

# The Second Epistle to the Corinthians

## No.1. Introduction and i. 1 - 13.

pp. 41 - 47

In the introduction to the first epistle we pointed out that the Corinthian letters were the most personal of all Paul's writings. Especially is this true of the second epistle where we find a deeper revelation of Paul the man than anywhere else. W. R. Inge writes: "Of all the epistles, the second to the Corinthians is one which contains the most intimate self-revelations, and few can read it without loving as well as honouring the author". It has been called 'the most letter-like of all the letters of Paul', yet it is difficult to interpret, largely owing to the fact that we can only ascertain its background approximately. In order to bring this before the reader, we think it wise to quote from the study we gave in *The Berean Expositor*, Volume XLV, pp 4 and 5:

"Both external and internal evidences point strongly to the Pauline authorship of the letter. Clement of Rome wrote an epistle to the church at Corinth about 95A.D. and refers I Corinthians to 'the blessed Paul, the Apostle'. This is the earliest instance of the quotation of a N.T. writer identified by name. Other external evidence is provided by Ignatius and Polycarp. The characteristics of style, vocabulary and content harmonize with what is known of Paul and Corinth.

The Apostle wrote the letter from Ephesus and the date many conservative scholars give is 55A.D., though C. K. Barrett suggests early 54 or the end of 53. It will be helpful to reconstruct the background to the writing of the Corinthian epistles, derived from the Acts and from the epistles themselves. Some of these points may be debated and there is no unanimity among Bible scholars here, but we believe the following will not be far from the true facts.

We have already mentioned Paul's visit to Corinth described in the Acts and referred to in I Cor. ii. 1. After this visit he wrote them a letter which has not been preserved (v. 9). We need have no concern that any part of inspired Scripture has been lost. The Apostle must have written letters which do not form part of Holy Scripture and this is one of them. Disturbing news came from believers in contact with the Corinthian assembly and also a communication from them requesting information on certain problems. In order to meet these needs Paul wrote I Corinthians. Apparently this did not solve all the difficulties, and in consequence Paul was forced to pay them a hurried painful visit (II Cor. ii. 1; xii. 14; xiii. 1, 2). Following this the Apostle wrote them a third letter of very severe character (II Cor. ii. 4). His anxiety for the church there concerning their condition and also how they would receive this severe epistle was so great that he could not wait in Troas for Titus, the bearer of the severe letter, but hurried on to Macedonia where he met him and learned with great relief that the letter had produced the needed results and all was well. From Macedonia Paul then wrote the canonical II Corinthians (II Cor. ii. 13; vii. 5-16). After this he paid his last visit to the Corinthian church (Acts xx. 1-4).

Some modern scholars hold that the 'severe letter' is contained in II Corinthians and that this epistle is not a unified work. They claim that vi. 14 - vii. 1 is an interpolation, because it breaks the sequence of thought, that chapter ix. largely duplicates what is in

chapter viii., and that the last section (x. 1 - xiii. 14) is so different in character from the earlier sections that it must be part or whole of the stern letter Paul sent to Corinth. Against this there is absolutely no manuscript evidence for such a truncated epistle and a close study will reveal that, far from being disjointed, it shows a remarkable unity.

It will be good to look at the background of I Corinthians a little more closely. Apollos undoubtedly worked in Corinth (I Cor. iii. 6) and it is possible that Peter visited it too. Owing to their spiritual immaturity this tended to cause the Corinthians to break down into groups and to range themselves under the name of one of these leaders (i. 11, 12) thus producing disunity. There were problems and abuses at the Lord's Supper (xi. 18-22), public litigation among members (vi. 1-8), a notorious case of immorality (v. 1-5), arguments about eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (viii. 1-13; x. 14 - xi. 1), disagreements about the need for marriage (vii. 1-40) and of morality outside marriage (vi. 12-20). Resurrection was denied by some (xv. 12) and Paul's own apostleship questioned by those who were very likely Judaists (iv. 3; ix. 1). All this was quite enough to produce an unhealthy spiritual state in the assembly and to cause great concern to Paul. Some of this bad news had been brought to Paul by the household of Chloe (i. 11). Additionally a trio, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived from the Corinthian church, probably bringing the problems which Paul was asked to answer (xvi. 17). These may be seen in the recurring phrase "now concerning" (*peri de* vii. 1, 25; viii. 1; xii. 1; xvi. 1, 2). There were problems too about spiritual gifts. Some were placing too much emphasis upon the gift of tongues and upon these gifts in general, which appeared to be producing pride. Furthermore the gifts were not being used in an orderly or balanced manner. One can therefore readily see that guidance and warning through an epistle was absolutely necessary."

We now give the structure of the epistle as a whole and for this we are indebted to *The Apostle of the Reconciliation* by C. H. Welch:

## II Corinthians.

- A | i. 1, 2. Introduction. Salutation.
- B | a | i. 3-11. Thanksgiving for comfort in affliction.
  - b | i. 12. The Apostle's manner of life.
- C | i. 13 - ii. 13. Subject of writing. Visit. Vindication.
  - No rest in spirit. Macedonia.
- B | a | ii. 14-16. Thanksgiving for triumph in affliction.
  - b | ii. 17 - vii. 4. The Apostle's ministry.
- C | vii. 5 - xiii. 10. Subject of writing. Visit. Vindication.
  - No rest in flesh. Macedonia.
- A | xiii. 11-14. Conclusion. Benediction.

The structure makes clear the importance of Paul's ministry and his anxiety over the condition of the church at Corinth which is so prominently featured in this epistle. It would appear that the Apostle had more trouble with the Corinthian church than with any of the other assemblies he founded by his missionary work. Yet his patience and love for them never failed, even though he had to correct them sharply. Let us never forget that the most wondrous ode ever written concerning love in its highest sense was addressed by Paul to this church!

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in the whole of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (II Cor. i. 1 R.V.).

In the opening verses of I Corinthians Sosthenes is associated with Paul, but here Timothy is mentioned instead. From I Cor. iv. 17 it appears that he had been sent to Corinth and when he rejoined Paul later on at Ephesus he had to report failure in rectifying the troubles there. Possibly he moved on with the Apostle to Troas into Macedonia and he sends his greetings with those of Paul in the first verse of the epistle. It is clear that both the canonical letters to Corinth were intended to be read in other places by the author. In the first epistle “all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place” is added and here, “the saints which are in all Achaia” are linked with the Corinthian church.

Achaia was the name of the Roman province which included the isthmus of Corinth and the land south of it, roughly corresponding to the southern half of the modern kingdom of Greece. It is probable that the local churches kept copies of Paul’s letters forwarded to them by their neighbours and thus came to possess collections of their own which would be read at their gatherings together with the Old Testament.

Paul continues:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction” (i. 3 and 4 R.V.).

The Apostle first of all directs our thoughts not merely to God, but God Who has revealed Himself through the Lord Jesus as the One Who is all-compassionate and the origin of all comfort and encouragement, and this conception is paramount right through the epistle. *Paraklesis*, ‘comfort’ (translated ‘consolation’ in A.V. in verses 5, 6 and 7) is a key-word in II Corinthians, occurring no less than eleven times and the verb *parakaleo*, eighteen times.

When Paul speaks of this, he does so as one who was constantly experiencing it himself, for the overwhelming tests and tribulation which this epistle reveals that he passed through would have been otherwise unendurable. Not only does he come through these triumphantly, but he even obtains blessing through them! There is another aspect too which is related to the mystery of pain and suffering in this life. Much we may not be able to understand, but having passed through a measure of this, at least we can understand and comfort others who go through similar dark experiences. We are then able ‘to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God’ (verse 4) and so the tests are not valueless and unfruitful. Furthermore, when the Corinthians saw the Apostle’s Christ-like conduct under suffering, they would be encouraged and inspired to make a similar stand themselves. This is what verses 6 and 7 mean:

“But whether we be afflicted, *it is for your comfort and salvation*; or whether we be comforted, *it is for your comfort*, which worketh in the patient enduring of the same

sufferings which we also suffer: and our hope for you is steadfast; knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also are ye of the comfort.”

Having made this clear, Paul straight away draws attention to a great test that he had recently passed through:

“For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despised even of life” (i. 8 R.V.).

Whatever this may mean, it must have been very serious, for ‘pressed out of measure’ A.V., or ‘weighed down exceedingly’ R.V., indicate that he was like a beast of burden crushed beneath a very heavy load, so that he regarded immediate death as a certainty. Some think this referred to the uproar at Ephesus described in Acts xix. 23-41, but there is no suggestion in this context that Paul was in any personal danger at this time. It is possible that he is recalling a severe illness which nearly proved fatal. In any case we should remember that the experience to which he refers was not unique, for in xi. 23 he states that he was ‘in death oft’, such was the cost that this man had to pay for faithful witness for the Lord.

As he looked back on this terrible experience, he could see one reason at least why the Lord permitted it, and that was for him to realize his own utter helplessness and to trust in the “God which raiseth the dead” (verse 9). This is one of the great lessons stressed in this epistle, and one that we must all learn and practice, that is to have ‘no confidence in the flesh’, but *every confidence in the risen and ascended One Who has conquered death*. The power that vanquishes death is a limitless power that can accomplish anything, and Paul not only looks back to a wonderful deliverance, but forward to future testings and says “He *will* deliver” (verse 10 R.V.), and upon this he sets his hope, assisted by the intercession of the Corinthian saints, ‘ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplication’ (11 R.V.).

We have on other occasions stressed the importance of the ministry of continual intercession for others. There is no doubt that this is a vital part of Christian witness and service behind the scenes. This is prayer in the highest sense, where self is forgotten and the needs of others become paramount. Furthermore it is a service that *all* can engage in and we commend this to every reader of *The Berean Expositor* who loves the Truth. Do not think it is wasted time, or that other forms of service are more practical. *Intercession along the lines of the Lord’s will accomplishes things for Him and for the Lord’s people.*

There is abundant testimony that Paul valued highly the prayerful remembrances of the churches. He could say “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation *through your prayer . . . .*” (Phil. i. 19); “. . . . For I trust that *through your prayers* I shall be given unto you” (Philemon 22), so let us labour in prayer for one another, and when such prayer is answered, it will result in praise and thanksgiving which will redound to the glory of God. This is the sense of verse 11 in the chapter we are studying. Many persons prayed for the gift bestowed upon the Apostle and many gave thanks for the answer.

In the section that follows, Paul, contrary to what his opponents were saying, defends his integrity and his behaviour towards the Corinthian believers:

“For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (i. 12 R.V.).

The reader will notice the better rendering of *kauchesis*, “glorying” rather than ‘rejoicing’ A.V. and “holiness” instead of ‘simplicity’. The Apostle had a clear conscience with regard to his treatment of the church at Corinth and it would seem that some were accusing him of insincerity in his letters, writing one thing and meaning something else. But Paul wrote nothing but what the Corinthians could read and understand. There were no double meanings:

“For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully (i. 13 R.V.).

The Apostle hopes this will be true ‘to the end’, this being the near approaching ‘day of our Lord Jesus’, when He would return and render to every man according to his work. The previous section now leads to another (verses 15-22), in which Paul explains why a plan he had made to visit them had to be postponed. This was certainly not due to fickleness or changeability on his part. He was not a vacillator who says ‘yes’ and ‘no’ almost in the same breath. Knowing the sterling character of the Apostle, it seems amazing that he should have to defend himself in this way, but misunderstanding plays into the enemy’s hands and so Paul takes the trouble to explain to the Corinthians why his proposed visit had to be deferred temporarily.

**No.2. i. 14 - ii. 13.  
pp. 64 - 68**

We have now reached a section in chapter i. where Paul feels it necessary to explain the reason for the postponement of his promised visit to Corinth. Doubtless his opponents there were making much of the fact that the Apostle had *not* visited them and that he was therefore changeable in nature and his word was unreliable. In I Cor. xvi. 5 he had told them that he proposed to pay them a visit *after* he had passed through Macedonia. In the second letter in the context we are considering, he refers to another plan made *after* writing I Corinthians and out of consideration for the Corinthian believers. He would now cross over and come straight to Corinth, and after visiting Macedonia, return to Corinth again, whence he trusted to be ‘brought on his way’, i.e. ‘given a good send-off’ toward Judaea. The result of this would be that the church at Corinth would have a ‘second benefit’, the joy and profit of seeing him twice:

“And in this confidence I was minded to come before unto you, that ye might have a second benefit; and by you to pass into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come unto you, and of you to be set forward on my journey unto Judaea” (i. 15, 16 R.V.).

In changing his plans, was he like a fickle man of the world, saying ‘yes’ one minute and ‘no’ the next?

“. . . . I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure (or favour). I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this?” (i. 15, 16, 17 R.S.V.).

