The Second Epistle of Paul to the CORINTHIANS

Opening Considerations

Greeting

1 [1]Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and brother Timothy,[1] to the church[2] of God that is in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia: [2]Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Sovereign[3] Jesus Christ.

Praise for deliverance

[3]All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion[4] and God of all encouragement, [4]who encourages us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in whatever affliction, by means of the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.[5] [5]Because just as the sufferings of the Christ flow over into us,[6] so also our encouraging overflows, through Christ. [6]Now then, if we are afflicted, it is for the sake of your encouragement (even deliverance), that is effective for enduring the same sufferings that we also are suffering [7](yes, our hope concerning you is steadfast);[7] if we are encouraged, it *also* is for the sake of your encouragement and deliverance, since we know that you will share in the encouragement just as you do in the sufferings.[8]

[8]And so, brothers, we do not want you to be in ignorance concerning the affliction that came upon us in Asia: we were under extreme pressure, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. [9]Yes, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, so that we

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[1] He acknowledges a junior partner.

[2] Since there were probably several local congregations meeting in homes in Corinth, not to mention "throughout Achaia", I have rendered "church". Note that Paul obviously intended that his letter should have a wide circulation. Rather than give up their copy, would not the congregation that received the 'original' set about making verified copies to distribute to other locales? (Such a procedure would give us the beginnings of a 'majority text' in that region from the start.)

[3] Where 'Lord' occurs without the definite article, as here, I usually render 'Sovereign'; with either 'the' or 'our' I usually render 'Lord'.

[4] Literally, 'the compassions' or 'the mercies'. I suppose the point to be that He is the Source of all genuine compassion (you won't get any from Satan).

[5] One important reason God sends suffering our way is so that we can help others later.

[6] We get our share of suffering, we participate in Christ's sufferings—Colossians 1:24 and 1 Peter 4:13. Evidently for God's Kingdom to increase among men, as we continue to undo Satan's works in the world, we have to suffer.

[7] I take it that he is affirming his confidence that they will not cave in under the suffering.

[8] We cannot stop people from going through their share of suffering, but we can encourage them.

not place confidence in ourselves, but in the God who raises the dead;[1] **10**He did deliver us from that deadly peril, and still delivers; in whom we trust that He will keep on delivering, **11**you also adding your cooperation in prayer,[2] on our behalf; that thanks may be given by many persons for the gift bestowed on us by means of many, on your behalf.[3]

A change of plans

12Now this is our boast: the testimony of our conscience that we have conducted ourselves in the world with openness and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and especially toward you. **13**For we do not write you any other things than what you can read and understand;[4] and I do hope that you will keep on understanding to the end **14**(as indeed some of you have acknowledged) that we are your boast, just as you are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.[5]

15It was in this confidence that I was planning to come by you first, **16**and by you to proceed into Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia (that you might benefit twice),[6] and then to be sent by you on my way to Judea.[7] **17**Now then, when I was deciding this, I was not acting frivolously, was I? Or the things I decide, do I decide according to the flesh, so that with me there would be both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"? **18**As God is faithful, our word to you was not "Yes" and "No",[8] **19**because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy[9]—was not "Yes" and "No". In fact, with Him it has *always* been "Yes", **20**because all the promises of God in Him are "Yes"; indeed, in Him they are "Amen", that there be glory to God through us.[10] **21**Now He who establishes us together with you into Christ, and who anointed[11] us, is God, **22**who also sealed us and gave us the down

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[1] If you look to the God who heals the sick, it is because you are sick; if you look to the God who raises the dead, it is because you are facing death. Paul evidently figured he had been pretty close.

[2] Prayer makes a difference.

[3] They will get a return on their 'investment', the time they spent in prayer. Some 25% of the Greek manuscripts have 'our behalf', as in most versions.

[4] I take it that Paul is saying that he never writes with the intention of obfuscating an issue. That would be a good example for everyone to follow.

[5] Paul seems to be speaking of a reciprocal boasting, and that before Christ's Judgment Seat! We probably all know a father and son who are proud of each other; the idea may be similar.

[6] The "benefit" is presumably spiritual; Paul seems to be saying that he imparts such benefit wherever he goes. I would like to be able to say the same thing.

[7] Here Paul is probably referring to financial help.

[8] Paul took a clear stand on things; he was not ambiguous.

[9] Paul gives credit to his associates.

[10] As we take advantage of the promises, God gets the glory. God's promises are positive, with the 'yes'.

[11] The anointing is in the past, but the establishing is an ongoing process—note that it is "into" Christ.

payment of the Spirit in our hearts.[1]

The change explained

23For my part, I call on God as witness, upon my soul, that it was to
spare you that I have not yet returned to Corinth. 24(Not that we have
control over your faith,[2] but we work with you for your joy, for it is by
faith that you stand firm.)

2 1Actually, I determined this within myself, that I would not come
again to you in sorrow. 2For if I make you sorrowful, then who will
make me glad, besides the one whom I made sorrowful? 3And I wrote
this very thing to you so as not to have sorrow from those who ought to
make me rejoice, when I come, having confidence in you all that my joy
is also yours.

About the first letter

4Now I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart, with
many tears, not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might
know the greatness of my love for you. 5So, if anyone has caused grief,
he has not so much grieved me as he has all of you, to some extent—not
to be too 'heavy'. 6This punishment that was inflicted by the majority[3] is
sufficient to such a one, 7so that now, on the other side, you should
forgive and comfort him, so that he not be overwhelmed by excessive
sorrow. 8Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.[4]

9Now I also wrote to this end: to put you to the test, to see whether
you are obedient in all things. 10If you forgive anyone, I do too; further,
if indeed I have forgiven anything to someone, I have done so for your
sakes in the presence of Christ,[5] 11so that we not be exploited by Satan;
for we are not ignorant of his intentions.[6]

An afterthought

12Also, upon arriving in Troas for the Gospel of Christ, a door having
been opened to me by Sovereign,[7] 13I had no rest in my spirit, because I
did not find Titus my brother; so taking leave of them I went on into
Macedonia.

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1 The Holy Spirit in us is like God's brand on us, but is also our guarantee that we have been regenerated. Verses 21-22 refer to all three persons of the Godhead.

