what Paul describes as the dwelling place of the Lord! The Jewish terminology of heaven was viewed three ways:

1. First is the atmosphere around the earth, the clouds, etc.
2. Then beyond that we here in Montana can see on a clear night a second heaven made up of the planets, moon, stars, and other galaxies.
3. Finally you have the third heaven the invisible realm where God's throne is, a place he calls Paradise. It’s the invisible dimension of life because we can’t see it for the most part unless God chooses to reveal it to us as in the case of the apostle John, Stephen at his stoning and Paul here just to name a few.

If you trace back the 14 year date from the date of the writing of this letter it makes this encounter somewhere around the time when he came out to Tarsus, back to Antioch (some ten years after his conversion). The other thing Paul tells us is that whether this was in his body our out of his body he wasn’t sure and if it was out of his body he didn’t miss it. When we are home with the Lord who cares about the old tent! Home is the place where you can relax, be at ease, kick off your shoes, stretch out and feel comfortable. That apparently is what being with the Lord is like. Perhaps this is the reason he gives this account in the third person, because it was almost like it happened to someone else as he was not aware of his body.

Another thing Paul tells us is that what he heard he could not tell us about. He must have heard things that contributed to his understanding of life and reality. But he could not describe these things in earthly words just like John and the Old Testament prophets who had visions of the Lord, visions of heaven, were never able to quite accurately describe what they saw. They had to put it in symbols using words prefaced with “LIKE”. The only commonality between all these visions of heaven is that not a single person could accurately put into human language what they witnessed. What this reveals to us in this realm is that when we are with the Lord our knowledge will be vastly increased. We will know of secrets we never dreamed existed, secrets that are so beyond us now they cannot be put into language.

**IV. Vs. 5-6 At home while away**

Vs. 5-6 But instead of boasting in this experience and using it to put those false teachers in place instead he says, “*If I bragged about this encounter even though it would be 100% true he wouldn’t want anyone to use it to get their eyes off of Jesus and on to him*.” Calvin wrote that such inexpressible things were given to Paul personally as he was a man who suffered enough to break a thousand hearts and needed to be strengthened thus he was given a greater view of glory in order to keep him a float through the beatings, imprisonments and shipwrecks of his ministry. The very fact that Paul for 14 years has never once mentioned this experience he had with the Lord tells us that such an experience despite its personal revelation and powerful encounter with the risen Jesus what he experienced had “*NO bearing or importance to the gospel*” else he clearly would have spoken of it every chance he got. Consider the amount of times Paul had shared his testimony of his conversion and how the Lord transformed on the road to Damascus, yet here in this amazing revelation Paul has never spoken of it until now 14 years later and that only to say that he won’t talk about it. Paul had learned that no matter how impressed folks would be of any person, talent or experience none of those things matter when compared with the person and work of Jesus. Paul is saying, “*I don’t want you to see me based upon what I experienced mystically but rather upon how I lived among you practically.*” What a lesson we can learn from our brother Paul who didn’t want to block anyone’s view of the most incredible person there has ever been, JESUS. Paul practiced “*invisibility*” so that all could see the “*Invisible God*” who alone is the only One worthy of following! Think of all the books there are out there in the Christian book stores about these experiences that of folks that went to heaven and came back writing about it. Then think of Paul who went to heaven and for 14 years has never mentioned once until he was forced to do so and then only to say he wasn’t going to talk about it. Why talk about heaven when you can talk about the one who created heaven?

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 12:7-10**

**“Splinters for saints”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 7 A thorn in the flesh**

**III. Vs. 8-9a A Spiritual Principal**

**IV. Vs. 9b-10 Pitching His tent among the weak**

**I. Intro.**

It will not be the revelation that caught Paul up that he will boast, but of the pain which brought him low, in the thorn that he will gladly speak. What we know of this “thorn” is limited but it appears that it was both debilitation and humiliating. What a remarkable rebuke to the false teachers who worshipped health and wealth and viewed affliction and weakness as an absence of God’s blessings. In God’s plan of redemption, there had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection). And this spiritual principal is true in our sanctification as well, we are told that “*His strength is made perfect in our weakness*”. The trouble with arrogant Christians is that they feel that Christ belongs to them rather then they belong to Christ. Remember Christian “Every kite must have a string attached and anchored upon the earth that it may not only enjoy the view of the heavens but the safety of the earth as well!”