The thought of fickleness in dealing with his converts was absolutely abhorrent to the Apostle, so much so that he now makes a solemn assertion, “As God is faithful (or true), our word toward you is *not yea and nay*” (18, 19 R.V.). In other words, Paul did not say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ almost in the same breath. He followed consistently One Who was the unchanging Truth. Never could the Son of God be a ‘yes and no’ kind of person for He always gave an unqualified ‘yes’ to all the Father’s will, whatever it cost:

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in Him is the yea: wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us” (i. 19, 20 R.V.).

So, for this reason, that of His unchangeability, all the promises of God are sure, for they are *in Him*, Who is the *Amen* or *the Truth*. “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness . . . .” (Rev. iii. 14). We remember the number of times recorded in John’s Gospel when He prefixed a solemn assertion by a double Amen, translated ‘verily, verily’ (literally, *amen, amen*). The Son of God, then, is the Amen to all the promises and will of the Father, and Paul could say that he followed Him closely and so, in spite of appearances, the Apostle was certainly not vacillating. He, with all other believers at this time, had been *established* in Christ, anointed and sealed and been given the earnest or foretaste of the Spirit (verses 21 and 22).

This ‘anointing’ included the Pentecostal gifts which were a foretaste of the coming earthly kingdom the soon returning Christ would set up. Among these was the supernatural gift of knowledge which John refers to in his first epistle, “But ye have an *unction* (‘anointing’ R.V.) from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (I John ii. 20). “But the *anointing* which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and *ye need not that* any man teach you, but as the same *anointing teacheth you all things . . .*” (I John ii. 27). This ‘anointing’ or ‘sealing’ should lead to stability. It certainly had done so in the case of the Apostle, so that he now states to the Corinthians in all solemnity, that it was not lightheartedness or selfishness that caused him to change his plans. He had acted solely for their benefit:

“But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth . . . . For I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not be pained by those who should have made me rejoice . . . . For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (i. 23 - ii. 4 R.S.V.).

The situation lying behind Paul’s statements here is not easy to ascertain for we have not all the facts. It could either be that Paul had determined that his second visit, which

had not yet taken place, should not be a painful one; or that he would not pay the Corinthians a second painful visit, which would mean that he had already paid them two visits, the second of which, unrecorded in the Acts, had been of a painful character. The latter view seems the more probable. The Apostle's main wish was to promote their joy. If he had to use his apostolic power to discipline them because of the sinful failure of some in the church, it was with reluctance and sorrow that he took this step, for it caused him much anguish and tears owing to the great love he had for them. He would much rather have commended them, but a real friend is one that speaks the truth even though it hurts, always having the interests of the other person at heart. The wounds his words would inflict on them would be the faithful wounds of a loving friend who only wanted their spiritual progress, faithfulness in witness and response to the Lord.

The following verses (5-11) deal with the offender at Corinth. Who was he and what had he done? The person is not named. Some have assumed him to be the incestuous person mentioned in the first epistle, but this does not fit the passage we are now considering which seems to indicate an offence against the Apostle personally, either in his absence or when he last visited them.

“But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to you all. For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough; so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (ii. 5-11 R.S.V.).

It seems evident that the believers at Corinth, influenced by the painful letter the Apostle had sent them, had taken the step of punishing the offender. They had not been unanimous, but *the majority* had acted in obedience to Paul's advice and he was satisfied that it had been adequate, so much so that he now advised them to change their attitude and seek to restore the sinner and assure him of their brotherly love lest he be overwhelmed with sorrow. They should now make clear to him their forgiveness and Paul states that he himself will also forgive, which would not have much point unless he has been personally wronged and involved in the matter. This forgiveness was important, because if it was not put into effect, some lasting damage might be done to the offender, a permanent breach caused and Satan would then get the advantage, for he waits tirelessly for the opportunity to get in and spoil the work of the Lord.

The Apostle now returns to the details of his personal movements subsequent to the terrible experience he describes in i. 8-10. He makes clear to the Corinthians that, having abandoned the original plan to go straight to Corinth, he went north to Troas with the intention of preaching the gospel there. This was a sea-port town from which he had previously sailed on his first crossing into Europe (Acts xvi. 8-11). Here he expected eventually to be joined by Titus on his return from Corinth and from him to have up-to-date news of the condition of things in the church there.

“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and when a door was opened unto me in the Lord, I had no relief for my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia” (ii. 12, 13 R.V.).

Though this promising opening of the Lord had occurred, for which doubtless the Apostle was grateful, he had no peace of mind as he pondered over the state of the Corinthian believers. He knew only too well how Satan and the flesh could work to overthrow and spoil the Christian witness he had founded, and like any true leader, he had a very close link with his converts and what affected them affected him. Because of this uncertainty of mind he felt he could endure it no longer and proceeded into Macedonia hoping to meet Titus on his return journey along the main highway which spanned the province. This is what evidently happened—not only did he meet his fellow-worker, but Titus was able to reassure him concerning the Corinthian church that all was well in spite of his fears, the danger there was passed and they longed to see the Apostle again.

No wonder we have the outburst of praise for this answered prayer in ii. 14 although Paul does not describe his meeting with Titus until chapter vii. This context in the second chapter and the seventh shows us how human the Apostle was. He was no super-man who was indifferent to adverse circumstances. He knew what fear and anxiety were for others whom he loved and who were in danger, and all his interests being bound up with such, he suffered with them and for them. Here is real love and unselfishness. When he said ‘for me to live is Christ’ (Phil. i. 21) this is what he really meant, spending himself without limit and with practical concern for the Lord and for His people.

### **No.3. ii. 14 - iii. 18. pp. 94 - 99**

We have seen in the context we are considering (II Cor. ii. 12-16), Paul’s anxiety and unrest as he pondered over the dangerous condition of things in the Corinthian church, and how he finally broke off his own work at Troas to meet Titus on his return journey from Corinth. His heart filled with a paean of praise when he learned that the danger was past and the Corinthian believers had responded to his warnings and not taken offence.

“But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of His knowledge in every place. *For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish*” (ii. 14, 15 R.V.).

It is difficult to be sure of the exact meaning of *thriambeuo*. The R.V. and the R.S.V. give it its classical meaning ‘leads in triumph’ whereas the A.V. follows Augustine and the Latin tradition ‘causeth us to triumph’, for which there is no parallel. The figure is of a victorious general returning from victory in a triumphal procession in which the Apostle is sharing. The triumph of Christ was spreading all over the world as a sweet

savour unto God and possibly the figure is continued here like the incense bearers in the conqueror's train scattering the fragrance far and wide.

The Apostle now comments upon the *effect* of the Gospel on its hearers. To Those who reject it is a 'savour from death unto death' (verses 15 & 16 and note the present tenses of the verbs correctly rendered by the R.V.). These two opposite effects of the gospel upon the human mind are always present when it is faithfully preached. Like the sun which not only softens the wax, but hardens the clay, it sharply divides its hearers. As Paul considers the terrible seriousness of this he says 'who is sufficient for these things?' The answer is 'no-one unaided', for he was not like a shady merchant who adulterates his goods. "We are not as many, corrupting the word of God" (17). *Kapeleuo* means to 'peddle', 'adulterate' or water down anything. Anyone can preach a 'watered down' gospel where all unpleasantness concerning sin and perishing are left out and the offence of the Cross omitted. This was probably referring to the work of the enemies at Corinth, but the Apostle refused to engage in such preaching. His ministry was the very opposite—sincere in the sight of God and his sufficiency was from Him. Alas, how often we get a 'watered down', diluted gospel today which offends no-one and is powerless!

Having explained his reasons for the postponed visit to Corinth, Paul now observes that there really was no need to go into further detail and commend himself to them. Their relationship had been so close that this should be quite unnecessary:

"Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ . . ." (iii. 1-3 R.V.).

Some were making use of testimonial letters written by other believers. The church at Ephesus had written such a letter commending Apollos to the Corinthians (Acts.xviii.27). Paul is not saying this was wrong, but that he himself did not need them. As their founder and leader he was well known to them and surely they were not so forgetful of his ministry as to want further credentials. They were themselves truly *his epistle*, though not written with material substance as ink—"written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh' (verse 3 R.V.).

This illustration brings to the Apostle's mind another divine writing which played a momentous part in the history of Israel. Moses received from God two tables of stone written with the finger of God containing the divine law (Exod. xxxi. 18). This law of God was a covenant made between Himself and the people of Israel (Exodus xix. 5; xxiv. 7, 8). It was the "Old Covenant", but, in absolute contrast, Paul had been made a minister of "the New Covenant" made by God with the same people. Jeremiah graphically records this in chapter xxxi. 31-37. This contrast the Apostle now expounds in the wonderful passage that follows. We should note that the 'Old Covenant' of law and the 'New Covenant' of grace are used with precision in the Scriptures. A covenant is a binding arrangement between *two parties* and applies to them alone. Those two parties are made perfectly clear in the Scriptures. They are God on the one hand and the people of Israel on the other (Exod. xix. 1-6; xxxiv. 27; Deut. v. 2-4; Jer. xxxi. 31-37) and we

have no right to insert any other parties into these covenants. One has its basis in *works* and *law-keeping*, and the other in *divine grace*.

Because the New Covenant operates on the principle of grace, many assume that this covenant must be introduced whenever God deals in grace with sinners. But we should remember that God can have dealings of grace with such *without making any covenant with them* and such is the case with every member of the Body of Christ upon whom riches of grace are showered (Eph. i. 6-8). We therefore find no mention of the New Covenant in Ephesians or in any of the prison letters of Paul, for, by this time, Israel, the human party in the New Covenant, had passed into spiritual darkness and now was in unbelief (Acts xxviii. 25-28) and, in the *new man* now being formed (Eph. ii. 15), Israel as a *nation* does not exist. In it there is neither Jew nor Gentile as such. All such distinctions have vanished. Saving grace *administered by covenant* is only necessary to those who had already been dealt with by covenant, i.e. Israel (Jeremiah xxxi. 31-34; Romans ix. 4). Gentiles were ‘strangers from the covenants’ (Eph. ii. 12) and can be reached and saved by grace without the necessity for any covenant.

It is important to realize that both Old and New Covenants are *national*. Israel the *nation* is at the centre of both (Exod. xix. 5, 6; Jer. xxxi. 36). Saved Gentiles in the Acts period who were like wild olive grafts into the true (Rom. xi. 16-21) and therefore partook of Israel’s covenant privileges, shared in the New Covenant blessings, but we cannot perpetuate this condition of things while Israel is dead spiritually and unusable by God. The New Covenant touches the *heart* upon which God Himself writes His precepts (Jer. xxxi. 33) whereas all through this age, Israel’s heart has been ‘gross’ through their rejection of God’s offer of mercy (Acts iii. 19-26) and so they cannot ‘understand with their heart’ (Acts xxviii. 27). This is the absolute negation of the New Covenant and it cannot be operating under such conditions when the main party which it touches, Israel, has a blinded and hardened mind. In this dispensation of grace (Eph. iii. 2) God can deal *directly* with sinners, either Jew or Gentile, in grace on the basis of the Lord’s all-sufficient redemptive work on the cross and there is no need to bring any thought of a covenant in here. It is far better to keep accurately to the inspired Word and put both these covenants where God puts them, i.e. with Israel the nation at the centre of both.

It should hardly be necessary to say that the word ‘testament’ in II Cor. iii. should be rendered ‘covenant’ right through the chapter. Paul is not dealing with will-making but with the two covenants which have such a prominent part in Holy Writ and to emphasize the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, he sets out a series of contrasts to make this clear. At this point it would be as well to point out that when he says ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’ (iii. 6) he is *not* dealing with the interpretation of Scripture, referring to a *literal* or *spiritualizing* method as many people think when they quote (or rather misquote) this verse to support the idea that the Bible must not be read *literally*. They should realize that ‘the letter’ refers to the *Old Covenant of law*, the breaking of which led to death and being under the curse (Rom. vii. 9, 10; Gal. iii. 10). It was indeed the ‘letter that *killeth*’ and the ‘ministration of death’, whereas the New Covenant, where human works and merit are disregarded and God alone works in grace bringing forgiveness and *life*, can truly be designated as *the spirit which giveth life*.

Not that there was no greatness or glory in the law. Of itself it was ‘holy, just and good’ (Rom. vii. 12). It reflected the character of the thrice holy God Who gave it, and at its inception there was glory and awe-inspiring majesty (Exodus xix. 16-20; Hebrews xii. 18-21), so much so that when Moses came down from the mount, his face reflected the glory so intensely that the people could not look at him and were afraid. He was then forced to put a veil over his face (Exod. xxxiv. 29-35). This not only moderated its brightness, but when it began to fade, hid this also from the Israelites. It will be helpful to set out the comparisons between the Old and the New Covenants in II Cor. iii.:

<b>The Old Covenant</b>	<b>The New Covenant</b>
The letter that killeth (6). The ministration of death (7, 8). The ministration of condemnation (9). That which is done away (11). Moses and Israel veiled (13-15). When Israel turn, the veil removed (16-18). The glory of God in the face of Moses “done away” (7).	The spirit that quickeneth (6). The ministration of the spirit (7, 8). The ministration of righteousness (9). That which remaineth (11). The veil done away in Christ (13-15). We all with unveiled face (16-18). The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (iv. 6).