2 This is an important point: in Matthew 23:8-10 the Lord Jesus forbids any attempt to dominate someone else's faith or conscience. As He said to the Samaritan woman, the Father wants worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)—the worship must not be faked, forced or controlled.

3 Note that it is not necessary for 'everyone' to be in agreement with disciplinary action.

4 The purpose of the discipline was to restore, not destroy.

5 An interesting concept: Paul does the forgiving 'in the presence of Christ'. He clearly believes that his forgiving, or otherwise, makes a difference. Well, he had ordered the disciplinary action, so it was appropriate for him to address the consequences.

6 Well, at least we shouldn't be, but how many Christians today really take the enemy seriously? Paul will refer to Satan by name several times.

7 If it was the Lord who opened the door, was that not indicative of His will? So did he move on against that will?

We have a glorious ministry

A fragrance of life

14Now thanks be to the God who always leads us in triumph in the Christ,[1] and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him[2] in every place. **15**Because we are the aroma of Christ for God, among those who are being saved and among those who are being wasted[3]—**16**to these a smell of death into death, while to those a fragrance of life into life[4]—and who is adequate for such things? **17**However, we are not like the rest[5] who retail[6] the word of God; rather, we speak in Christ, out of sincerity, as of God in His very presence.[7]

An aside

3 **1**(Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you,[8] or commendation from you? **2**You are our letter, inscribed on our hearts, known and read by all men; **3**you are manifestly a letter of Christ, mediated by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God,[9] not on stone tablets but on 'tablets' that are hearts of flesh.)

Competent ministers

4Now we have such confidence before God because of the Christ; **5**not that we are competent of ourselves to reckon anything as being from ourselves, but our competence is from God[10]—**6**indeed, He has made us

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1 The title 'Christ' is usually accompanied by the definite article, 'the Christ'—we are not to forget what the title really means.

2 The antecedent of the pronoun could be either the Father or the Son, but in this context most likely refers to the Son—getting to know Him is in view.

3 We are accustomed to 'perishing'. The verb here has a considerable semantic area and can be rendered—destroy, kill, deprive, void, lose, perish—depending on the context, but I believe the root idea is 'waste'. The only way to fulfill the purpose for which you were created, to realize your potential, is to turn your life over to Jesus. The alternative is to waste your life, both now and forever. Of course the enemy works to make people think the opposite.

4 The Gospel of Christ represents both life and death: if you receive it, you get life; if you reject it, you get death. Naturally, those in rebellion against God do not enjoy being reminded that they have chosen death.

5 The Greek manuscripts are about evenly divided between "the rest" and 'the many', but I follow the best line of transmission.

6 A retailer makes his living by buying goods wholesale and reselling them piecemeal, at a profit. In our day there is no lack of those who dole out their teaching, precisely with a view to getting more money out of it.

7 To be objectively aware that you are in God's presence does have a way of encouraging you to make the right choices!

8 Note that the early church used letters of introduction to help them in evaluating new arrivals.

9 In some sense all of us are 'letters' that those around us read. To the extent that we invest in others, build into their lives, we contribute to their 'letters'. Of course it is our lives that people see, not what is inscribed on the heart.

10 Competence is basic to everything that is done in this world; anything done by an incompetent will almost always be inferior. This is certainly true in the spiritual realm, where work done 'in the flesh' is poor work.

competent as ministers of a new covenant;[1] not of letter but of Spirit, because the letter kills, while the Spirit gives life.[2]

A greater glory

7Now if the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, came with glory—so that the children of Israel could not gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance (that was fading)—8how can the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, how much more glorious is the ministry of righteousness! 10Because what had glory could actually be said to be without glory, compared to the surpassing glory—11if what is being set aside had glory, that which is continuing is much more glorious.[3]

12Therefore, since we have such a hope, we use great boldness of speech—13**not** like Moses, who put a veil over his own face, so that the children of Israel would not observe the end of what was fading.[4] 14But, it was their minds that were closed, because to this day that very veil remains in place when the Old Testament is read, since only in Christ is it taken away. 15Yes, even to this day, when Moses is read a veil lies on their heart. 16However, whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is removed.[5] 17Now the Spirit is the Lord,[6] and where the Lord's Spirit is there is freedom.[7] 18So we all, contemplating as in a mirror the glory of the Lord with unveiled face,[8] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, precisely from Lord Spirit.[9]

But it isn't easy

4 1Therefore, since we have received mercy along with this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2Rather, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in deception nor falsifying the Word of God,[10] but by the open proclamation of the Truth[11] commending ourselves to every

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[1] Note that Paul is clearly aware that he is promoting a new covenant. The old covenant was characterized by "letter", while the new is characterized by "Spirit" (or "spirit").

[2] I have capitalized 'Spirit', but 'spirit' is also true. The 'spirit' of a message has to do with its purpose, which should take into consideration the local context.

[3] Paul is being emphatic about the superiority of the new covenant.

[4] At first he used the veil because the people found the shine to be disconcerting, but the shine faded, and he kept on using the veil so they couldn't see that it was gone. Any reflected light depends on the source, and constant exposure to that source.

[5] Any Jew can escape that veil—here is how.

[6] A clear statement that the Holy Spirit is God.

[7] "The Truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Several times the Lord Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Truth.

[8] Comparing this text with others like Psalm 1:2-3, James 1:22-25, 2:12, Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12, I conclude that the 'mirror' here refers to God's Word. As we spend time in the Word with "unveiled face" (sincerely open to what it says), the Holy Spirit moves us up from one plane of glory to another—the goal is "the same image".

[9] Had Paul been writing in Hebrew, I imagine we would have 'Jehovah-Spirit', or 'Jehovah the Spirit'. He here reinforces what he already said in verse 17—the Holy Spirit is part of the Triune God.

[10] Alas, there is no lack of those who deceive and falsify.

[11] The importance of this is enlarged upon in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

man's conscience, in the sight of God. 3So where our Gospel has actually been concealed, it has been hidden from those who are being wasted, 4among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving,[1] so that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them.