**II. Vs. 7 A thorn in the flesh**

Vs. 7 Paul already told us what he would brag about in 11:30 when he said, “*If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.*” In fact the one thing that he did speak of concerning the revelation of Jesus when he was caught up into Paradise was that it brought with it an irritating agony in his life which he calls a “*thorn in the flesh*”. As you study this passage everybody seems to have an opinion with regards to just what this “*thorn in the flesh*” was:

* Some feel the thorn in Paul’s life was **bad eyesight**: They come to this conclusion because of two passages in Galatians. First in 4:15 Paul writes that the church there was willing to “*pluck out your own eyes and given them to me*.” Then in 6:11 Paul writes, “*You see with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand*.” I have little doubt that Paul had eye problems and perhaps one that not only bothered his sight but wasn’t very attractive for others as well. But I not certain that this is what Paul am referring too.
* Some feel that he had a **speech impediment**: Because he mentions having difficulty uttering things as he wanted to. I think that is a stretch.

Here is what we know:

1. **It was in the flesh**: As such it was most likely something physical as the word “thorn” can mean “*splinter, stake, or thorn*”, (many like to point out that it is the word used to describe the stake that holds up a Bedouin’s tent in a wind storm).
2. **It was continual**: The word buffet is a rare word and comes from a word that means a fist and in the Greek is in the continual which means a continual striking not just one punch.
3. **It came from a “messenger of Satan” but was allowed by the Lord**: Satan is the instrument the Lord used similar to the case of Job, when Satan has to appear before the Lord to get permission to afflict Job. Satan's purpose was to destroy and harass Paul, to make life miserable for him, but God's purpose was to strengthen him, to humble him and to keep him usable in his hands.
4. **It was seen as a gift**: In verse 7 Paul refers to it as a gift that caused God’s strength to be perfected.

**III. Vs. 8-9a A Spiritual Principal**

Vs. 8-9a Though we aren’t certain specifically what the “*thorn in the flesh*” was we do know Paul did not like it as he went to the Lord about it three times. The request of Paul was that this messenger of Satan with his thorn by removed for good. As earnest in his prayer as Paul was God had a better plan then removing the thorn as the thorn had a purpose that made it useful to the Master. Some of us are too busy telling God what He ought to do about our situation which in turn renders us incapable of hearing what He wants to do. It is because of this that we become certain that the only thing to do about our situation is to remove it altogether. The Lord did not say, “*My grace* ***will prove*** *to be sufficient*” or “*My grace* ***will be enough to get you through****.*” No the Lord told Paul, “*I allowed the pressure to be such on this thorn so that you will understand that each moment there is ample provision for your every need, because no matter the thorn God’s grace is able to exceed the need.*”

Paul’s **human weakness made the way for more of Christ’s power and grace**! There is a spiritual principal here that we need to get a grip on dear saints: “***The spiritual principal is that His strength is made perfect in our weakness***”! That is to say that **God’s power continually increases as our weakness grows**. That is as much a spiritual principal as gravity is in the natural realm, the “*Paradox of Power*”. So what do you think God will be doing with us based upon this spiritual reality of: “***Human weakness makes way for more of Christ’s power and grace***”? Well He will be involved in those things that cause us to realize we are weak! So let me ask you personally, “*What is it that makes you feel weak*?” If you are feeling weak that means that though you may be under attack you are also being led this way so that you will have far more of God’s strength and grace! Now the opposite of this spiritual principal is also true and that is: “***Human arrogance and pride makes for less or none of Christ’s power and grace***”. Listen carefully “***It is far more important to God to keep us humble than it is to keep us comfortable***”. God allows us to feel weak to keep us from that which would render us useless in the work of spreading his Kingdom. The most dangerous thing each of us faces daily is “*spiritual pride*”.

**IV. Vs. 9b-10 Pitching His tent among the weak**

Vs. 9b-10 Paul uses a very interesting phrase here in the later part of verse 9 where he writes “*that the power of Christ may rest upon me*” as it is the same word used in John 1:14 of Jesus that describes Exodus 40:34 of the tabernacle. In other words the all-powerful Jesus “*pitches His tent*” with His people in their weakness. We are often led to believe that God pitches His tent with the famous and powerful, those who are popular and are on center stage in life but not so. Jesus pitches His tent with the weak and unknown, the suffering shut-in, the anonymous, quiet servant! There is no virtue in suffering if it is for any other reason other than for “Christ’s sake”! There in Paul utters the “*Paradox of Power*” “*For when I am weak then I am strong*!”So Paul comes to two decisions based upon this “spiritual principal”:

1. Vs. 9b **First he would never permit himself to brag about what he was doing**: Mac Davis the country crooner once wrote the lyrics to the song: “***It’s Hard to be Humble***” writing, “***Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look in the mirror cause I get better looking each day. Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble but I’m doing the best that I can***.” If Paul found himself wanting to brag about something he was doing he would find some area of weakness and speak of that instead. Paul was going to take precautions so that he would not succumb to the temptation to be proud. Now he didn’t view this as other people’s responsibility to keep him there. Paul wasn’t looking for folks to put him down! In 1 Cor 15:31 Paul says “***I die daily***” he doesn’t say, “***You slay me***”! There are people who feel it’s their business in life to keep somebody humble by never encouraging them, never being nice because they are afraid it will “*go to their heads*”. You cannot keep somebody humble by putting them down it’s the responsibility of each individual to face this problem in their own life. Paul says, “*I'm going to remind myself of who I really am by boasting only in my weaknesses, my failures, the times when I don't do very well. That is what I want to boast about.*”
2. Vs. 10 **Second, Paul says whenever trouble comes, I’m not going to gripe, complain or feel sorry for myself**: Paul wanted to recognize that this “thorn” was the best thing for God to work in his life because, “***When I am weak, then I am strong***.” Dear ones when is the devil beaten in our lives? Well, based upon this “*spiritual truth*” **NOT** when we feel great and confident, when it looks like wonderful things are happening, and everything is going well. No, the devil is being defeated when we are under attack feeling weak and helpless. When we don’t know what to do; when in our weakness we come before the Lord and plead with him for strength to go on one more day, for grace to help us stand. Saint’s that’s when we are winning, that’s when the Kingdom of God is being spread.

In Chron. 26:16 we are told of Uzziah and his downfall as it reads “He became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.” Oh how many times this phrase has been repeated in mankind’s history. In every place there has been a thorn satan will seek to distort the reason for it as sure as the Lord will seek sanctify the reason for it. Henrietta Mears once said “*I believe my greatest spiritual asset throughout my entire life has been my failing sight, for it has kept me absolutely dependent upon God.*” God doesn’t need our perceived strengths, He wants our weaknesses, our sufferings, our inadequacies, our disabilities, our failures and fears. And if we will boast in those things His power will pitch it’s tent among us.

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10**

**D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness**

**2 Corinth. 12:11-13:4**

**“I do not seek yours, but you!”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 11-13 The way God works**

**III. Vs. 14-18 About others**

**IV. Vs. 19-13:1 Approved by God alone**

**V. Vs. 2-4 Trusting God’s power**

**I. Intro.**

Twice in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian’s he admonished them to “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*.” (4:16, 11:1). Mark Twain's once said, “*When I was a boy of fourteen I thought my father was the most ignorant man in the world, but when I was twenty-four I was amazed at how much the old man had learned in ten years.*” I think Paul could relate to that quote! He founded this church and as such was their spiritual father. He had stayed among them 18 months teaching them how to live as Christians. But, after he left, some false teachers with smooth words came in and these same believers began to see Paul as unimpressive. And because of what was at risk Paul was forced to stand up against them based upon who he was so they wouldn’t reject what he taught. Here in this section Paul gives four marks of a true apostle.

**II. Vs. 11-13 The way God works**

1. **Vs. 11-13 Not just what God did through Paul but the way in which God did it through Paul**:

Here in verse 12 Paul indicates that there were signs, marks of authentification that distinguished the true apostle from the false. Furthermore he says that they were visible while he was among them. Prior to saying that in verse 11 Paul says he was surprised by these Corinthian believers in that they didn’t defend him when the false teachers began to defame his character; after all they had been eyewitnesses of these marks in his life. Since they were so deceived by these false teachers Paul embarrassedly now has to defend himself for their benefit. Notice that Paul describes these marks or signs three ways:

1. ***Signs***: By the use of this word Paul is saying that these miraculous marks were meant to convey something more than just the miracle; they were symbolic and meant to signify something; represent something.
2. ***Wonders***: Second Paul says that these signs or marks were used to cause the person witnessing them to stand up and take notice.
3. **Mighty deeds**: Finally, the first thing noticed about these signs is that it was not a talent or ability of man that produced them. They were amazing demonstrations of the power of God.