Though the Old Covenant of law-keeping had its glory, it was a temporary one and fading at that, owing to the fact that it was ‘weak on account of the flesh’ (Rom. viii. 3). It showed a standard of conduct far above that which failing and sinful human nature could reach. The New Covenant, on the other hand, being all of God’s doing in grace, replacing condemnation and death by imputed righteousness and life, had a glory which far outshone the Old Covenant, so much so that by comparison it scarcely appears to be glorious at all (iii. 10). The contrast therefore right through this long section is the condition of the Jew under the law in the Old Testament with its condemnation and blindness, and the emancipation and salvation of the Jew in the N.T. who believed in Christ and came under the gracious work of the New Covenant which was ratified by the Lord Jesus on the cross. The O.T. Israelite had his mind ‘veiled’ like the face of Moses (iii. 14) and the only way this blinding element could be removed was by coming into saving contact with Christ ‘which veil is done away in Christ’ (verse 14) which is expressed by ‘turning to the Lord’ (16). This turning was vital to the Jew of the N.T. for salvation and will be so for the whole nation when in the future it looks on the Lord Jesus Christ at His Second Advent and is convicted of sin, ‘they shall look on Me Whom they have pierced’ (Zech. xii. 10). They will then whole-heartedly turn to Him and be saved and this is all part of God’s New Covenant dealing with Israel (Rom. xi. 25-29) so that at last they can be the Divine channel of blessing to the whole world that the Lord always intended they should be.

The New Covenant ministry therefore had a special relevance to the Acts period when Israel was being tested yet again by God and those who were saved, together with Gentiles, became a New Covenant ‘firstfruits’, a faithful ‘remnant’, looking forward to

the day when the whole nation shall be saved and the hope of the New Covenant fulfilled and the earthly kingdom of the Lord established.

The closing verses of the chapter deal with the transformation that is being daily effected in the lives of those who have no veil coming between them and the Lord:

“But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (iii. 18 R.V.).

The R.V. ‘unveiled face’ is more accurate than the ‘open face’ of the A.V. and shows the connection inspired Scripture is making with the ‘veil’ of the context. This ‘beholding of the glory of the Lord’ is expressed in iv. 6 as the ‘light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’. The Lord Jesus sums up and fully expresses the glory of God which has been fully expressed in His redemptive work at Calvary. The more we experience this by faith and practical outworking, the more we progress ‘from glory to glory’ and come into a deeper knowledge and response. The Holy Spirit, Who is one with the Lord (“the Lord the Spirit”, or “the Spirit which is the Lord”, R.V. margin) alone makes all this possible.

#### **No.4. iv. 1 - 18. pp. 109 - 114**

The Apostle Paul has made plain the superiority of the New Covenant of Jer. xxxi. over the old one of Exodus by a series of comparisons (II Cor. iii. 16-18). The nation of Israel was the centre of this New Covenant from a human standpoint and thus had first place in the Acts period during which II Corinthians was written. Paul and those with him were made ‘able ministers’ of this covenant (iii. 6) and they fully realized the responsibility that this divine appointment brought upon them. It may be in the opening of chapter iv. that he has in mind the evil work of his opponents at Corinth:

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not: but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (iv. 1, 2 R.V.).

This great service in connection with the New Covenant had been committed to Paul by the *mercy* of God. This mercy had touched him at the very beginning of his Christian life (I Tim. i. 12, 13) and followed him all the way through together with God’s abundant grace. Because of this he does not faint, or shrink from the duties this ministry brought upon him; he rather discharges them with frankness and courage, as opposed to some whose disgraceful underhanded ways (R.S.V.), craftiness and deceitful handling of the Word of God, played into Satan’s hands. He knew, needless to say, that not all who hear the gospel respond to its claims. They hear with their ears, but that is as far as it goes. It does not touch their mind or conscience:

“But and if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them” (iv. 3, 4 R.V.).

Using a different type of language, the Lord in His earthly ministry taught the same thing, for out of four sowings of the Word of truth connected with the earthly kingdom only one was fruitful in the fullest sense. Here the Apostle Paul continues the figure of the veil which he has already used. One reason why the gospel is rejected is that Satan, the arch-deceiver, draws a veil over the minds of such so that they cannot ‘see’ properly or understand. The glory of Christ, which the gospel makes known, is hidden in this way and they continue to walk in spiritual darkness, however intellectually gifted they may be. The good news of man’s salvation wrought out by the crucified and risen Christ is not only a deliverance from relentless bondage and a cleansing from guilt, but a rescue from blindness and darkness as well, as Col. i. 13 plainly teaches, and also this context. Only in this way can this mental and spiritual darkness be removed. Sinners have not sufficient ability or power to rescue themselves from such a terrible condition. Only the power of the risen Saviour can do this, as He is personally received and trusted:

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, Who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (iv. 5, 6 R.V.).

The Apostle goes back in his mind to the Damascus road, on which the risen and glorified Christ met him, made him a new creation and completely changed his whole outlook and ways. The only adequate parallel reaches back to the beginning of creation when the same Lord Jesus, the Creator, commanded the light to shine out of darkness (Gen. i. 3). This therefore is repeated in the new creation, when He Who is the only Light of the world, the brightness of God’s glory, shines into a darkened sinner’s mind upon being savingly beheld by faith.

The knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is the most treasured of all possessions. It is like an exquisite jewel, unique in its beauty. Literal jewels of beauty are usually encased in an equally lovely setting, but the opposite is found with this jewel of God, for He sets it in frail *earthen vessels*, men and women who are failing creatures, subject to infirmity and weakness. One thing this striking paradox makes clear is that the gospel is no product of human cleverness or lofty intellect, but is a revelation of God in His power and sovereign grace. He condescends in His great love and mercy to place this treasure in frail earthenware vessels to demonstrate, among other things, that His strength is made perfect in weakness (II Cor. xii. 9).

Paul now contrasts the often humiliating experiences he passes through as a faithful servant of Christ and minister of the gospel with the exceeding divine power that he finds to be all-sufficient in all circumstances. In the verses that follow, there are four pairs of present participles in an ascending scale, as it were. We find the climax to these testings in chapter xi. 16-28. In chapter iv. the Apostle states:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (iv. 8-10, R.S.V.).

It is difficult for any English translation to convey adequately the sense of the original Greek. *Stenochoreomai* literally means ‘to be hemmed in’. “Straightened” (R.V.) comes nearer to the meaning of the word than ‘distressed’ (A.V.). *The Twentieth Century New Testament* renders it ‘though hard-pressed on every side, we are never hemmed in’ or Knox’s paraphrase ‘for ourselves, we are being hampered everywhere, yet still have room to breathe’. In spite of all restrictions, Paul still has room to move in his witness for Christ.

In the next statement there is a play on the words *aporonmenoi* and *exaporonmenoi* which is practically impossible to bring over into English. Perhaps ‘hard put to it, but not put out’ gets near to it. Then follows ‘persecuted (or pursued or hunted) but not abandoned’. Paul is not abandoned to the enemy or left to his own frail resources. If he is persecuted in one place, he escapes safely to another, only to find fresh opportunities for witness as the record in the Acts makes quite clear.

Finally he states ‘though struck down, never killed’ (T.C.N.T.) or, as Charles William’s translation ‘always getting a knock down, but never a knock-out’. His experience at Lystra was a good example of this (Acts xiv. 19). Literally struck down by stones, it appeared as though he was finished, yet by the exceeding power of God he has mentioned, he stood up on his feet and continued his ministry, doubtless much to the surprise and dismay of his would-be murderers.

All this varied experience he sums up as follows:

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you” (iv. 10-12 R.V.).

Paul, in a sense, was always under the sentence of death. “In deaths oft”, he writes later on in the epistle (xi. 23). He could never be absolutely sure he would be alive on the morrow. In this he closely followed the Saviour in His earthly life, Who experienced the relentless hatred and persecution of His religious opponents right throughout His public ministry, who would have murdered Him before Calvary, if they could have done so. Note the fourfold use of the name ‘Jesus’ which is linked with the *earthly* life of the Son of God and is rarely used by the Apostle except in this connection, unlike Christians today who habitually refer to the Lord this way, unmindful apparently of the fact of His Deity and Lordship (John xiii. 13).

But if the Apostle experienced the ‘dying of Jesus’, he also experienced His risen life. In fact it was only this great power that enabled him to survive and triumph over all his difficulties. But even if he did give his life for Christ (and this was actually true later on when his work was completed and he had finished ‘the race’), then there would be the

certainty of resurrection to follow with a glorious presentation in the presence of God and eternal life to follow:

“Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also with Jesus, and shall present us with you” (iv. 14 R.V.).

The grand truth of resurrection is going to dominate the section which follows right into chapter v. If this is not perceived, then the clue will have been lost to this wonderful passage with its reference to being ‘clothed upon’ that mortality may be swallowed up of (resurrection) life. ‘All things’, cries the Apostle, ‘are for your sakes’ and ultimately for the Lord’s sake, because the more people who come to know the saving grace of God through the gospel Paul preached, the more there will be to render thanksgiving to Him and the greater the praise He will receive (verse 15).

In view of all this Paul does not faint or lose heart, even though his external self, his ‘mortal flesh’, is decaying, the ‘inward man’, the divine new nature, implanted in him at salvation by the Lord, ‘is renewed day by day’ (verse 16). This is a firstfruits of the glory yet to be and as he contemplates it, the Apostle’s present sufferings and trials seem to fade away and be not worthy of comparison, so great is the glory lying ahead in resurrection. Viewed from any other angle, his sufferings would appear overwhelming and far from temporary. As Hodge remarks, ‘it was only by bringing these sufferings into comparison with eternal glory that they dwindled into insignificance’.

“For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (iv. 17, 18 R.V.).

In view of the *heavy weight* of glory, the present afflictions seem not only *light*, but very *temporary*. “While we look”, are the important words. If our vision is in the wrong direction, then the present difficulties will doubtless appear overwhelming. If however we look to what God is keeping and reserving for us in the life to come, then they fade away to nothing. Paul uses tremendous language here. *Hyperbole*, ‘exceeding’ is used twice. He seems almost to exhaust language in this great crescendo of superlatives. We end with the translations of Goodspeed and Moffatt:

“For this slight, momentary trouble is piling up for me an eternal blessedness beyond comparison, because I keep my eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal” (iv. 17, 18, E. J. Goodspeed).

“The slight trouble of the passing hour results in a solid glory past all comparison, for those of us whose eyes are on the unseen, not on the seen; for the seen is transient, the unseen eternal” (iv. 17, 18, J. Moffatt).

**No.5. v. 1 - 15.**  
**pp. 124 - 129**

After giving the magnificent testimony of II Cor. iv. 14-18 as to his triumph over his sufferings and trials as he considers the ‘eternal weight of glory’ that awaits him, the Apostle Paul goes on to develop this theme and to consider what it will involve if he is called upon to give his life for Christ and thus not be among those who are ‘alive and remain to the coming of the Lord’ (I Thess. iv. 15). He realizes that his human body is only a temporary structure like a tent, but however adequate for this earthly pilgrimage, it is not suitable for the glory yet to be, but will be dissolved after death. What follows then will be God’s provision of a permanent ‘house from heaven’, the resurrection body, concerning which he had previously written to the Corinthian church in chapter xv. of the first canonical epistle.

“For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle (tent) be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life” (v. 1-4 R.V.).

In Rom. viii. 23 he refers again to our present ‘groaning with resurrection as deliverance’, “For we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *the redemption of our body*”. Nothing can be clearer than that Paul dreaded the idea of any disembodied state and his statement in Phil. i. 23 must be interpreted in the light of Phil. iii. 11 and the context we are studying in II Corinthians. He could not think of a future life apart from resurrection. To be there apart from a body was like being naked, a condition from which he instinctively shrank.

The following quotation from Professor F. W. Beare is to the point:

“. . . . our minds are dominated, or at least profoundly affected by our Greek (essentially Platonic) inheritance, so that we think of immortality as the ‘immortality of the soul’ . . . . we still feel that there is some essential part of our personality which alone is capable of immortality, and that part does not include the body . . . . Paul was constitutionally incapable of thinking of life eternal in terms of a ‘soul’ existing in some disembodied state . . . . A spiritual resurrection would to him be no resurrection at all; a disembodied existence would be no better than the shadowy and unsubstantial existence of a shade. He is therefore bound to express his hope of immortality in terms of attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 125, 126).