5Now we do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Sovereign,[2] and ourselves as your servants[3] for Jesus' sake; 6because the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness[4] is He who shined in our hearts to give the light that comes from the knowledge of the glory of

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[1] The Text clearly states that Satan, "the god of this age", is in the business of blinding the minds of unbelievers when they hear the Gospel, so they will not understand, so they will not be convicted, so they will not repent and convert. This is a terrible truth, the most terrible truth in the world, at least as I see it. The enemy has access to our minds, access in the sense that he has the power or ability to invade them, whether by introducing thoughts or by jamming our reasoning. The Lord Jesus had already declared this truth previously, when He explained the parable of the sower. "These are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown; but, as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away the word that was planted in their hearts" (Mark 4:15). In the parallel passage in Luke 8:12 Jesus adds the following words: "lest they believe and be saved." Note that the Word is already in the mind or heart of the person, but then Satan comes, invades the mind and "takes away" that word. I am not sure just how this intrusion by the enemy works, perhaps he causes a mental block of some sort, but the practical effect is that the Word becomes ineffective, as if the person had not even heard it.

The crucial question then becomes, what can we do about it? We find the answer in Mark 3:27. "No one can plunder the strong man's goods, invading his house, unless he first bind the strong man; then he may plunder his house." I have used the definite article with the first occurrence of 'strong man' because the Greek Text has it, the point being that this particular strong man has already been introduced in the immediate context. "The strong man" here is Satan. (The Jewish leaders tried to explain Jesus' authority over the demons by saying that He expelled them by the power of Beelzebul, prince of the demons. In His retort Jesus does not waste time with that name but uses the enemy's proper name, Satan.)

So then, the Lord Jesus declares that it is impossible to steal Satan's goods unless we bind him first. (From His use of "no one" it seems clear that the Lord is enunciating a general principle or truth.) And what might the nature of those 'goods' be? In the context (see Matthew 12:22-24) Jesus had delivered someone from a demon that caused blindness and dumbness, and in their comments the scribes and Pharisees include other instances where Jesus had expelled demons—it seems clear that the "goods" are people who are subject to Satan's power, in one way or another. Thus we have the same essential truth as that declared in Acts 26:18—we have to do something about Satan's power over a person so that he or she can be saved! So what can we do? Since the point of handcuffs is to keep someone from acting, I believe that in so many words, aloud or in thought, we must forbid Satan from interfering in the minds of our hearers, before we preach. For more on this subject the reader may consult my site: www.prunch.org.

[2] That is what the Text says; Christ Jesus must be proclaimed as Lord/Sovereign, nothing less.

[3] Literally, 'slaves'.

[4] See Genesis 1:3.

God in the face of Jesus Christ.[1] **7**Further, we have this treasure in jars of clay,[2] so that this all-surpassing power may be of God and not from ourselves[3]—**8**we are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9**persecuted, yet not abandoned; knocked down, but not out;[4] **10**always carrying about in the body the putting to death of the Lord[5] Jesus, so that also the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body.[6] **11**For we, the living, are always being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that also the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.[7] **12**So then, death is at work in us, but life in you.[8]

Momentary affliction; eternal glory

13Now since we have the same spirit of faith, just like it is written, "I believed; therefore I spoke,"[9] we also believe and therefore speak, **14**knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us through Jesus[10] and present us together with you. **15**So all this is for your benefit, so that the grace that has spread through the many may cause the thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.[11]

16Therefore we do not lose heart—even though our outer man is wasting away, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day—**17**because our light, momentary affliction is working out for us an eternal and limitless measure of glory,[12] **18**as we do not focus on the seen, but on the not seen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.[13]

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1 Did you get that? When you really look at Jesus you see God's glory; that knowledge becomes a light shining in your heart. Wonderful!

2 That we are clay pots does not change the nature of the "treasure".

3 God gives us the privilege of using His power, but we had better not try to take the credit!

4 Dear me, this really doesn't sound like 'easy street' or a 'bed of roses'! Paul is talking about very real struggle.

5 Perhaps 5% of the Greek manuscripts omit "Lord", to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

6 One is reminded of 1 Corinthians 15:31, where Paul says, "I die daily". Clearly he cannot be referring to physical death, so it must be a dying to self. As I die to myself, to my own ideas and desires, the life of Jesus will be manifested in and through me. Or as he put it in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, so it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; what I now live in this body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself in my place."

7 You can't have resurrection without death.

8 There are stages in Christian life and ministry: at their beginning stage, Paul is paying the price for them to have life; later, they should pay the price for others to have life; and so on.

9 See Psalm 116:10. We speak on the basis of what we believe.

10 Our resurrection depends upon that of Jesus.

11 The more people are reached by God's grace, the more thanksgiving God gets.

12 Using the language in 1 Corinthians 3:12-14, whatever we build in gold, silver and precious stones will contribute to that glory. What we do for the Kingdom down here goes into our savings account in the Bank of Heaven.

13 Where is your focus?

We live by faith

5 [1]Now then, we know that though our earthly, tent-like 'house' may be destroyed, we have a building from God (not a handmade house), eternal in the heavens. [2]Further, in this one we do groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly habitation; [3]since, obviously, once clothed we will not be found naked. [4]Yes, being in this 'tent' is a burden, so we groan—not enough to want to strip, but to be really clothed; that what is mortal may be swallowed up by the Life.[1]

[5]Now it is God who has prepared us for this very purpose, who also has given us the down payment of the Spirit.[2] [6]So we are always confident, even knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord's home—[7]we walk by faith, not by sight—[8]indeed, we are confident in preferring to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.[3] [9]Yes, that is why we make it our aim (whether at home or away from it) to be well pleasing to Him. [10]Because we must all be exposed before Christ's Judgment Seat, that each one may receive his due for the things he did while in the body, whether good or bad.[4] [11]Therefore, since we know the Lord's intimidation,[5] we try to convince people.

Why Christ died

We are well known to God, and I hope in your consciences as well. [12]We are not commending ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity of boasting on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.[6]

[13]If we are 'out of our senses', it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. [14]For Christ's love impels us, having concluded this: if One

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[1] This paragraph relates only to the redeemed; only we have the prospect of improving our 'clothing'. As for the lost, the mortal will be swallowed up by the Death, and they will be left naked (but not cease to exist).