What is amazing to me is that these signs that Paul brings up here that identify him as an apostle is not something that you don’t see him talking or writing about. In the 16th chapter of Mark Jesus said certain signs would follow those who believe: “*In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*.” Looking at that list and comparing it with the list recorded for us by Luke in Acts and you will soon discover that Paul has four out of five of these the only one missing “*if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them*”. Now if you again read verse 12 you see that Paul says that these signs “*were accomplished among you*”. These things weren’t miracles that they ***HEARD*** that God accomplished through Paul they were miracles that they **SAW** God accomplish through Paul! Yet I submit to you that more impressive then God at work through Paul was God at work in Paul. Simply put it wasn’t all about the miraculous works God did but the WAY they were done. Look carefully at verse 11 as Paul describes this in a paradoxical statement:

* First, he says “*for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles*”. Paul say’s, “*I am not inferior at all to these superlative apostles; I have everything they have and more*”.
* Next Paul says, “*though I am nothing*”. In one statement Paul says, “*I am the equal of anybody*” then in the very next sentence Paul declares that he is “*nothing*”.

This reveals that God worked through Paul in such a way that Paul remained invisible and God remained the center of attention. Paul was all about God and nothing about himself. This attitude is echoed in Paul’s words in Philip. 4:13 where he writes “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” The “*can do*” attitude was encompassed by “*Christ who strengthens me*”. The confidence was not upon relying upon self but surrendering everything to Christ! There is no limit to what God can and will do through any person who has surrendered all their time talent and treasure to the Lord so that He alone gets all the glory.

One of the ways you can test the false apostles of our day is to listen carefully to what they say about themselves. Do they claim anything is coming from them? Do they claim to be remarkable people of remarkable ability, or are they talking about the power coming from Christ? Paul adds in verse 13 “*Did you reject all this only because I failed to let you support me? I'm sorry I should have let you do that. Forgive me that wrong.*” That is a reference, to the fact that he supported himself when he was with them instead of living, off the fat of the congregation.

**III. Vs. 14-18 About others**

1. Vs. 14-18 **Not about self but about others**:

Paul’s readiness to come to them was not based upon his educational qualifications but because he was willing to spend and be continually spent on their behalf. How strange to fallen mankind is the Christian life that is selfless and sacrificial! Oswald Chambers wrote: “*Our interest in another is to be centered in what is Christ’s interest in them*.” The principle Paul states is giving of oneself in selfless love for others. He uses the analogy of a parent to their children as it is the responsibility of parents to provide for the children and not to expect the children, while they are children, to support their parents. One of the great marks of a true servant of Christ is that he gives himself without restraint to those to whom he is ministering. But like so many teenagers these Corinthian believers were not responding back in love to which Paul says he will continue to love sacrificially on their behalf. Years ago a story appeared of a mother who went down to breakfast and found a bill from her son lying beside her plate. It read:

Mowing the lawn -- $2.00
Drying the dishes -- $l.00
Raking leaves ------ $3.00
Cleaning garage --- $4.00
Total --------------- $10.00 owed

When the boy came home from school he found a bill lying beside his plate and it read:

Purchasing clothes --- nothing
Washing clothes--- nothing
Cooking meals --- nothing
Health Care -- nothing
Providing place to live -- nothing
Love, Mother

That was Paul’s parental attitude, as he didn’t expect or demand anything in return. It would have been nice if he got it back, but even if he didn’t it wasn’t going to stop him. That’s a true sign of a person called by God and one we can test ourselves with can’t we?

Vs. 16-18 Not only did they not treat Paul as he had treated them they went further and said that the only reason he treated them this was so that he could win their approval in order to take advantage of them in the future. I was having this conversation with a successful business man in our area who was talking about how he went about choosing those he would hire. He told me that as they applied for a position if all they were interested in was what the company offered in benefits, salary, vacation, health ins. Etc. that it was a clear sign that they were not the right candidate for the job. Paul had no concern for his salary, he wasn’t asking question with regards to his retirement or vacation time. His concern and only care with regards to others was to be a blessing because he had been so blessed by the Lord. In the 6th chapter of this letter Paul explained it this way in verse 10 *“…as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*” Dear ones I believe the “***entitlement mentality***” has permeated the Church as it has our society and people are more concerned about “*What the Church can do for me*” then “*What I can do for the kingdom of God*”. Jesus said in Luke 22:25-26 “*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.*”