Also Professor F. F. Bruce:

“. . . . But if he (Paul) does (die), what will be the mode of his existence between death and resurrection? Must he endure some kind of disembodied state in the interval? To some people of a different tradition, disengagement from the shackles of the body was something infinitely desirable, but while Paul longed to be delivered from the present mortal body it was in order that he might exchange it for one that was immortal; to be

without a body of any kind would be a form of spiritual nakedness from which all his mind shrank" (*1 and 2 Corinthians*, p.200).

All this would be perfectly clear to Christians today if their minds were not clouded by tradition concerning the immortality of the soul and the idea that this part of each individual goes straight to heaven after death because it is immortal. It comes as something of a shock when the sincere Bible student finds this is not true. Specially as it is backed up by countless hymns which are sung in places of worship Sunday by Sunday. However we can say with certainty that *in the revelation of the Word of God there is no life after death apart from resurrection* and if we do not accept this then we can never understand the teaching of II Cor. v.

Redemption and Resurrection are the key to the final fulfillment of the purpose of God as it touches heaven and earth and this is central in the revelation of Christ as mediated through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. It is fundamental to the realization of hope whether in the Old Testament or the New. Paul contrasts the temporary dwelling in the body (likened to nothing more than a tent) with the *permanent building*, the resurrection body in the heavens. Its sole maker is God; no human hands have constructed it or played any part in its maintenance. It is indeed 'a building of God, a house not made with hands' (v. 1) and it is fashioned to suit the sphere of glory that God wills, and it lasts for ever. Even now while Paul 'sighed with anxiety' (groaned), owing to the burdens which he was continually bearing, this glorious future hope greatly strengthened and cheered him. It would then be true that 'mortality (death) would be swallowed up by life' (verse 4) thus bringing us to the same point as he makes in the great resurrection chapter of I Cor. xv. 53-55. Resurrection is the time when immortality is attained and not before. It is 'put on' *then*, and death at this point is annihilated for the believer. We may be sure that for such there is *no consciousness of any interval* between the dissolution of the 'tent' and the investiture of the permanent 'house from heaven' and as far as *experience* goes, this should be all that matters as far as the believer is concerned.

The Apostle goes on to assure us 'that He Who has prepared us for this very thing is God Himself' (v. 5), that is the endowment of immortal resurrection bodies. Further, He has given us the Spirit now as a *guarantee* ("Who gave us the *earnest* of the Spirit") that all this will one day be realized in glorious fact.

The result of all this is 'being always of good courage'. With such a wonderful goal in view despair could not enter, however great the present trials:

"and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (v. 6-8 R.V.).

It should be noted that the Apostle does not say (as is so often misquoted) 'to be absent from the body *is to be present with the Lord*', meaning in some disembodied state immediately at death. There are only two states envisaged by Paul here (1) being at home in the present body (2) being at home with the Lord in the resurrection body, and of the two it is the latter obviously that he 'considers good' (*eudokeo*, translated 'willing' A.V. and R.V.). To read traditional views into this passage, as is so often done, ruins

the Apostle's argument. It is fatal to its understanding and is merely wishful thinking to prop up an idea that is considered to be 'orthodox'.

Paul, in contemplating the resurrection state, now stresses that among the first experiences will be for him to stand before the Lord's tribunal when He will assess his earthly service of what sort it is. The fact of this assessment for all believers he has already dealt with in the first Corinthian epistle (I Cor. iii. 10-15). With this in view he states that it has a profound effect upon his present life and outlook:

"Wherefore also we make it our aim (literally 'we are ambitious') whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him" (v. 9).

The thought of Christ as the righteous Judge (II Tim. iv. 8) was a profound stimulant to the Apostle, constantly urging him on to make all his thoughts and actions here and now conform to the Lord's approval and pleasure, for His final verdict is going to have eternal consequences.

"For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (v. 10 R.V.).

Rom. xiv. 10 R.V. teaches similarly except that the phrase is the 'judgment-seat of God', which is a strong testimony to the Deity of Christ. All judgment has been committed to the Son (John v. 22-27) the One Who has added humanity to His Deity and so can judge men with absolute impartiality, whether it is unbelievers for their sins or believers for their service. The thought of this engenders awe and reverence in the Apostle. He therefore discharges his ministry with the fear or reverence of the Lord in view ('terror' in the A.V. is too strong. Believers have no need of being 'terrified' by the Lord). The Apostle's work is to preach the gospel faithfully and seek to persuade men, and in this he is transparently open to the Lord as he will be at His judgment seat in the future. He trusts the purity of his conduct is likewise recognized by his converts at Corinth (verse 11). At the same time he was not idly boasting, but with his critics in view, men who evidently did their best to belittle and undermine his witness, he gives the Corinthians material for a reply (verse 12).

Evidently these opposers did not hesitate to accuse Paul of being mad:

"For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you" (v. 13 R.V.).

The phrase 'we are beside ourselves' or 'are mad' could be a reference to the ecstatic revelations he refers to in chapter xii. which were being described as 'madness' by his enemies. This is for God to assess, declares the Apostle, not men—"it is unto God". In his ministry to them he had passed on the message soberly and quietly which his opponents could not deny, and the great motive power behind it all was *the love of Christ*:

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One die for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again” (v. 14, 15 R.V.).

The Greek *sunecho* constrain, is used in Luke xii. 50 of the compulsion the Lord Jesus felt as He looked forward to the completion of His earthly work on the cross:

“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I *straitened* (R.S.V. constrained) till it be accomplished.”

Weymouth beautifully renders it ‘overmasters us’. The overwhelming love of Christ Who gave His all for His people was so powerful an influence on the Apostle that he gladly gave himself in service for others, the only adequate way of expressing his love in return. We believe this is the only acceptable motive for Christian service. Do we do this because it appeals to us, or because we have been asked to do it, or perhaps because we want to please others? Not one of these motives is adequate. We should be able to say truthfully that we serve Him *because we love Him*. It is the only practical thing that we can do in response to His love for us which passeth knowledge’ (Eph. iii. 19).

**No.6. v. 14 - vi. 18.  
pp. 141 - 146**

Having stressed the love of Christ as the great motive for Christian service, the Apostle Paul continues:

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again” (v. 14, 15 R.V.).

The Lord Jesus has died as the representative of all His people and therefore by identification, all of them are reckoned to have died in the Person of their Representative. The second *all* has the article (*hoi pantes*) which shows that the reference is to the *all* for whom One has died. Just as the disobedience of Adam brought death and ruin to the old creation, so the life-giving death of the ‘last Adam’ brings a new existence, a new creation, so that those who live, (having died and risen with Christ) now belong to this new order and for them the old creation with its worldly standards has for ever passed away. The estimation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the estimation concerning other men has completely changed:

“Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation (R.V. margin): the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new” (v. 16, 17 R.V.).

Paul is contrasting the standards and estimation of the old creation of unregeneracy with the entire new mental outlook of one who is truly saved and therefore can be

designated by God as being in an entirely new sphere, namely *in Christ*. That is his standing by grace. For such a person the old life and its thinking and standards are finished. New things have come into being, namely those things pertaining to the new creation which is eternal and has God as its source. Paul's reckoning of Christ before conversion was distorted and wrong. He now no longer knows Him in this way 'after the flesh'. Nor for that matter does he estimate men after this fashion. He has God's view point and this alters and corrects his whole thinking and estimation.

"All this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . ." (v. 18 R.S.V.).

All things is *ta panta*, literally 'the all things', not all things without exception, and the R.S.V. translation rightly shows its defining power here. In the past some have used this phrase to teach that everything including sin comes from God, making Him the author of sin, but this is a gross abuse of what the Apostle has written. The *Revised Standard Version* is correct in its rendering "All this", namely the truth dealt with in the context, 'is from God', and He, says the Apostle, has given us the ministry of reconciliation. The Greek words translated 'reconcile' basically mean a change of outlook and condition. Reconciliation is only necessary where two parties are divided or at enmity. As far as God is concerned the enmity has been taken away by the death of Christ as the Representative and Head of the race. Adam's one offence involving all has been cancelled and from God's side there is now no barrier. Grace now *reigns*:

"That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. v. 21),

and as this is so, Divine judgment for sin is held back. God is not now reckoning men's trespasses as a barrier between Himself and man. The Cross has broken this down and the enmity now is entirely on man's side. Before the effect of this great reconciling work can be the individual sinner's possession, this reconciliation must be *personally received*. Just as God's righteousness is 'unto all' without exception, it is only '*upon all them that believe*' (Rom. iii. 22), so men are exhorted 'Be ye reconciled to God' (II Cor. v. 20) and true believers are those who have '*received the reconciliation*' (Rom. v. 11 'Atonement' in the A.V. is literally in the old English of the A.V. 'at-one-ment' or in other words reconciliation).

Those who have not 'received the reconciliation' for themselves cannot claim redemption, salvation and all the glorious aspects of truth that are wrapped up in the redeeming work of the Son of God on the Cross and confirmed by His present risen life. They are still at enmity with God and remain so until their faith is placed in the risen Christ Who is able to save to the uttermost. Then the forgiveness, peace and power which flows from God's reconciling work becomes their own possession and experience. Never must we present the reconciliation provided through Christ as though it cancels the need for preaching the gospel of God's saving grace to lost sinners. The greatness and wonder of such a gospel is difficult to sum up but the Apostle has done it in a wonderful way in verse 21 R.S.V.:

“For our sake He made Him (Christ) to be sin (or a sin-offering) for us, Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ from the cradle to the tomb is utterly essential to God’s redemption. If the Lord Jesus had only sinned once, He would have *needed a Saviour*. He could not have been the Saviour of others. But in a way we can never fully appreciate, the Lord ‘laid on Him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. liii. 6) and this is true, not only of Israel, but of all the Lord’s people. There is a wonderful exchange here. Christ takes the believer’s sins and receives the judgment of them in Himself, whereas the believer is given a righteous status before God, for it is nothing less than God’s righteousness which is reckoned his as a free gift (Phil. iii. 9; Rom. iii. 22). Paul concludes this section relating to the ministry of reconciliation by saying:

“And working together with Him we intreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for He saith, at an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succour thee; behold now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation)” (vi. 1, 2 R.V.).

In using the plural ‘we’ here, the Apostle doubtless included other fellow-workers besides himself. In this glorious service men co-operate with God in making known the ‘good news’ and Paul underlines its urgency by quoting from Isa. xlix. 8. Men must avail themselves of the grace of God while the opportunity lasts, for the *accepted time* will not always be with us and we do well to bring this to the fore when we proclaim the gospel. The Apostle could do this with a good conscience, bearing in mind his opposers at Corinth who evidently had done their best to disparage his ministry and misunderstand his motives. There are always those who are glad of an excuse not to listen to the gospel and try to find one in the conduct of its ministers. But they could not truthfully do this with regard to the Apostle Paul. He could commend his service to them without boasting:

“. . . . but in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the Word of truth, in the power of God; by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (vi. 4-10 R.V.).

What a defence! and what an eloquent list of the characteristics of a faithful servant of God! There are nine kinds of trials which divide into groups of three. In the first group there is general suffering, pressure physical and mental, hardships which could not be relieved, and frustrations on every hand. The second group deals with sufferings he endured at the hands of men (stripes, imprisonment, tumults). The third section gives us the qualities he sought to display in his Christian witness day by day, resulting in a series of antitheses which illustrate the way he was being maligned by his enemies. Sometimes he was praised, sometimes he was misrepresented. Sometimes he was flattered, sometimes he was harshly criticized, but whatever men’s estimate of him was, he

continues with his faithful service and witness for the truth committed to him. What an example to us all!

The Apostle's feelings must have been deeply stirred in writing this section—yet he has nothing but love for these Corinthians, even though some of them were doing their best to upset and grieve him:

“O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged” (vi. 11).

Paul had written freely to them without constraint and his love and concern for them had grown. In return he asks that their regard for him should grow too (verses 12 & 13) and not be restricted (straitened). It would seem that this lack of response to him was largely because some of them had not separated themselves from pagan practices that existed all around them. Hence the Apostle goes on to warn them:

“Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to Me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (vi. 14-18 R.V.).

Do not become diversely yoked with unbelievers, says the Apostle. “Mismatched” is the translated of the R.S.V. Any such tie is bound to pull the believer down. This of course applies to marriage, but it can go further and cover any *close* tie with the unsaved world. The amount of unhappiness and misery that has resulted from disobedience to this Divine command only the Lord knows. The wrecked homes, the unfruitful Christian life are a startling testimony to the truth and wisdom of this prohibition of the Lord, and yet many, alas, do not heed but choose to go their own way, deceiving themselves that somehow all will come right in the end.