[2] If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you don't have a 'contract'. He is the down payment on 'the Life' (verse 4); eternal life being a quality of life, we can start living it down here.

[3] Paul is talking about facing death with confidence, knowing it is the doorway to something much better than this life. Of course this only applies to those who belong to Sovereign Jesus.

[4] If we are wise, like Paul, we will never forget the Accounting. He was 'confident' that upon leaving his physical body he would be at home with the Lord. To have the same confidence we also must consciously live so as to be well pleasing to Him. Notice that the emphasis is on what we **do**.

[5] God's holiness is an aggressive quality that attacks anything evil that tries to approach. That holiness is truly intimidating, and we will all be judged by it. Jonathan Edwards preached on that basis, with extraordinary effect, but there are few in our day who follow his example. On a lower level, worldly people tend to feel uncomfortable in the presence of someone who is holy, sometimes to the point of reacting aggressively. As Satan increases his hold on the world, such aggressive reaction will become ever more common.

[6] Paul will enlarge on this later on in the letter.

died for all it follows that all died;[1] **15**and He died for all so that those who *now* live should no longer live for themselves but for the One who died for all[2] and was raised again.[3]

We are Christ's ambassadors

16So then, from now on we regard no one from a fleshly perspective—even if we have 'known' Christ in this way, we do so no longer[4]—**17**so then, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old things have passed on; look, all has become new![5] **18**And that 'all' is from the God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus[6] Christ and given us the ministry of the reconciliation,[7] **19**namely that in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself,[8] not imputing their trespasses to them, including committing to us the message of this reconciliation.

20So then, we are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God! **21**Because He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become God's righteousness.[9]

6 **1**So working together[10] we really urge you not to receive God's grace in vain, **2**for He says: "At a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I aided you." Well, right now is a really favorable time; indeed, the day of salvation is <u>now</u>![11]

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1 They all died in Him; just like all sinned in Adam. Jesus died for everyone, but not all take advantage of that.

2 I follow the best line of transmission, along with a minority of the manuscript total (35% here), in reading "all" instead of the familiar 'them'.

3 The clearest statements giving **why** Christ died begin with Romans 14:9, "that He might be <u>Lord</u> of both the dead and the living"; followed by this verse, that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for <u>Him</u>. Philippians 2:8-11 refers to the final victory. Hebrews 2:14 refers to destroying Satan; saving us from hell is a by-product. As it says in Romans 10:9, "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord…', you will be saved".

4 The unregenerate are forever trying to explain or understand Jesus in purely humanistic terms. We who are in Christ must not do so. Further, we should not try to understand anyone in such terms—we need to take account of what is happening in the spiritual realm. (As a student Saul of Tarsus had certainly seen and heard Jesus.)

5 This is neither immediate nor automatic; it is potential. No benefit of the shed blood of God's Lamb is automatic; it must be appropriated.

6 Perhaps 3% of the Greek manuscripts omit "Jesus", to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

7 Yes, <u>the</u> reconciliation—no other reconciling compares with reconciling men to God.

8 Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!

9 Here we are face to face with the mystery of our redemption. Jesus, God's Son, never sinned, did not 'know' sin, experientially, but He was "made to be sin" on our behalf. It is a grim picture, as though on the cross He was changed into a bundle of sin. And in exchange He gave us His righteousness. How can we 'measure' or understand such love? It is beyond our comprehension. As Romans 11:33 expresses it: "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

10 'Working together' with whom? Presumably with other ambassadors, but also with God.

11 See Isaiah 49:8. The 'window' of opportunity for any individual does not last forever.

What it costs to be Christ's ambassadors

3(We give no occasion for offense in anything, that the ministry not
be faulted; 4rather we commend ourselves as God's servants in every
way with great endurance—in afflictions, in hardships, in distress, 5in
beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in hard work, in sleepless
nights, in fastings; 6by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness,
by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7by truthful speech, by God's power,
with the weapons of the righteousness in the right hand and in the left;[1]
8through glory and dishonor, through defamation and good repute; as
'deceivers' and true, 9as unknown and well known, as dying and we live
on, as chastened and not killed; 10as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as
poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing every-
thing!)[2]

An aside

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

Separation is a 'must'

14Do not enter a mismatch with unbelievers;[3] for what do righteous-
ness and lawlessness have in common? And what fellowship does light
have with darkness? 15And what agreement is there between Christ and
Belial? Or what portion can a believer share with an unbeliever?
16Further, what agreement can a temple of God have with idols? Because
you[4] are a temple of the living God, just as God said: "I will dwell in them
and walk among them; I will be their God and they will be my people."[5]
17Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate," says the
Lord, "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."[6] 18And, "I will be
a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the LORD
Almighty."[7]

7 1Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves
from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear
of God.[8]

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1 Why right and left? A right-handed soldier would have a shield in his left hand, for defense, with a sword or spear in his right, for offense—our weapons are for both offense and defense.

2 Well, well, well, there really ought to be an easier way to make a living! Well, it depends on what kind of living quarters you want in Heaven. When I get there I hope to see many individuals who can say to me, "You made me rich; thank you!".

3 This does not refer only to marriage, as the explanation that follows makes clear.

4 Instead of "you", perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts have 'we', to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

5 See Leviticus 26:12 and Ezekiel 37:27.

6 See Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34.

7 This appears to be an application based on several passages.

8 "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God"—how long since you heard, or preached, a sermon on that?

Titus, and the first letter

Introduction

2Make room for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no
one, we have exploited no one. 3I do not say this to condemn you; I have
said before that you are in our hearts, whether to die together or to live
together. 4I have great confidence in you; I do a lot of boasting about you.
I am filled with encouragement, overflowing with joy in spite of all our
affliction.

Enter Titus

5Now indeed, when we came into Macedonia we had no physical
rest, but were surrounded by affliction—conflicts on the outside, fears
on the inside. 6But the God who encourages the lowly encouraged us by
the coming of Titus; 7and not only by his coming, but also by how much
he was encouraged over you as he reported to us your longing, your
mourning, your zeal in my stead, so that I rejoiced even more.