**IV. Vs. 19-13:1 Approved by God alone**

1. Vs. 19-13:1 **Doesn’t look for affirmation from man**: A true servant of Christ does not need to justify himself before the people to whom he ministers. Paul was a God pleaser not man pleaser. And because of this Paul sates that he wasn’t afraid to do what was right even though it wasn’t popular. In verse 20 Paul makes a list of 8 things that William Barclay called the, “*marks of an unchristian church*.” One of the reasons why people have rejected Jesus is because of their experience in Church, we simply don’t live like our Lord told us too. Because Paul got his approval from God not from the church he was free to address the issues that needed to be corrected and in verse 21 he lists those as well and in this case they have sexual connotations’. Finally in 13:1 we note that Paul’s behavior was consistent with them something that a hireling may not be for fear of losing their job. And the reason why he was able to maintain this was because he answered to God not the Church, denomination, etc.

**V. Vs. 2-4 Trusting God’s power**

1. Vs. 2-4 **Trusts and rests upon the power of God working in life's**: Twice in verse 4 Paul mentions the “*power of God*” and by so doing he is assuring the fact that he is trusting that God will correct there behavior. Paul’s not afraid to address the 11 issues that he lists but he is trusting in the power of God to bring about the needed repentance. He is not saying, “Wait till your father gets home!” He is encouraging those actively involved in rebellion to get their hearts right before separation occurs. Effectiveness is the proof of reality! The health of a Church is not seen in the splendor of their buildings, the elaborateness of its worship, the wealth of its giving or the size of its congregation. Not it is seen only in changed lives, if there are no changed lives than the essential health of the Church is missing! That is the only thing Paul was to be judged upon as it related to his ministry and they were living proof of his effectiveness.

Allan Redpath said, “*God’s goal in your life is not only to get you living sacrificially with no other motive, no limit to your availability, no expectation of reward, but He waits for the day when He hears you say this very words of Paul to the Church in Corinth, “I do not seek yours, but you*!” (verse 14) We move from fans to followers when we are no longer looking only to get something from Jesus and instead are only wanting Jesus!

2 Corinthians

**“Winning Through Weakness”**

**IV. Closing: 13:11-14 Be Complete**

**2 Corinth. 13:5-14**

**“Now leaving Corinth; all aboard”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 5-6 Self examination**

**III. Vs. 7-10 Complete or incomplete?**

**IV. Vs. 11-14 Make up test**

**I. Intro.**

After many weeks going through the 13 chapters of 2nd Corinthians we finally come to the end of this letter. Culturally Corinth was similar to our American culture. They were affluent when compared to the rest of the known world, media and entertainment driven. And although a church had sprung up and numerically seemed to be doing very well it had some real problems. Looking at these two letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians it appears as it was far easier to get the Christians out of Corinth then it was to get Corinth out of some Christians. Have you noticed that church people can be like furniture in a Church: They have sat in a Church for years been used, heard the bible, experienced worship in fact they have been in church more hours than anyone else. Yet with that said those chairs may not be saved, you can’t save your seat folks, only people can be saved!

 As I read through Paul’s words I’m thankful that he never gave up on them as carnal and fleshly as they were, for three years he kept on trying to get them let go of the world and fully grasp Jesus. Is Christ in you? Paul asked. It’s not about being in Church, it’s not about being religious! It’s about a relationship with Jesus. It’s not a question of theology it’s a question of intimacy, knowing Jesus personally not just knowing about Him intellectually.

**II. Vs. 5-6 Self examination**

Vs. 5-6 The test is subjective as Paul allows the bar to be their own conscience which will either substantiate or disprove of the genuineness of their faith. An objective test of one’s faith by doctrinal agreement may stand the test of religion yet still fail the daily test of relationship. We are not saved by statement or creed. To use a doctrinal agreement as the basis of the test is to leave open the door to criticizing others while failing to examine myself. R Kent Hughes makes this observation: “*Today the warning stands over the church, and especially those who have transmitted the present cultural values into the church, so that church is little more than a Christianized version of modern culture. The warning stands where leadership is built on the cult of personality ----- where image is everything. The warning looms where worship is show time ----- where preaching is entertainment ----- where God’s Word is muzzled and the pulpit panders to itching ears. The warning echoes where we are the focus of worship ---- our feelings, our comfort, our health, our wealth ----- where super apostles are preferred over Paul.*”

 But Paul didn’t say “*examine others*” he said “*examine yourself*”! Would I pass the test as Paul before me who held onto a vision of paradise for 14 years seeing and hearing things that he no doubt didn’t even know were a mystery. Paul never published a book, or produced a video of that experience. Would I like Paul not mention the five things that Jesus said would authenticate apostolic ministry in Mark 16 even though they were clearly evident everywhere I went. Is what I would speak most about in my Christian experience be my biggest failure; the day when as a minister all I thought about how gifted, educated, and special I am was flushed down the toilet, kicked to the curb in Damascus. Would I like Paul commit to prayer for blessings to those false teachers who prayed for my failure? Oh how there is a constant need for each of us to go through personal examination to see if we are for real.