Paul here gives five rhetorical questions introduced by the interrogative pronoun *tis* (what?) demanding a negative answer. He uses five synonyms, ‘partnership’ (*metoche*), ‘fellowship’ (*koinonia*), ‘accord’ (or harmony *symphonesis*), ‘agreement’ (*sunkatathesis*) and ‘portion’ (*meris*) and makes the contrast between righteousness and iniquity, light with darkness, Christ with Belial, the believer and the unbeliever, the temple of God with idols. Belial means ‘worthless’ or ‘perdition’ and is a title of Satan. The questions are followed by a series of quotations from the O.T. Such references as Lev. xi. 44; xxvi. 11, 12; Exod. xxv. 8; Ezek. xi. 20; xxxvi. 28; xxxvii. 27 should be consulted. The Corinthian believers are reminded that they are a sanctuary (temple) of a holy God and since He dwells among them, they must separate themselves from everything that is incompatible with His holiness. Only then can they experience God *as a Father* and know the intimacy, warmth and strength of such a close relationship.

**No.7. vii. 1 - viii. 9.**  
**pp. 161 - 165**

Chapter vii. of this epistle is obviously carrying on the theme developed in the sixth chapter. The Apostle Paul had urged the Corinthians to separate themselves from all the pagan ways that surrounded them. This was *practical sanctification* and the gracious promise was made that if they did this God would be a *Father* to them with all the wonderful teaching that this close relationship implies.

“Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (vii. 1 R.V.).

“Perfecting holiness” on the surface seems impossible. How can holiness ever be improved? *Epiteleo*, perfecting, does not mean this, but ‘to take to completion’, to ‘reach its goal’ and this is achieved in the believer when the sanctification he has already in Christ (I Cor. i. 30) is made *actual in practice*. The present participle is used, teaching us that this must be a *continual* experience day by day.

The Apostle now goes back to his theme in vi. 11-13 and he urges them to ‘open their hearts to him’ (vii. 2). He has wronged no man or taken advantage of them and is prepared to die or live together with the believers at Corinth, so closely does he feel the tie to be between them. He expresses his confidence and pride in them and is overjoyed (verse 4), especially by reason of the good news Titus had brought of their renewed regard for him. Paul goes back to the memorable meeting with Titus in Macedonia, recorded in ii. 13. He recalls the restlessness which he felt before this meeting, his anxiety as to what was happening at Corinth, whether his enemies there were getting the upper hand, and then the wonderful relief that he felt when Titus was able to tell him that the Corinthians were repentant and keen to see him again and restore the happy fellowship they had previously enjoyed. Not only this but they mourned for their past behaviour (verses 5-7). In this way God comforted the Apostle and Titus too was comforted when he saw the complete change of heart at Corinth.

As Paul thought over this, he could now see that the painful letter he sent them (see introductory studies) had achieved its object, though he wondered at the time of writing whether it would produce this result or harden them still further against him. This painful letter, as we have shown, cannot be I Corinthians but must be an epistle that does not form part of inspired Scripture.

“For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it), for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death” (vii. 8-10 R.S.V.).

As it turned out, the severe letter which Paul felt forced to write them because of their conduct, had its desired effect. It produced repentance and a change in their attitude to himself, so the temporary pain was worth while. They were now anxious to clear themselves of the guilt in which they were involved and were ashamed at what had happened and were ready to mete out discipline to the offender. They had done the right thing at every point and were now guiltless in the matter. Not only had he been greatly encouraged by all this, but it had given Titus joy too and refreshed his spirit (verse 13). The Apostle had spoken highly of the Corinthians to Titus and their change of attitude had increased the affection of Titus for them. R. Knox translates 'he bears a most affectionate memory of you' (verses 14 & 15) for they had not received him disdainfully, but in fear and trembling had responded to his message. Consequently Paul had renewed confidence in them (16).

The subject of the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem is now brought up. Something like a year had passed by since Paul last referred to it in I Cor. xvi. 1-4, and doubtless during this period of tension between him and the church, their interest in this offering had waned. The time was now propitious to remind them of this and the Apostle does so with care and tact, for he wanted this to be *voluntary* and not the result of any apostolic pressure. A long section of the epistle is devoted to this subject of Christian giving which serves as a guide to believers of all time.

Paul first of all refers to the example of the Macedonian churches in this respect:

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia, how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord . . . . but first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God” (viii. 1-5 R.V.).

These churches were at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. We note that before making any money gift to the Lord's work, they first *gave themselves to Him*. Redemption by grace means we are not our own, 'we are bought with a price', but how easy it is to cheat the Buyer of His property and not continually yield ourselves to Him! He first wants *us*, before our money, and then He is pleased to use what we possess and joyously give Him as an expression of our love and obedience. Let us remember it is easier to give a sum of money to the Lord than to give ourselves!

Secondly, they gave *joyfully and willingly*, not by compulsion, but because they evidently loved the Lord Who had given His all for them. Thirdly, they didn't wait till times were easy before they gave, rather the opposite. Paul reminded the Corinthians that these churches were going through affliction and much difficulty. I Thess. i. 6 & ii. 14 record the suffering of the Thessalonians and Paul had himself received persecution at Philippi (Acts xvi. 20) and at Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 5). Fourthly, none of these were *wealthy* churches. The Apostle talks of their deep poverty (II Cor. viii. 2).

Taking all things into consideration, one might have excused these assemblies from making a money gift or only perhaps giving a small one. Not so, for Paul refers to the

*riches of their liberality*, for they had given *beyond their power*. The greater their poverty, the greater their liberality seemed to be and furthermore they begged earnestly for the favour (grace) of taking part (fellowship) in this service for the Lord and His people. Professor R. V. G. Tasker points out that the Macedonian's poverty was partly due to the harsh treatment they had received from their Roman conquerors, who had exploited the rich natural resources of their land, and partly to the succession of civil wars which had been fought on their soil before Augustus became sole emperor.

But none of this was made as an excuse for not contributing to the gift for the impoverished Jerusalem saints. It was a case of the poor giving to the poor! and what an example this must have been to the Corinthian church and should be to us today also. Plummer's comment is apt here, 'the crowning point of their generosity was their complete self-surrender'.

Paul trusts that this will act as a stimulus to the Corinthians to complete their gift and accordingly he plans to send Titus to help them with the final stages of their donation (verse 6). He had asked them in I Cor. xvi. 2 to set aside their money gift systematically once a week, its size being decided by the way the Lord had prospered each one. It is significant that no actual sum is mentioned here or anywhere else in the N.T. In the O.T. dispensation the Lord had commanded that one tenth (the tithe) should be given to Him. In this present age of the abounding grace of God and the riches He has showered on us in Christ, we might ask ourselves, can *we* give less? This is for each child of God to decide, but the context we are studying assures us that 'God loves a cheerful giver' and he that gives to the Lord bountifully *reaps a bountiful harvest of blessing*, whereas the mean Christian can only receive back 'sparingly'. In any case, a mean believer is a contradiction in terms (II Cor. ix. 6-10).

The Apostle Paul assumes that the weekly giving of the Corinthians had been kept up and all that needed to be done was a final liberal gift to complete the sum. He reminds them that they abounded in spiritual gifts. Let them show themselves to be possessed also of the gift of liberality (viii. 7). Let them also remind themselves of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (viii. 9 R.V.).

Can we ever assess what it meant to the Lord Jesus to leave all the supreme riches connected with His Godhead and to stoop down to this poverty-stricken human life, so much so that He hadn't enough money to pay His tax! (Matt. xvii. 25-27) nor even anywhere to lay His head (Luke ix. 58). He died without a single soldier carrying out His execution! And He willingly submitted to this deep poverty for our sakes, so that we might be made eternally rich beyond all comprehension!

With all this (and more) in view, surely the Corinthians did not need any *command* to give. It was a joyous privilege so to do and we should realize that it still is for each one of us today. It should be hardly necessary to say that Christian giving in the N.T. was without any material return in the way of entertainment. When one looks around on

modern Christendom and sees the whist drives, dances, etc. arranged in order to raise funds for Christian work, one is appalled and realizes that those who do these things can have absolutely no conception of the truth of the wonderful context we are studying. If a believer wants something back for his gift to the Lord—he had better not give it in the first place, for in any case it ceases to be a *gift* to Him.

Paul now gives his Christian advice (judgment) to the Corinthian church. They had been among the first to start a collection among themselves a year before. Let them now complete it. It was vitally important that they should have a willing mind (readiness R.V.) for without this, giving is of no value. The amount must be decided by their financial resources (verses 10-12).

It was a question of *proportion* rather than a fixed sum. On the surface the widow's two mites looked a very mean gift to put into the treasury. But, said the Lord Jesus, "she hath cast *more in than all they which have cast into the treasury*; for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in *all that she had, even all her living*" (Mark xii. 43, 44). In this gift, small though it was, *she had given everything she had*, and the Lord who watched the donors took note of this. We should remind ourselves *that He still does*. God is never in any man's debt and the blessing that generous believers receive from Him outweighs all their giving, and in any case, as we have seen, all that we have is really His, and this includes our money. Let us constantly avail ourselves of the *privilege* of giving generously to the Lord Who has bought us by His supreme love and grace.

**No.8.   viii. 10 - x. 11.  
pp. 185 - 189**

We are examining the section of the epistle, namely chapters viii. and ix., which deals with the question of Christian giving in terms of money. The Corinthian church amongst others had started making a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, but somehow the work had got held up and now the Apostle Paul urges them to complete the task. He tells them that Titus would visit them to finalize this, together with two other unnamed brethren (verses 18 & 22). Titus did not need any urging to go. He had already conceived deep affection for the believers at Corinth on his previous visit (verse 17).

Who are the two brothers whom Paul does not name? The fact that he does not name them means that we cannot know them for certain, but both were well known to the various assemblies. The former one the Apostle says his 'praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches' (18) and of the latter, 'we have many times proved earnest in many things' (22). They were obviously two faithful and earnest Christians who could be relied on to handle possibly a large sum of money. Note Paul's wisdom in appointing *two men* where money was concerned, to avoid any adverse criticism of

misappropriation, for doubtless there were critics of him at Corinth who would have loved to have been able to level such a charge against him.

Some have thought that the former brother mentioned was Luke. This was Origen's opinion, but it largely rests on taking the word 'gospel' as meaning the Gospel of Luke. It is very doubtful indeed whether this Gospel was in circulation at this time and it is better in matters like this not to guess. That this brother was a well-known *preacher of the gospel* is the evident meaning. We do not know who these brethren were, but the churches most certainly did and we must leave it at that. They, together with Titus, were messengers of the churches and because of their worthy walk, were reflecting the glory of Christ (verse 23) and so Paul exhorts the Corinthians to show to them the genuineness of their Christian love.

Some have thought the beginning of chapter ix. to be somewhat awkward as though a new subject was being introduced, whereas it is the same theme of Christian giving that is continued. But *peri men gar* ('for') links it to what has gone before. Paul states that it is superfluous for him to repeat what he has already told them. He had praised them to the Macedonian churches, saying that Achaia, the Roman province that included Corinth, had been ready a year ago. There is a difficulty here for it looks as though the Apostle was going beyond what was true. But Professor R. V. Tasker points out that *parakeuastai* ('were ready') should be taken as a perfect middle rather than a perfect passive, in which case the sense would be 'was prepared' and *apo perusi* can mean 'last year' rather than 'a year ago' (Moulton and Milligan). Thus the difficulty vanishes.

Paul was not only sending the brethren to help with the completion of their gift, but also so that his commendation of them to the Macedonian churches would not be falsified. It would have been embarrassing, to say the least, had the Corinthians failed with their donation after such praise (ix. 3, 4). They should therefore complete their gift (bounty, literally blessing, *eulogia*). This willing gift would be a concrete blessing to others in need at Jerusalem. It must be a spontaneous gift of real generosity, not by compulsion, otherwise it would lose all its benefit as far as the donors were concerned (ix. 5).

Paul now goes on to describe the blessings that rest upon the generous giver to the Lord, for let us remind ourselves that our giving is first of all *to Him* and no one need feel fear of destitution who gives in this way, for the Lord is able to give back in return out of all proportion to the gift we give Him. Farming is often used in Scriptures to illustrate spiritual truths, and here the Apostle states:

"He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver" (ix. 6, 7 R.V.).