The effect of the first letter

8Even though that letter caused you sorrow, I do not regret it
(though I almost did), because I perceive that the letter made you sorry,
though only for a while. 9Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry,
but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry as God
intended, so as not to be harmed by us in any way.[1] 10Now godly sorrow
produces repentance into salvation without regret, but the world's
sorrow produces death.[2]

11Just consider your own being caused to sorrow in a godly manner,
how much diligence it produced in you—what self-defense, what indig-
nation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At
every point you have demonstrated yourselves to be clear in the matter.
12So even though I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the wrongdoer,
nor for that of the victim, but, before God, so that your real commitment
to us might be made clear to you.[3] 13We have been encouraged by all this.

Titus again

Because of your[4] encouragement, we rejoiced all the more over the
joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14Because
wherein I boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame, but just as
everything we spoke to you was true, so also our boasting to Titus proved
to be true. 15Also, his affection for you is all the greater, as he remembers

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[1] The implication is that it is possible for those in spiritual authority to cause harm, through the misuse of that authority. I imagine that we have all seen this sort of thing happen in fact.

[2] The Creator made us with emotions, which when properly used are beneficial, but that under the world's control are destructive.

[3] God's agenda in dealing with us often includes several objectives.

[4] Instead of "your", perhaps 3% of the Greek manuscripts have 'our', to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

your collective obedience as you received him with fear and trembling. **16**I am so glad that I have complete confidence in you.[1]

The collection for the church in Jerusalem

The Macedonian example

8 **1**And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace of God that has been bestowed upon the congregations of Macedonia, **2**that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their extreme poverty produced their extravagant, sincere generosity. **3**Because according to their ability, I bear witness, even beyond that ability, of their own accord, **4**they begged us with much entreaty to receive the gift, the sharing in the ministry to the saints **5**—and more than we had hoped, they first gave themselves to the Lord[2] (and due to God's will, to us).

6So we urged Titus that as he had made a beginning so he should also bring to completion in you this grace as well; **7**that as you excel in everything—in faith, in word, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—that you excel in this grace too.

Christ's example

8I am not giving a command, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. **9**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our[3] sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. **10**So here is my advice in this (since already a year ago you began to give and to plan, this is to your advantage): **11**now you must really finish the doing—not only of the enthusiastic planning but also of the completing—out of what you have **12**(because when the intention is presented, it is acceptable according to what one may have, not what he does not have). **13**Now this is not to distress you so as to relieve others, **14**but by way of balance—at this juncture your surplus alleviates their lack, so that later their surplus may

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[1] Paul knew how to 'accentuate the positive', as we used to say.

[2] Is obeying the commands of Christ the exclusive privilege of the rich? How about the first believers, there in Jerusalem, were they rich or poor? It would appear that the vast majority were poor; so much so that the few well-to-do were selling their property to feed the rest. (That is what gave rise to the case of Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 4:32-5:11].) They evidently did not want to leave Jerusalem, in spite of the Lord's words recorded in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8. So God Himself sent the persecutions to disperse them. And they scattered, preaching as they went, poor though they were.

Here in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 we find an account that is very much to the point. Those Macedonian believers were very poor ("extreme poverty"). Furthermore, they were experiencing a "severe test of affliction". Even so, they insisted on giving. From verse 4 it almost seems that Paul felt a bit embarrassed about asking them to give—they needed help themselves! But they insisted; they wanted to give. And they gave more than they properly could ("beyond their ability"). But how was that possible? They had the mentality of the Kingdom—in verse 5 we read that "**first** they gave themselves to the Lord". And they must have understood the secret of God's economy, as described in 2 Corinthians 9:8.

[3] Although some 60% of the Greek manuscripts, and most versions, have 'your' (thereby agreeing with the complement), I take it that the best line of transmission has "our", that is more inclusive.

alleviate your lack—yes, that there be balance;[1] 15as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."[2]

When handling money, avoid criticism

16Now thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you in the heart of Titus; 17because he not only welcomed my appeal but being very diligent he went to you of his own accord.[3] 18But we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the Gospel is throughout all the congregations—19and not only that: he was actually chosen by the congregations as our traveling companion with this gift, that is being administered by us—with a view to the glory of the Lord Himself, and to our own goodwill, 20avoiding any criticism about how we are handling this abundance; 21giving thought to blamelessness, not only before the Lord but also before men.[4] 22Further, we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved to be diligent in many things, but now much more so, because of *our*[5] great confidence in you. 23As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker toward you; as for our brothers, they are envoys of the congregations, a glory of Christ.[6] 24Therefore show the proof of your love (and of our boasting about you) to them as representatives of the congregations.

A little precaution

9 1Now concerning the ministry to the saints, it is unnecessary for me to write to you; 2for I know your readiness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia has been ready since last year, and your zeal has stirred up the majority.[7] 3Still, I have sent the brothers so that our boasting about you in this matter not prove to be empty, so that you may be ready, like I said 4—if any Macedonians were to go with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention, you!) would be put to shame by this confident boasting.[8] 5So I considered it necessary to urge the brothers to go to you in advance and finish preparing the 'blessing'

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1 Note that I have replaced the usual 'equality' with 'balance'. God is not egalitarian; He likes diversity—no two snowflakes are identical, no two drops of water, no two leaves or blades of grass, and much less two human beings. God hates laziness, so we should never do anything to encourage it (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

2 See Exodus 16:18. Maybe there was some sharing involved in that picture.

3 Evidently Titus was bearing this letter, and it was he who delivered it to them.

4 As we say in Brazil, 'all care is little' when handling God's money. Carelessness, not to mention dishonesty, reflects negatively on the Gospel. The Macedonian Christians took the matter seriously.

5 There is no possessive pronoun in the Text to show whose confidence, so it could be 'his', but in the context it seems to me to be more likely to be 'our'.

6 An interesting concept—Paul affirms that Christ was proud of those men. Now that is a compliment that I would really like to hear: "he is a glory of Christ".

7 Nothing like a good example.

8 Maybe Paul should not have boasted quite so much. Do we ever get 'carried away' by our enthusiasm? Some 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit "boasting", to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

you had promised, that it be ready, representing generosity and not extortion.