Through the years I’ve been asked countless times by sincere believers if they can “*habitually engage*” in some area of life style and still be a Christian. They should be asking, “***Can they have a healthy growing relationship with Jesus and continue to practice their sin***?” And the answer to that question is an emphatic **NO**! In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus declared “*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*!” There are some who truly have been born again and experienced change, but later on, began to drift back into old patterns that they once did then saw as wrong. When that happens, it raises the question, “*Does Jesus Christ dwell in me*?” Others who are watching us cannot answer that question. There are two questions we must ask ourself with regards to our sin and our faith:

1. ***How do you feel about this behavior? Are you glad to get back to it?*** ***Do you justify it?***
2. ***Do you hate yourself for doing it?***” ***Are you sorry you went back to it and long to be freed again by the power of Jesus Christ?***

How you answer those questions reveal to you whether you are a believer or a pretender! What value is there in a cheap kind of grace that makes me no different from the man I was before I knew Christ?

**III. Vs. 7-10 Complete or incomplete?**

Vs. 7-10 Paul would have been far happier with these who are following false teachers or those still actively practicing sin it they on their own repented from their sin before he comes. Dear ones the mark of maturity is not measured sully on the basis of not sinning it is measured upon us turning from that sin towards Christ. Paul was more interested in their moral improvement, not an opportunity to personally exhibit what a true apostle he is. So Paul reinstates that biblical authority is visible not in the destruction of people it is in the building up of people that sin has destroyed. Much of the New Testament is written around not taking our view of leadership from the world where those in charge lord over people reign as their superiors instead of serving the people and caring for them.

**IV. Vs. 11-14 Make up test**

Vs. 11 Paul give five brief admonishments with the focus of bringing unity to the believers in Corinth all with a promise:

1. **Farwell**: The word in the Greek is “*cheer*” some have rendered this greeting as “*good-by*”. Jewish scholars remind us that this parting salutation was what Rabbis would say to each other as they parted the temple on the Sabbath. Its meaning was “*May He that has caused His name to dwell in this house cause love, brotherhood, peace, and friendship to dwell among you*.” The idea here is that unity will only be possible when what unites us (the Lord) is larger than what divides us.
2. **Become Complete**: The word here has the meaning to “*put back or mend*”. Paul’s thought here seems to be saying “*aim at restoration*” pull yourselves together! It speaks of being flexible enough to bend one’s self in order to repair a break. Far too often when division has come the opposing parties wait till the other person does the mending. But I think that if I sow on my torn fabric and you sow on yours we will back together sooner.
3. **Be of good comfort**: The word comfort here is the same root word for the Holy Spirit as the comforter, which suggests that we need to be that which seeks out the person hurt. There is a need for those in the body to exercise tenderness where heart ache is present.
4. **Be of one mind**: This was not a call for harmony for the sake of harmony but rather it was **a call not to major in minors**. It is fine to have opinions and differences just don’t allow those things to separate what you have in common.
5. **Live in peace**: Such peace between people who differ requires work and determination. Peace is no passive word in fact there may be no word known to man that requires more effort to obtain and maintain then the word “peace”!

The promise is that “*The God of love and peace will be with you*.” The more we work on these five admonishments the more we will continue to experience God’s presence with His love and peace!

Vs. 14 The benediction is decidedly Trinitarian but the order is experiential:

1. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we come into contact first.
2. It is by way of the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are first made aware of the love of God.
3. And it through the communion of the Holy Spirit that we continue to grow in the above two.

What a gracious word from this great apostle as he closes this letter to the church at Corinth. History does not tell us what happened in the church there, whether it was able to recover and obey this word or not. But Paul has done his best. He has left with us a tremendous testimony as to what constitutes Christianity at work in a pagan world. I hope and pray that this letter to the Corinthian church will cause us to obey the word that Jesus Christ is among us and we must be His kind of people.