A number of passages in the O.T. confirm this. Prov. xi. 24, 25 reads:

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

The LXX reads ‘every liberal soul receives a blessing’. One of the sayings of the Lord Jesus was ‘Give, and it shall be given unto you’ (Luke vi. 38). As we have seen, this must not be done grudgingly or by compulsion, as either of these motives will spoil the gift. It is a *cheerful* and *willing* giver that God loves, and here Paul quotes from the LXX of Prov. xxii. 9, “God blesses a man who is cheerful and a giver”. One is reminded of the attitude of David with his gifts for the Lord’s house described in IChron.xxix. and note verses 14 and 17. Such giving delights the Lord’s heart and in return He multiplies grace and blessing to the donor (II Cor. ix. 8). The Apostle again quotes from the O.T., namely Psa. cxii. 9 concerning the man that fears the Lord and delights greatly in His commandments (verse 1). God will certainly enrich the generous giver so that he will have the opportunity of further giving which will lead to further thanksgiving to the Lord on the part of the recipients.

Not only this, but the love of those who receive the gift will increase towards the givers as they consider the liberality of the contribution made, and this would stimulate their prayerful remembrance of the Corinthians (ix. 13 and 14) for the exceeding grace of God which has worked in them to make this practical expression of their generosity and unselfishness.

The last thought on the subject expressed by Paul is:

“Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift” (ix. 15).

The Father’s gift of His beloved Son is the greatest of all gifts and when one contemplates the wonder and fullness of this, who can give in a niggardly way? Every time we support the Lord’s work and witness with our gifts of money, the Gift of all gifts should be constantly before our minds.

The Apostle Paul now changes the subject and deals with his personal ministry and the opposing minority at Corinth who constantly criticized him. They evidently accused him of being lowly or humble when with them face to face, but bold (‘of good courage’) when at a distance writing letters to them. But he followed One Who was ‘meek and lowly at heart’ (Matt. xi. 29) and so he ever sought to walk in this spirit, but if they did not realize this but opposed his apostolic authority, then he would be forced to adopt a different attitude. Paul was always reluctant to use severity, so he appeals to those who were confounding his gentleness with timidity to so behave that he may not have to deal with them severely in person when he visited Corinth. They may say that he was walking ‘according to the flesh’ (x. 3) but he forcibly reminds them:

“. . . . we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strong holds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (x. 3b, 4, 5 R.V.).

The Christian warfare is a spiritual one and not with flesh and blood (Eph. vi. 12), and carnal weapons are utterly useless here. Human cleverness, eloquent speech, organizing ability and propaganda are absolutely unavailing in the task of pulling down the

strongholds where Satan and evil are entrenched. Nothing less than the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, is needed here to overthrow all that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring it into captivity and obedience to Christ.

If entreaty is ineffective, the Apostle is ready to use his apostolic authority bestowed by the risen Christ when every disobedience would be dealt with and punished. Verse 7 is rendered as a question in the A.V. and a fact in the R.V. Either is permissible from the Greek and the verb can be either imperative or indicative, so three translations are possible: 'look on', 'you look on' or 'do you look on?'. "The things that are before your face" means things after the outward appearance. The Apostle apparently is reprimanding those who were judging merely by external appearance without going any deeper. His opponents claimed to have the authority of Christ; so did he likewise, for it was by special revelation that he had received the gospel of grace (Gal. i. 11, 12).

Even if he was to boast of his apostolic commission he could do so without shame or exaggeration:

"For though I should glory somewhat abundantly concerning our authority (which the Lord gave for building you up, and not for casting you down), I shall not be put to shame" (x. 8 R.V.).

Yet he did not wish to terrify them by his letters. Even his enemies had to admit that his letters were weighty and strong, even if his bodily presence was weak and his speech of no account (x. 9 and 10). And this characteristic of his epistles has been admitted ever since by all those who have seriously considered them. Where his detractors at Corinth made a mistake was in assuming that the Apostle could not act with the same vigour and directness when he was personally with them. He warns such:

"Let such a one reckon this, that, what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such are we also in deed when we are present" (x. 11 R.V.).

These people commended themselves, measuring themselves with themselves, making their own standards, and exalting themselves in their own estimation and conceit. "Self-praise is no recommendation", but some of the Corinthians were doing it unashamedly and were therefore without true understanding (x. 12 R.V.). If Paul is going to boast about his apostolic achievements, he will keep it within well-defined limits, that is, the sphere appointed to him by Christ as the minister of the gospel of the uncircumcision. This principle had been recognized by Peter, James and John at Jerusalem (Gal. ii. 9) and the Apostle never built on another's foundation or intruded into someone else's sphere of witness (Rom. xv. 20).

In other words he was a pioneer missionary to the Gentiles and therefore Corinth came within his bounds, for he was the first to preach the gospel there, and it was predominantly a Gentile church. In view of this the false apostles were ministering at Corinth merely with the position they had arrogated to themselves.

**No.9. x. 12 - xi. 11.**  
**pp. 206 - 210**

The Apostle Paul has been stressing the province for service marked out for him by the risen Lord, which, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, he would not exceed or encroach into another's territory. This sphere, of course, included Corinth where the church had been founded by his faithful pioneering preaching of the gospel. His opponents there were interlopers. They had no right to interfere and they came with no commendation but their own. Yet there were some at Corinth who were listening to them! Paul, however, looks to the future and the possibility that Corinth may be a base for the extension of the gospel witness to lands beyond (II Cor. x. 15, 16). He does not specify these places, but doubtless they would include other parts of the Balkan peninsula, and after this Rome and even Spain (Rom. xv. 24, 28). He had no need to boast in another man's labours or sphere (II Cor. x. 16). The only true ground of boasting was the Lord Jesus and what He had done through His servants: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (quoting from Jer. ix. 24).

One remembers that when Paul and Barnabas returned from the first missionary journey, they rehearsed to the church at Antioch, not what *they* had done, but "all that *God had done with them* and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts xiv. 27) and when Paul wrote to the Roman Church he said concerning his ministry:

"I have therefore my glorying in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God. For I will not dare to speak of any things *save those which Christ wrought through me*, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv. 17, 18 R.V.).

In chapter xi. the Apostle comes closer to the problem that the false apostles at Corinth were making. They did not hesitate to parade their so-called credentials and were obviously influencing some in the church. Because of this and Paul's great concern for the believers there, he is forced to do something he would have rather avoided and that is to indulge in what was apparently self-commendation, the thing he had just condemned! "A little foolishness" he called it, but so much was at stake that he is compelled to compare his own true apostleship with the false apostleship of his opponents.

His motive was a godly jealousy (xi. 2) such as God Himself had for the people of Israel in the O.T., this nation standing towards Him in the relationship of a wife to a husband. His yearning over them, especially when they went after other 'lovers', is described in many O.T. passages, and it is this same intense feeling that Paul had for the Corinthian church:

"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (xi. 2 R.V.).

If the nation of Israel was looked upon as the faithless wife of Jehovah, the Bride represents the faithful remnant that remained true to the Lord all through; such, from faithful Abraham onwards, looked forward by faith to the better country linked with the heavenly Jerusalem whose destiny is the new earth (Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 2, 10) and this city is the Bride of the Lamb (Rev. xxi. 2, 9). This sphere would include the faithful and those that went on to perfection (Heb. vi. 1) in the Acts period, and those who are tested and found faithful on the future Day of the Lord, and it was Paul's great aim that those to whom he ministered, including the believers at Corinth, should be included in this favoured company. It is important to grasp that the heavenly city is a *reward sphere* for overcomers in Israel and those Gentiles linked with Israel. There is, therefore, no need to confuse this with the later revelation of the "Joint Body" of Christ, yet to be blessed with Christ in the heavenlies, 'far above all'.

Paul's godly concern for these Corinthian believers made him fear:

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (xi. 3 R.V.).

This fear centred in the possibility of 'another Jesus' being presented to them by his enemies, together with 'another gospel' and 'a different spirit' to what they originally received. Here is Satan with his most deceptive wiles, the 'angel of light', preaching a 'Jesus' and a 'gospel' which, although appearing to be right on the surface, is false to the core and has one object, to oust the Christ of the New Testament from His rightful place as the only Saviour and Lord. And we can be sure of one thing, *this activity of Satan has been going on in Christendom in this same way ever since.*

Every professing Christian movement must of necessity bring in Christ, but we should ask ourselves in all seriousness, is it the Christ of the Scriptures, the holy Word of God, or the Christ of men's imagination? Too often, alas, it is the latter, and indiscriminating listeners, who keep the Book shut, are easily deceived into thinking that the Christ they hear about and profess to follow is the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament! False Christs today are being proclaimed everywhere from pulpits and platforms just as the Lord Jesus predicted would be one of the characteristics of the 'end of the age' with its Satanic deception (Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 11, 24, 25). Never was there more need for all to test what they hear over the radio or television or in the churches, with the Word of God.

We should beware too of the use of the word 'gospel'. Like the word 'democracy', it can mean *anything the user cares to make it mean.* Every church or chapel today professes to 'preach the gospel', but how often is it the true gospel which Paul stated he had received 'by the revelation of Jesus Christ'? (Gal. i. 11, 12). To the Galatian churches he complained some were being 'removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another gospel:* which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would *pervert the gospel of Christ*' (Gal. i. 6, 7), and this is still going on around us. There never was such a time of world-wide confusion and deception, and we should remember that the Saviour warned that the ultimate object was, if possible, 'to

deceive the very elect' (Matt. xxiv. 24), and to do this what is put forward *must look like the real thing*, so let us be alert to this all the time.

Such corruption of the truth was being foisted upon the Corinthian church by the false apostles and no wonder the Apostle Paul was concerned lest their minds should be beguiled as Eve's was when she listened to the voice of the serpent (xi. 30).

"For if he that cometh preacheth *another Jesus*, whom we did not preach, or if ye receive a *different spirit*, which ye did not receive, or a *different gospel*, which ye did not accept, ye do well to bear with him" (xi. 4 R.V.).

It should be pointed out that both the A.V. and R.V. in the last phrase of verse 4 miss the point and actually give the impression that the Corinthians would be doing a good thing to tolerate these false teachers with their deception! "Ye might well bear with him" A.V., "Ye do well to bear with him" R.V. The R.S.V. gives the true sense, "You submit to it readily enough" and this was tragic, after they had received the Truth as ministered so faithfully to them by the Apostle Paul. To listen to and bear with such impostors was to be misled and dominated by them. Paul could say with truth:

"For I reckon I am not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (xi. 5 R.V.).

Who are these superlative apostles? There are two explanations. (1) They are the leaders of the Jerusalem assembly, Peter, James and John. (2) They refer to the false apostles at Corinth whose conceit arrogated to themselves the position of the most important apostles, and Paul is referring in irony to them. It is not easy to decide which is the more likely to be true. If the reference concerns the Jerusalem apostles, then it is his *opponents' portrayal of them* that he is criticizing, i.e., they were asserting that Paul's apostleship could not compare with the leaders at Jerusalem. The Apostle is certainly not directly criticizing the latter's position or witness. We do know that, when his own ministry was being considered at Jerusalem as recorded in Gal. ii., he referred to Peter, James and John as those who 'seemed to be somewhat' (Gal. ii. 6), but here the burning question of his own apostleship was at stake at the very beginning, and there could be no compromise with 'those who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus' who evidently associated themselves with the Jerusalem leaders, and probably asserted that their apostleship was greater than Paul's.

Again, such language as the 'very chiefest apostles' could hardly apply to anyone but them. Whatever is the true interpretation here, one thing is certain, namely, Paul's apostleship was the equal of any other and quite independent of them. He owed nothing to human leaders as far as his Apostleship goes. The threefold stress 'not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ' (Gal. i. 1, 11, 12, 16, 17) shows this quite clearly, and he now demonstrates this truth in the passage with which we are dealing.

Another important point to note is that the quality of his divine calling did not depend on the ability to speak fluently and persuasively:

"But though I be unskilled (rude) in speech, yet am I not in knowledge" (xi. 6),

and moreover he had already written to the Corinthian church, giving his reasons for avoiding mere oratory, so that their faith should stand in God and not the human ability of any speaker (I Cor. ii. 4, 5). No one could deny the Apostle's deep knowledge of the Truth. By this time this should have been abundantly plain.

Another thing that still rankled with some was the fact that he refused to accept material support from them, though he had done so from other churches. The reason for this he had made clear in I Cor. ix. He would not be beholden to them in any way, though, as this chapter clearly shows, he had the right to do so as an apostle. By not doing so he appeared to 'abase himself' in this capacity (II Cor. xi. 7). Had he received material gifts, it would surely have been misrepresented by his critics and the last thing he wished was to appear to be sponging on them. Consequently he supported himself by tent-making (Acts xviii. 3) when he was at Corinth.

In this way he did not burden anyone there, though it might have seemed on the surface as 'robbery' to accept money support from other churches (xi. 8). His needs were supplied by brethren from the Macedonian churches (xi. 9). The reason for his independent spirit in connection with the Corinthian church was certainly not due to lack of love (xi. 9-11). God was his witness to that. Rather, as we have seen, it was to give no opportunity for his enemies, the false apostles, to have any grounds for accusation and criticism. The Apostle Paul was a wise man. He had learned to do what he had exhorted others to do, to walk in wisdom, even if this was at considerable cost to himself.