Kingdom economics

6Now then, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.[1] **7**Each one *should give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a glad giver. **8**Further, God is able to make all 'grace' abound toward you, that always having all sufficiency in everything you may abound to every good work[2]—**9**as it is written: "He has distributed around, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures

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[1] All of chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians deal with money, in one way or another. But the description of how God's economy operates begins at 9:6. This verse enunciates a fundamental principle that has global application. "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

Any farmer understands this. If he only plants a few beans, that is all he will get. If he wants more, he has to plant more. Any businessman will also understand it. If he wants money, he has to invest it. But there is one detail that can be quite bothersome—we must plant first, and reap later. It is better to tighten your belt than to eat the seed, no matter how hungry you are. Isn't it obvious? If you eat the seed, you will not have anything to plant, and if you plant nothing, you reap nothing!

In the Creator's goodness nature is often quite generous. I suppose corn is the champion. We usually plant three or four kernels in a hill, but suppose we just plant one. If that grain germinates, we get one stalk. That stalk should produce two good ears (a third ear will likely be a nubbin). Now then, have you ever counted the number of kernels on an ear of corn? I have. A poor ear may have 300 kernels. A good ear will have around 500. A **super** ear can have up to 800! Let us suppose our stalk gives us two good ears—we planted one kernel and get back 1,000! Isn't that a deal? Even beans that only give us several dozen to one are a deal. That is God's way.

As already noted the context is financial, and verse 7 makes clear that when the author speaks of planting and harvesting he wants us to apply the principle to giving. "God loves a glad giver." I believe the following conclusion is beyond reasonable doubt: whoever gives nothing receives nothing. Maybe that is why many believers, including those in 'full-time Christian service', often seem to be in a financial bind. They do not give; they never contribute. Luke 6:38 shows the reaction of men and Proverbs 3:9-10 that of God when someone gives.

[2] I believe verse 8 gives the 'secret'; let's consider the meaning with care. It is **God** who is powerful, not we. He it is who will cause to abound, not we ourselves. And what He causes to abound to us is "all grace". The grace in view here is the grace of giving (as in 2 Corinthians 8:1, "the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia", which was precisely the grace to give, even beyond their means). Now the Text piles up emphatic words: "always, all, sufficiency, everything, abound, every". All that emphasis serves to guarantee two results: we ourselves should always have enough (at least), and we should be a significant channel of blessing to others. Let's see how it works.

I understand that it is as follows: God wants us to be channels, conduits through which He can send a flow of blessings, both material and spiritual, to others. Much of what we receive may not be intended for our own use—it has another address and we are supposed to pass the blessing along (the precise address must be discerned through the Spirit). When we get the point and cooperate with God, He sends more. The more sensitive and faithful we are, the more God sends, an ever-increasing flow of blessings. But if God sends a blessing, suppose a sum of money, that has another destination and we choose not to understand, decide not to cooperate, if we retain it for ourselves, we become like a water pipe that corrodes shut. (Now a plugged pipe is a sad thing; it has

forever"[1]—**10**yes, the One who supplies[2] seed to the sower and bread for food, so as to supply and multiply your seed for sowing and to increase the yield of your righteousness; **11**you being enriched in everything so as to always be generous, which passing through us produces thanksgiving to God. **12**Because the administration of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God—**13**on the basis of the proof that this service gives, they are glorifying God for the obedience of your confession into the Gospel of Christ, and for the generosity of your sharing with them and everybody—**14**and in their prayer for you, longing for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

15Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift![3]

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lost its reason for being.) With that, the flow of God's grace through our lives is staunched, because He stops sending it. Surely. Why should God keep on sending if we will not let it pass? Can it be that our churches are full of 'plugged pipes'?

When we cooperate with God He gains, the others gain, and we gain. But whoever holds back or abstains will be cheating himself, others and even God. Consider verses 9-14. Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9, bearing on the last clause of verse 8. Now verses 10 and 11: "The One who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, so as to supply and multiply your seed for sowing and to increase the yield of your righteousness; you being enriched in everything so as to always be generous, which passing through us produces thanksgiving to God." This is marvelous! God even gives the seed to be planted, and lest we eat the seed He also gives us bread to eat. He wants us to plant, He wants to see fruit! When we are faithful and cooperate, then God not only meets our needs but augments our planting; in other words, He increases our generosity, or at least He will do so to the extent that we cooperate with His purpose. As a reasonable and proper consequence of this process God receives what He deserves: the beneficiaries give praise and thanks to Him.

Verses 12 and 13 elaborate on this aspect. When we line ourselves up with God's economy He receives the glory due Him, the needs of the saints are supplied, and we are blessed. First, the people who receive the benefits from our ministry will pray for us, and certainly God will listen to those prayers. Next, even if they do not pray, our obedience will receive the effects of God's faithfulness. This we know, not only from the promises and affirmations in this passage, but as an inference from God's own interests—a faithful and useful 'water pipe' must not die of hunger.

So there it is, my friends. God is no man's debtor. That is worth repeating: **God will not be anybody's debtor**! We are too small; He will not allow Himself to be in debt to the likes of us. We may rest assured: whoever gives much, receives much; whoever gives little, receives little; whoever gives nothing… It seems to me that this principle, much like the tithe, works even when one's motivation is selfish or self-serving. However, I trust that the reader will agree that my whole appeal has been against selfishness. It is because of the "mercies of God" that we should present our lives as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). It is the privilege and pleasure of participating in God's grace that should motivate us to give. I believe it is fair to say that our prosperity is in our own hands, at least in part (unfortunately it is also true that we may suffer because of others' disobedience, just as they may suffer because of ours).

[1] See Psalm 112:9.

[2] This verb is used of an authority furnishing what is necessary for a subordinate to carry out an order.

[3] Amen!

Paul's defense of his apostolic authority

Weapons of spiritual warfare

10 [1]Now I, Paul, am myself appealing to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (I who am 'humble when present' among you, but 'bold when absent' toward you). [2]Yes, I beg you, that when I am present I may not have to be bold with the confidence that I will 'dare' to visit upon some who think that we are walking in a fleshly manner. [3]Well, we do walk about in flesh, but we do not wage war that way,[1] [4]because the weapons of our warfare are not physical, but are powerful in God for demolishing strongholds:[2] [5]demolishing sophistries[3] and every arrogance that sets itself up against the knowledge of God; taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ; [6]being ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.[4]

Paul is criticized

[7]Do you only look at the 'face' of things? If anyone has persuaded himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also we are Christ's. [8]Now even if I boast a little to excess about our authority (which the Lord gave us for building up, not to tear you down), I will not act ashamed,[5] [9]so as not to appear *to agree* that it is only with letters that I 'terrify' you. [10]Because some say, "His letters are 'heavy' and forceful, but his physical presence is weak, and his speech can be disdained." [11]Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters while absent is just what we will be in action when present.

Proper limits for boasting

[12]Now we do not dare to class or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understand-

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[1] Well, at least we shouldn't!

[2] The subject of biblical spiritual warfare is generally not well understood in Christian circles. Much of what has been written concerns defensive procedures, but this text speaks of demolishing strongholds (presumably the enemy's, since no one will want to destroy his own), that has to do with taking the offensive. For more on this subject the reader may consult my site: www.prunch.org.

[3] A sophistry is a false argument that is presented in such a way as to appear correct, and impressive, especially if not properly analyzed. Satan has purveyed a number of sophistries designed to keep people from the knowledge of God, such as humanism, relativism, materialism, Freudianism, and so on.

[4] I suppose that the three gerunds—'demolishing sophistries', 'taking captive every thought' and 'being ready to punish'—are some of our weapons, being grammatically subordinated to 'demolishing strongholds'. In the context, the thoughts we take captive are not our own (though that also is a good thing to do), but those of the enemy's servants. I do this in so many words, aloud or in thought, and thereby avoid unnecessary complications. Verse 6 refers to their specific situation, as does verse 2.

[5] He is not going to pretend to be ashamed of having overdone the boasting (in the event), since his greater concern here is to cut the ground from under his critics.

ing.[1] 13We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will stay within the boundaries that God assigned to us, a field that includes you. 14For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we had not reached you, because we did indeed get to you with the Gospel of Christ; 15nor do we boast 'off limits' in the labors of others, but we have hope that as your faith grows our boundaries will be greatly expanded through you, 16so as to evangelize the regions beyond you[2] (not to boast in work already done in someone else's field).

17"He who boasts, let him boast in the LORD."[3] 18Because it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but whom the Lord commends.[4]

A godly jealousy

11 1I could wish that you would put up with a little of my foolishness, but indeed you already are. 2For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, because I determined to present you to Christ (a single husband) as a pure virgin. 3But I am afraid that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve with his cunning, so your minds may be corrupted[5] from the integrity that is in Christ. 4For if someone comes and preaches another 'Jesus' whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you easily put up with it.[6]

Paul ministered without charge

5Now I consider that I am not at all inferior to the very best apostles. 6Though I may not be a trained speaker, I do have knowledge—but we have been fully manifested to you in all things. 7Or did I commit a sin in humbling self so that you might be exalted, in that I proclaimed God's Gospel to you free of charge? 8I 'robbed' other congregations, receiving support from them so as to serve you, 9and when I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone; because the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. Yes, I kept myself from being a burden to you in anything, and will keep on.

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[1] If you compare yourself with a weakling, you can tell yourself that you are strong, which could get you beaten up. In any case, our standard is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

[2] Who does the actual evangelizing? Presumably the Corinthians, not Paul himself, so he is saying that their work will contribute to his 'boundaries'. As my spiritual children pass on my teaching, they are increasing the area that my teaching has reached.

[3] See Jeremiah 9:24.

[4] Just because God uses or 'blesses' someone does not necessarily mean that He is approving of them.

[5] The implication is clear: Satan does the corrupting, directly or indirectly, and it is their thinking that he is corrupting (and that is serious—Proverbs 23:7).

[6] The impression one gets is that the Corinthian believers were lacking in discernment, or commitment, or both.

Exposing deceivers

10The truth of Christ is in me: this boasting will not be silenced in
me in the regions of Achaia. 11Why? Because I do not love you? God
knows! 12Further, I will keep on doing what I do in order to cut off the
opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be considered equal
with us in the things of which they boast. 13Such men are really false
apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into 'apostles' of
Christ.[1] 14And no wonder, because Satan himself masquerades as an
angel of light. 15So it is no great thing if his servants also masquerade
as ministers of righteousness,[2] whose end will be according to their
works.

A little 'necessary' boasting

16Again I say, let no one think me a fool. But should anyone do so,
at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little bit. 17What I
am going to say I do not say according to the Lord, but as though fool-
ishly,[3] in this confident boasting. 18Since many are boasting according
to the flesh, I will too 19(for you put up with fools gladly, being so wise
yourselves!). 20In fact, you even put up with someone who enslaves you,
who 'devours' you, who takes advantage, who exalts himself, who beats
on your face![4] 21Is it disrespectful to say that we were 'weak'?[5]

In whatever anyone is bold (I speak foolishly), I am bold also. 22Are
they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descend-
ants of Abraham? So am I. 23Are they ministers of Christ? (I'm being
irrational) I am more: in labors more abundantly, in beatings beyond
count, in prison more frequently, in 'deaths' often[6]—24five times from the
Jews I received the 'forty lashes minus one';[7] 25three times I was beaten
with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked (I spent
twenty-four hours in the open sea)—26in frequent journeys, in danger
from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my countrymen, in

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1 There have always been those who want to 'get on the band-wagon', to get a free ride; who traffic in spiritual things for personal, temporal advantage. Since such people only do damage, Paul's desire to expose them stems from his concern for the Corinthians' welfare.

2 It is well to remember that neither Satan nor his servants are in the habit of appearing with horns and tails. Just because someone 'looks good' doesn't mean that he is.

3 The implication would appear to be that whatever we do that is not 'according to the Lord' is foolish.

4 Paul is really worked up. Even allowing for his sarcasm, there were evidently negative things going on at Corinth that we do not know about.