**No.10. xi. 12 - 29.**  
**pp. 226 - 231**

Continuing our study of the eleventh chapter of II Corinthians, we are dealing with the section where the Apostle Paul, owing to misrepresentation on the part of his critics at Corinth, was forced to stress the superlative nature of his Christ-given apostleship, although this was very distasteful to him as it appeared to be self-praise. He had refused material support from the church and earned his own living by tent-making when he was with them. As he explains, this was not because he was too proud to receive such support, but rather because he would not give his opponents any opportunity to accuse him of making money out of them.

He now speaks of them in scathing terms:

“And I shall go on doing as I am doing now, to cut the ground from under those who would seize any chance to put their vaunted apostleship on the same level as ours. Such men are sham apostles, crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ. There is nothing surprising about that; Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is therefore a simple thing for his agents to masquerade as agents of good” (xi. 12-15, N.E.B.).

Satan goes about as a roaring lion ‘seeking whom he may devour’ Peter tells us (IPet.v.8). But more dangerous still is when he comes disguised as an angel of light and poses as a minister of truth! And never let us forget that he quotes the Bible when it suits his purpose (Matt. iv. 6). In fact, he knows the Word of God much better than many Christians and so do his ministers. These can be outwardly good living people with a show of righteousness, but underneath, they, like their master, are deceivers and one day will receive their just due from God. We need to be constantly on our guard lest we are carried away by any such deception, which alas, is everywhere around us today.

Paul now returns to his so-called ‘boasting’. With a little irony he tells the Corinthians that they bear with fools, as they are so wise themselves (xi. 19). Not only this, but some of them were putting up with those who enslaved them and took advantage of them:

“For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face” (xi. 20 R.S.V.).

If they went so far as this, surely they could tolerate the Apostle when he indulged in a little boasting! He compares himself with the false apostles at Corinth, showing in every way he exceeded all their personal claims:

“But whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater honours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches” (xi. 21-28, R.S.V.).

What a list of suffering and testing! Apart from the Son of God, did anyone ever approach this man in the cost that he willingly paid as a faithful servant of Christ? If his critics at Corinth had any spark of decency in them, they ought to have felt ashamed when they read these words. And when we read them today, do they not make us feel that we have hardly started to suffer for Christ yet, no matter what we have experienced? Every one of these statements is true without exaggeration and Paul calls God to witness to this fact (xi. 31).

The Corinthian troublemakers evidently boasted of their descent. Were they Hebrews? So was he; in fact he could call himself ‘a Hebrew of the Hebrews’ (Phil. iii. 5). A distinction is made in Acts vi. 1 where ‘Grecians’ are Jews of Greek language and culture and Hebrews who were Palestinian in origin and could speak Aramaic as Paul did in dealing with the crowd at Jerusalem recorded in Acts xxi. 40.

To be an Israelite was to claim a title of privilege, for Israel were a people chosen by God for His own peculiar possession to be guardians of His law, and to represent Him to the outside world. Paul was also a descendant of Abraham and not merely physically so 'in Israel', but spiritually, a distinction the letter to the Romans was to make abundantly clear (Rom. ix. 7). But coming to service for Christ, he leaves claims of birth for achievement and here, comparison with other servants of Christ appears to be self-aggrandizement and the utterance of someone out of his senses. However, he is forced to do it by his enemies' belittling of his apostolic status and witness.

Comparing with his detractors, Paul could say that he had undertaken more arduous campaigns in advancing the gospel (labours more abundant). He had suffered excessive corporal punishment, such as they had never endured. He had been imprisoned more frequently. Up to the writing of II Corinthians we only have the record of one imprisonment, i.e. at Philippi (Acts xvi.). Clement of Rome, writing in 96A.D. asserts that Paul was cast into prison seven times. Some modern scholars believe he was in prison at Ephesus during his stay recorded in Acts xix.

Five times he received the severe beatings by the Jews which were allowed under the law (Deut. xxv. 1-3). To assure that the maximum number of stripes was not exceeded ('forty' 40) it was ordained that this was limited to 39, a lash containing three thongs being used. Possibly from these beatings Paul nearly died ('in deaths oft'). Three times he was thrashed by the Roman authorities, one of these being at Philippi when he and Silas were beaten by the lictors' rods (Acts xvi. 22), although as a Roman citizen this was illegal. This was another experience of severe pain.

Once he was stoned and left for dead. This was at Lystra (Acts xiv. 19). Paul's experience of shipwreck must have been before the one described in Acts xxvii. on his way to Rome. A day and a night he was adrift at sea, possibly clinging to a fragment of a wreck. His travels were mostly dangerous owing to the brigands who infested the roads. Dangers from his own people, the Jews, from the Gentiles and in the city are graphically portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. Perhaps the most bitter for the Apostle was 'danger from false brethren'. Open enmity outside is bad enough, but treachery within is worse and this has occurred right through the history of Christendom, starting with Judas among the original apostles.

On top of all this there was weariness and painfulness ('toil and hardship' R.S.V.) possibly referring to his manual labour, sleepless nights, through such experiences, hunger and thirst often, and as a climax, the burden and responsibility of all the churches, not just the one at Corinth, with their subversive doctrines, internal discord and unChristlike behaviour. What a weight to carry! "A daily pressure" Paul calls it and, but for the mighty enabling grace of God, he must have succumbed to it all long before this. In spite of everything, he was in sympathetic touch with all the churches' problems:

"Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I burn not?" (xi. 29 R.V.).

The Apostle could feel the weakness of some as though it was his own and he burned with indignation when others thoughtlessly upset a weaker believer by bad example and treatment.

This record of what it cost the Apostle Paul to follow his risen Lord faithfully seems incredible. Was ever a human experience like it? He solemnly states that God could vouch for the fact that it was all true in every detail (xi. 31). We should compare similar assertions in Gal. i. 20; Rom. ix. 1 and I Tim. ii. 7. The section is ended by narrating his escape from King Aretas at Damascus (Acts ix. 23-25) soon after his conversion. Aretas was a title for Arabian kings like 'Pharaoh' was used in Egypt. This king reigned over Nabataea, between the Red Sea and the Euphrates, from B.C.9 to 40A.D. He was father-in-law to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee at the time of the earthly ministry of Christ. Paul had evidently incurred the enmity of this Aretas and that, together with the enmity of the Jews, caused him to make this dramatic escape through a little door or window in the city wall, through which he was lowered in a basket. This indeed was a foretaste of the great suffering and trials yet to come.

In dealing with his Corinthian enemies Paul now passes on to visions and revelations. They, too, possibly claimed to have received visions and once again the Apostle shows that in this respect, as in all others, he was their superior. Or they could have belittled his apostleship because it was based on a vision. The record of the Acts makes it clear that Paul received a number of visions of the risen Lord for imparting truth to him and guiding him in his ministry, commencing with the dramatic confrontation on the road to Damascus. Acts xviii. 9 records one at Corinth, another at Jerusalem during his last visit there (Acts xxiii. 11), another on the voyage to Rome (Acts xxvii. 23). See also Acts ix. 12 & xvi. 9 and note the promise of a future appearing of the Lord to him in Acts xxvi. 16 with further truth.

From these records we can see that the Apostle experienced a number of visions of and concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He now speaks of himself impersonally, possibly to avoid the appearance of further boasting, very similar to the way in which the Apostle John in the fourth Gospel refers to himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. It has been suggested that Paul is not speaking of a revelatory experience of his in this context, but refers to the vision that John was given which is recorded in the Revelation concerning Paradise. But we should ask ourselves, in what sense does this fit the context which deals with Paul's vindication of his ministry and the spurious claims of the false teachers at Corinth? Paul was at pains to show that his experiences of Divine visions were far superior to any his opponents could claim to have had. The fact that John had a similar revelation does not touch the point at issue. Nor can it be proved that John was the only believer who was ever granted such a revelation. Abraham and those who followed in his steps of overcoming faith, saw the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem and country that John describes (Heb. xi. 8-10, 13-16) and for this they were willing to be strangers and pilgrims and forego much here and now.

Moreover, to keep Paul from becoming too elated and proud because of the abundance of the revelations which he had received concerning Paradise, the Lord gave the Apostle

the counter-balancing 'thorn in the flesh'. When he talks about the 'abundance of the revelations' he is surely speaking of his own experience, not that of the Apostle John. It would be difficult to understand why Paul should receive a thorn in the flesh because John had had an abundant revelation!

We therefore believe that in chapter xii. the Apostle is recounting his own great visionary experience in a modest manner. Let us not forget he states he will now pass on to visions and revelations of the Lord and the context is still that of dealing with his Corinthian opponents in connection with whom he has clearly shown he is infinitely superior in service and suffering.

## The Second Epistle to the Corinthians

No.11. xii. 1 - 10.

pp. 6 - 10

We continue with our consideration of Paul's vindication of his ministry with respect to his opponents in the Corinthian church. He has already shown that this ministry was more than equal to that of his critics both in faithfulness and personal suffering and endurance.

In chapter xii. he passes on to visions and revelations of the Lord. This suggests that his enemies were also claiming to have such visions and revelations, but here again his experience far outweighed theirs. He is so averse to personal boasting and the exaltation of self that he begins to speak of himself impersonally:

“I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven” (II Cor. xii. 2, R.V.).

The A.V. “I *knew* a man” is incorrect here and also in verse 3. This gives the impression that the man referred to was no longer known to Paul!

We have already noted that the book of the Acts records a number of appearances of the Lord Jesus to the Apostle, but the one he is dealing with here cannot be equated with any of these, unless we add our own thoughts and ideas to Luke's narrative, and this we refuse to do. Nor must we make the mistake of identifying these ‘fourteen years’ with the fourteen years of Gal. ii. 1. If we go back from the probable date of the epistle we arrive at the time when Paul was sent to Tarsus and then fetched by Barnabas from Tarsus to Antioch (Acts ix. 30; xi. 25). About this time he was caught away to the third heaven. The Greek verb is found in Acts viii. 39 where it is stated that “the Spirit of the Lord *caught away* Philip” who was found later on at Azotus. It is also used in I Thess. iv. 17 which describes the Lord's *parousia*, His arrival on the earth, to set up the earthly Kingdom. Those believers who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* to meet the Lord in the air and then return with Him in His triumphal procession to the earth in power and great glory attended by the angels of heaven.

The expressions ‘the third heaven’ occurs only here in the N.T., but one must not forget the phrase ‘all heavens’ in Eph. iv. 10 in connection with the Lord's ascension. While we sometimes read of *heaven* in the singular in the Bible, describing the whole heavenly sphere, yet this is obviously subdivided into sections, otherwise Eph. iv. 10 and II Cor. xii. 2 are meaningless. We cannot tell how many sections there are, for this is not revealed\*, but there must be at least three or more. Peter, in his second epistles refers to (1) the heavens that were of old [II Pet. iii. 5], (2) the heavens and the earth that are now [verse 7] and (3) a new heaven and a new earth yet to be created wherein dwelleth righteousness [verse 13].

{\* - It is interesting to know that in Jewish writing about the time of Christ, *seven* heavens were enumerated. cf. *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, “The Testament of Levi”, chapter 3.}

So there are three heavens *in time* as well as at least three departments of heaven itself. The Apostle John, in the Revelation, links this new creation with Paradise (Rev. ii. 7), so it would appear that both Paul and John were given a preview, as it were, of this wonderful new heaven and earth where at last is absolute perfection and untold glory and joy. The word 'paradise', a Persian word meaning 'park', is used in the LXX of the garden of Eden and in the Revelation of the new earth. We should note that in both cases it is linked with *the earth* and not with heaven.

The rapturous experience that Paul had was beyond expression in human words. He did not know whether it was 'in the body' or 'out of the body' (verse 2). He says nothing about what he *saw*. What he *heard* he describes as 'unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter'. The Scriptures say little about resurrection life after death. Suffice it to say that it is so wonderful that there are no human means of adequately describing it. But its superlative and eternal wonders are real, and faith is willing to wait until the day of glory when all the shadows and limitations will have gone and we shall know and enjoy fully the pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore (Psa.xvi.11).

Such an extended revelation might have puffed up the pride of any man and even the Apostle was not immune from this, for he states:

"And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated" (xii. 7, R.S.V.).

Our heavenly Father, in His love and wisdom, knows how to balance us up so that we can remain in the centre of His will and be usable by Him. Some Pentecostals assert that all bodily ailments are foreign to the will of the Lord for the believer. The Lord's death, they claim, was to save us from bodily illness as well as from our sins.