5 I found this sentence to be especially difficult to translate, and am not sure I got it right. Compared to the types described in verse 20, he might have come across as being 'weak'.

6 Verses 24 and 25 spell out the 'deaths'; verse 26 resumes with the 'in's. We have no record of most of the experiences listed, an impressive list! Humanly speaking, he should have died several times.

7 Deuteronomy 25:3 forbids exceeding forty blows, so the Jews always stopped one short, just in case they had miscounted.

danger from Gentiles, in danger in cities, in danger in wildernesses, in danger in the sea, in danger among false brothers; 27in toil and hardship, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, in frequent fastings, in cold and nakedness[1]—28quite apart from the other things, my daily disturbances, my concern for all the congregations. 29Who is weak, and I do not feel it? Who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?

When I am weak, then I am strong

30Well, if I must boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness. 31The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ,[2] who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32In Damascus the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes, wanting to arrest me; 33but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.[3]

A visit to the third heaven

12 1It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast; still, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or outside of it, I do not know, God knows. 3Yes, I know such a man—whether in the body or outside of it, I do not know, God knows—4how he was caught up into Paradise[4] and heard inexpressible things, things that a man is not permitted to tell. 5I can boast about someone like that, but not about myself, unless it be my weakness. 6Now even if I wanted to go on boasting, I would not be stupid but speak the truth;[5] but I refrain, so that no one will think more of me than what he sees in me and hears from me.

The 'thorn in the flesh'

7Because of the incredible importance of the revelations, to keep me from feeling too important, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan[6] to beat on me—to keep me from feeling too important. 8Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more cheerfully about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may

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[1] When the Lord told Ananias to go and restore Saul's sight, and he protested, the Lord continued, "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16). Paul paid for what he did against the early Church. By the way, we usually have to pay for our misdeeds down here (how can you pay in Heaven?).

[2] Perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit "Christ", to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

[3] Apparently Paul considered this to be a humiliating experience.

[4] "Paradise" here evidently refers to Heaven. In Luke 23:43 it refers to the half of Hades (Sheol in the O.T.) that was reserved for the righteous dead.

[5] To exaggerate would be stupid.

[6] 'Satan' is Satan. Down through human history God has always used Satan, demons and evil men, both to punish evil and to restrain it (usually in those who are evil). Here God does so with Paul before the fact, that is, to forestall the sin. The procedure was sufficiently unusual that God actually explained to Paul why He did it.

take up residence upon me.[1] **10**So then, I take pleasure in weaknesses,[2] in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Apostolic signs were produced

11I have been boasting foolishly, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, because in nothing have I been inferior to the very best apostles, though I am nothing. **12**Truly the apostolic signs were produced among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. **13**Now in just what were you treated as inferior, compared to the other congregations, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong.[3]

Still not burdening

14Well now, I am ready to come to you a third time, and I will *still* not burden you, because I want you, not your things—children should not have to save up for parents, but parents for children. **15**So I will gladly spend and be spent for the sake of your souls, even if the more I love you the less I am loved. **16**'Ok, ok, I didn't burden you, but being crafty I took you by deception.'[4] **17**Come now, did I actually take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? **18**I urged Titus and sent the brother along—did Titus take any advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit, in the same footprints?

A little veiled threatening

19Do you still think that we are defending ourselves to you? It is before God we speak, in Christ; but all of it, dear ones, is with a view to your edification. **20**Yes, I am afraid that when I come I may not find you such as I wish, and you not find me such as you wish—may there be no strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, factions, slanders, gossipings, conceits, disorders—**21**that when I come again my God may not humble me before you, and I will mourn for many who have previously sinned and not repented of the impurity and fornication and licentiousness which they practiced.[5]

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[1] That is what the Text says, 'take up residence'. I would say that for most of us unusual manifestations of God's power are sporadic (if there are any at all)—if the power 'takes up residence', the manifestations should be a regular occurrence. The trouble is, there is evidently a considerable price in suffering that must be paid.

[2] Well, I must confess that I have not gotten there yet.

[3] Yes, it probably was a 'wrong', because they were not taught how God's economy works. If Paul had taught them the content of chapter nine of this letter early on, a considerable portion of this letter would not have been necessary.

[4] In verse 16 Paul repeats a criticism that someone might falsely level at him.

[5] There is only one definite article for the three nouns, and 'which' is singular, so the three are regarded as a single 'package'. Unfortunately, there have always been, and continue to be, those who go back to a sinful lifestyle, and stay there. Like Paul, about all we can do for such is 'mourn'.

I will not spare

13 [1]This is the third time I am coming to you. "At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."[1] [2]As I already said while with you the second time, I now repeat in writing[2] while absent, to those who sinned before and to all the rest: If I come again I will not spare, [3]since you want proof that Christ is speaking through me —He who is not weak toward you but powerful among you [4](although He was crucified in weakness, He lives by the power of God). Now we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by the power of God toward you.[3]

Examine yourselves

[5]Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you yourselves really not know that Jesus Christ is in you?[4]— unless indeed you are disqualified. [6]Well I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

[7]Now I pray to God that you do no evil; not that we may appear approved, but that you may do what is right (even though we may appear to have failed).[5] [8]For we cannot do anything against the Truth, but only for the Truth. [9]Now we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And we also pray for this, your perfecting. [10]This is why I write these things while absent, so that when present I may not have to deal harshly, according to the authority that the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.

Conclusion

[11]Finally, brothers, rejoice; restore each other; encourage one another; be of one mind; live in peace; and the God of the love and the peace will be with you.

[12]Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[13]All the saints greet you.

[14]The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.[6]

Amen.

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[1] See Deuteronomy 19:15. It almost seems that Paul is comparing his visits to witnesses.

[2] Perhaps 3% of the Greek manuscripts omit "in writing", to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

[3] Being weak in God's presence is one thing; being weak in our work for Him is quite another. I take Paul to be saying that being weak in God's presence triggers the outflow of His power in our work.

[4] Sin does have a way of undermining confidence. A Christian who keeps on sinning tends to become less and less sure of his salvation.

[5] I don't understand this.

[6] Here we have a clear reference to the Trinity.