However, this is completely disproved by Paul's experience here. Three times he prayed and asked the Lord to remove the 'thorn'. Doubtless he thought he could do better work for the Lord if he was relieved of this burden. But the Lord's answer was 'No'. He said to the Apostle 'My grace is sufficient for you and My power is made perfect in weakness'. There was a lesson that Paul had to learn through the experience of 'the thorn', so the Lord did not remove it.

We should be wise too, if, instead of asking for our 'thorns' to be removed, we prayed that we might learn whatever lesson the Lord wants to teach us in the experience we are undergoing. Let us not make the mistake of keeping grace to the gospel of salvation. Grace, as well as saving, strengthens, guides and enables us to become 'more than conquerors through Him Who loved us' (Rom. viii. 37). In fact, grace follows us all through our earthly pilgrimage and service, and will be with us till the day of glory dawns, and there is not a moment we can dispense with it.

Just what was Paul's thorn in the flesh? Many have been the opinions of believers on this point. Professor F. F. Bruce summarizes some of them:

“Pain in the ear or head (Tertullian). Such troublesome characters as Hymenaeus and Alexander (Chrysostom), epilepsy (M. Krenkel, J. Klausner), ophthalmia (J. T. Brain), convulsive attacks (M. Dibelius), sufferings caused by constant persecutions (J. Murick), attacks of depression after periods of exaltation (H. Clavier), the agony caused by the unbelief of his Jewish brethren (P. H. Menoud), malaria (W. M. Ramsay, E. B. Allo), or by the memory of his persecution of the church (A. Osiander, A Schlatter).”

The very variety of ideas shows that certainty is unattainable. The Greek *skolops* means ‘thorn’ or ‘splinter’ rather than ‘stake’ (R.V. margin). This is confirmed by the LXX (compare Numb. xxxiii. 55; Ezek. xxviii. 24; Hosea ii. 6). The examples of this word in the papyri strongly confirm this rendering. The dative case (*te sarki*) could be either locative ‘in the flesh’, or a ‘*dativus incommodi*’, ‘for the inconvenience of the flesh’. If the latter, then we have to understand the word ‘flesh’ in the peculiar sense of the sinful old nature. This was the interpretation of the Reformers and some of the early Fathers who regarded the word in a spiritual way, sent by the Lord ‘for the flesh’, i.e., to quell any possible pride or arrogance that might have arisen in the Apostle after such an exalted experience.

However, we believe that the plain, literal meaning of the Bible, wherever it makes good sense and is in accord with the general teaching of Scripture, is always to be preferred to ‘spiritualizing’. That Paul suffered severe physical trials, II Corinthians has already made clear in chapter vii. In Gal. iv. 13-15 the Apostle referred to a physical ailment evidently connected with his eyes, for he bears witness to the fact that the Galatian believers would have given him their own eyes if they could have done so. It would appear that he suffered from a chronic and ugly discharge from his eyes. The word ‘reject’ in verse 14 is literally ‘splitting out’ something offensive. In spite of this affliction which sometimes made him look revolting, these believers loved him so much that they could completely overlook this. And after his vision of the glory of the risen Saviour at his conversion which he described as “above the brightness of the sun” (Acts xxvi. 13), and which rendered him blind for three days (Acts ix. 9), we can well believe that his eyes were left permanently weak. Satan could have aggravated this condition, for the Word of God reveals that with the Lord’s permission, he can affect the body. Job was an O.T. example, and the bent woman in Luke xiii. 16 (described as ‘whom Satan hath bound’) is another.

However, the Lord’s grace is all-sufficient at all times and for every experience; as He said, “My power is made perfect in weakness” (II Cor. xii. 9). Thus, when the effectiveness of Paul’s preaching was so evident, then the transcendent power was manifestly the Lord’s and not his own. This was a witness in itself. “Most gladly therefore”, he said, “will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (verse 9). This is not the statement of a fanatic who rejoices in pain, but rather of one who is being protected by the overshadowing and almighty power of Christ. The phrase ‘may rest upon me’, means literally ‘may pitch His tent upon me’, a beautiful thought.

Thus he was able to endure the ‘thorn’ and the sufferings it cause, *for Christ’s sake*. No one in his senses can take pleasure in suffering which is brought on either by

inflicting upon himself or is the consequence on his own folly, but the believer, *for the Lord's sake*, can even welcome it, for then he can be strong, not in himself, but in the Lord and the power of His might (Eph. vi. 10).

A new section now starts in the Corinthian epistle which deals with the signs of a true apostle. Paul has now finished what he termed his foolish boasting which was forced upon him by his enemies at Corinth. May we all learn the lesson of the 'thorn that remains', and the glorious overshadowing power of the Saviour which can be our continual experience.

**No.12.   xii. 11 - xiii. 14.**  
**pp. 21 - 26**

Chapter xii. 11 commences a new section in this epistle. Paul has finished his 'foolish boasting'. As we have seen, it would not have been necessary for him to have started it had not his opposers at Corinth forced him to do so by reason of their exalting themselves and belittling him as the apostle of Christ. He could say 'in nothing was I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I am nothing' (verse 11). The Corinthians had had the miraculous signs of a true apostle manifested before their eyes when Paul evangelized their city:

"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works" (II Cor. xii. 12, R.V.).

Just as Christ's earthly ministry to Israel had been confirmed by evidential miracles ('miracles, wonders and signs' Acts ii. 22) as also was the witness of the Jerusalem apostles (Acts ii. 43), so had the ministry of Paul been so attested by God. There could be no doubt then of his apostleship. None of the false apostles at Corinth could claim such Divine credentials. Why did some of them then doubt him? They had enjoyed all the blessings that other churches had received through his ministry. Why should they then think they had received inferior treatment (xii. 13)? He had refused to be burdensome to them and for this 'wrong' he ironically begs their pardon.

Paul now refers to a third visit in verse 14. The second visit to them was the 'painful' one referred to in ii. 1. This third visit would also prove painful if the situation warranted it (see xiii. 1, 2), though the Apostle doubtless fervently hoped that they would mend their ways and make such apostolic discipline unnecessary.

Once more he makes known his motives to them. He does not want to be a burden, nor does he want their property, but it is *themselves* he is anxious to win. They are his spiritual children and as such it was right for him as their spiritual father to make provision for them, not the reverse (verse 14). He is prepared to go to the limit in spending himself for their spiritual profit and his love for them was unbounded. If only theirs for him had been likewise! (verse 15).

He continues:

“But be it so, I did not myself burden you, but, being crafty, I caught you with guile”  
(xii. 16, R.V.).

The latter part of the verse must not be misunderstood. The Apostle had stated in chapter iv. 2 that he had renounced craftiness (*panourgia*), so he certainly was not being crafty (*panourgos*) in his dealings with the Corinthian church. Rather he is quoting what some at Corinth were saying about him. The R.S.V. makes this clear by supplying the words ‘you say’.

He challenges them to say if he had taken advantage of them in financial or other matters through any of his messengers:

“Did Titus take any advantage of you?”

The question is expressed so as to require the answer “No”, for it is introduced by the negative *me*. Paul had urged Titus to visit them in connection with their money gift for the poor saints at Jerusalem (cp. viii. 6 and 17). Only one brother is mentioned here accompanying him, whereas two are mentioned in chapter viii. 18. One is probably omitted here because he was not Paul’s representative, but sent as a delegate from one of the other churches who were contributing. Titus’ companions are called ‘messengers of the churches’ in viii. 23.

Paul now further challenges them:

“Ye think all this time that we are excusing ourselves unto you. In the sight of God speak we in Christ. But all things, beloved, are for your edifying” (xii. 19, R.V.).

This could be read as a question “Have you been thinking . . . .?” The Apostle was not concerned about his own reputation. As one sent by Christ he knew what constituted his ministry and this was principally the building up of believers everywhere. What he desired above all things was their spiritual growth and maturity.

The last thing he wanted was to find them in the same state as when he made the ‘painful’ visit. This would not only be painful to them, but to him also. He would certainly feel humbled if he continued to find some of them indulging in the sins listed in verse 20. He would then ‘mourn for many who had sinned and not repented’ (verse 21) for this would probably mean excommunication.

Once again, in the first verse of chapter xiii., he refers to his proposed third visit and also to Deut. xix. 15 (and compare xvii. 6 and Numb. xxxv. 30), where accusation must be backed up by more than one witness to avoid a false charge. Again he warns them that he will be forced to deal ruthlessly with those who ignored him and continued in their evil ways, just as he did on his second visit (verse 2), and this statement shows us that this upsetting visit actually took place although we only have allusions to it.

Some had evidently said that his reluctance to use his apostolic power in judgment meant that in reality he was no apostle:

“Since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me, He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (xiii. 3 & 4, R.S.V.).

To all such he asserts that the power of Christ would be a reality amongst them and he would be a vehicle of that power. By worldly standards the Lord was ‘crucified in weakness’, but Christ crucified in reality was the power of God (I Cor. i. 18) and this power would be manifested in no uncertain way in their midst.

Did they demand proof of his apostleship? Let them examine themselves first and test the genuineness of their own faith:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (xiii. 5, R.S.V.).

The Apostle expresses the hope that the Corinthians will realize that he is no ‘counterfeit’ (*adokimos*, reprobate) apostle. Also that they may not do wrong, rather the reverse (verses 6 and 7). He would gladly appear to be weak in their eyes, as long as they are strong, not in themselves, but in Christ and the power He alone can impart:

“This we also pray for, even your perfecting” (xiii. 9, R.V.).

The word translated ‘perfecting’ here is *katartisis*, which is cognate with *katartizesthe*, ‘be perfected’ in verse 11. This is not the usual word which means maturity as ‘let us go on to maturity (perfection)’ of Heb. vi. 1. *Katartizo* is twice rendered *mending* their nets in Matt. iv. 21 and Mark i. 19. It occurs in Gal. vi. 1 where a believer who is overtaken in a fault is *restored*. The word means ‘restoration to wholeness’, and usually there is the thought of rupture in the background.

At Corinth there was certainly rupture and disunity caused by sin and failing, and Paul is concerned to see this lamentable condition remedied and full unity in walk and witness restored. If this was done there would be no need for him to have to deal severely with offenders when he visited them:

“For this cause I write these things while absent, that I may not when present deal sharply, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down” (xiii. 10, R.V.).

Thus he feels it essential to repeat himself (see x. 8) and warn them again, doubtless hoping that this would be effective, so avoiding another painful confrontation such as had occurred on his second visit. Paul was always desirous of constructive building up. It is a rewarding study to note the contexts which deal with ‘edification’ which is at the root of all profitable ministry and teaching. It is so easy to tear down and criticize, but it takes a real knowledge of the Word of God together with patience and wisdom to build up believers in the Truth.

We now come to the final exhortation, greetings and benediction in xiii. 11-14:

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (xiii. 11-14, R.S.V.).

“Be comforted” (verse 11 R.V.). *Parakaleo* can mean ‘be exhorted’ or ‘be comforted’, but in view of the context ‘exhort’ is better. It could be taken as the middle voice rather than the passive and then it could be rendered ‘exhort one another’. The title the ‘God of love and peace’ is not found elsewhere in the N.T. It is possible that, in view of the fact that the Corinthian failure was due to lack of practical love to the Lord and to one another, that love is linked with peace here.

As in I Cor. xvi. 20, they are advised to greet one another with a holy kiss. This was the recognized form of salutation in those days, very much like shaking hands is today. We are not sure who the saints were who joined with Paul in salutation, as we cannot say with certainty where the Apostle was when he dispatched this letter. In all probability they belonged to one of the Macedonian churches.

Paul, as his custom was, now writes the benediction with its reference to grace, that wonderful gift that was at the heart of all his faithful ministry and witness. He uses a Trinitarian formula, a threefold expression of the Godhead. While the word ‘trinity’ is not used in the holy Scriptures, yet the *fact* of it certainly is, whatever those who deny the Lord’s deity may say.

And so we come to the end of one of the most personal of Paul’s letters, revealing his personality possibly more than any other.

What was the effect of this epistle on the Corinthian church? The answer is we do not know, for Scripture does not give us any indication as to the result. However, forty years later, we have information about the church at Corinth in the letter addressed to it from the Roman church, traditionally known as the first epistle of Clement (of Rome). In it we find that division and anarchy are still in evidence and there is little indication that this church had made much progress towards spiritual maturity. This reminds us of the fact that the apostolic age was not ideal in unity and purity of doctrine and practice as is sometimes asserted. In our booklet, *The Early Centuries and the Truth* we have sought to show that few really gripped the truth given through the Apostle in his day and the succeeding generations.

If we today are rejoicing in any knowledge of the ‘unsearchable riches of Christ’ made known through Paul, how thankful we should be and how diligently we should be seeking to make this known to others while the day of grace lasts!