

2 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Possibly in A.D. 57, as soon as Titus had arrived back from Corinth, bringing news of the reception of the first letter, Paul, then living in Macedonia, penned this second letter to the Corinthians.

There is a good deal of Paul's personal circumstances, feelings, activities, and attitude to his own ministry in this highly interesting letter. The Corinthian church appears to have disciplined the guilty member referred to in the first letter, and Paul recommends his restoration to the fellowship of the church.

Again, in this letter Paul had to defend his own divine commission as messenger, and even had to threaten strong action against his opponents in a personal visit.

Throughout this letter, the reader cannot help sensing how "human" was Paul, and how genuine in his concern for the young and struggling churches under his care.

Paul gives us more of his personal history here than in any of his other letters. He reveals his courage and his self-sacrificing love; and he tells us of some things that happened in his life which are revealed only in this epistle: These are: His escape from Damascus in a basket; his experience of being caught up to third heaven; his thorn in the flesh; and his unusual suffering.

Because of these, accompanied by his faithfulness, this letter—

Begins with "comfort" – "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3)

Closes with "comfort" – "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11)

In the middle we find the reason for "comfort" – "That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8)

The source of this "comfort" – "My grace is sufficient for thee ..." (2 Cor. 12:9)

(What the Bible is All About, Henrietta C. Mears)

2 Corinthians 1:1-14

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians gives us a picture of the apostolic church, the second gives us the testimony of the apostle himself. It is intensely personal, and introduces us to the deepest experience of this man who stood nearest of all to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. His testimony in the present passage has reference to suffering—victorious suffering—suffering so borne as to bring out of it not only triumph but boundless blessing to other lives as well as his own. This passage contains several important points.

Trial

The word used for trial in this passage and repeated several times is the same Greek word in every instance, although it is variously translated in the King James by the several terms "tribulation," "trouble" and "suffering." The word "tribulation" first used is derived from a Latin root which literally means a flail, and it describes the crushing and humiliating blows which would be caused by such a fearful club as a flail applied to a bound and helpless human victim. The figure is not too strong to describe such sufferings as the Apostle Paul tells us were his frequent, indeed, his almost constant lot. We need not go farther than his Epistle to the Corinthians to find a picture of suffering most tragic and unprecedented in human life. If we turn to First Corinthians 4:9-13 we have an extraordinary array of dramatic and tragic afflictions:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

1. A Spectacle

The figure is exceedingly strong. The Roman emperors were accustomed at the close of the day, in the bloody amphitheater, to bring on as the last performance of the circus a battle unto the death. So Paul says that on the stage of Christian suffering, "God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (4:9). The Greek word for spectacle means a theater. Then he describes the various humiliations and afflictions appointed to him, ending with the vivid expression, "Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (4:13).

If we turn to our present epistle we read, "For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4). Again in the fourth chapter we find him thus describing his trials, even in the midst of victory: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus" (4:8-10). We read on a little farther and we come to the sixth chapter, and read such phrases as these: "in troubles" (6:4), "hardships" (6:4), "distresses" (6:4), "in beatings" (6:5), "imprisonments" (6:5), "riots" (6:5), "in hard work" (6:5), "sleepless nights" (6:5), "hunger" (6:5), "through glory and dishonor" (6:8), "bad report and good report" (6:8), "genuine, yet regarded as impostors" (6:8), "known, yet regarded as unknown" (6:9), "dying, and yet we live on" (6:9), "beaten, and yet not killed" (6:9), "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (6:10), "poor, yet making many rich" (6:10), "having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (6:10).

2. Unrest

Again in the seventh chapter we find this great apostle confesses to a state of unusual unrest that many of us, no doubt, had supposed he was exempt from, and that such hours of weakness only belonged to Christians like us: "This body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within" (7:5).

3. Sufferings

Once more we turn to Second Corinthians 11:23-30, and the picture reaches its deepest coloring:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

It would seem as if this heroic soul possessed the sublime ambition to surpass all other men in his sufferings for his Master, and that the only glory he sought was to have the heaviest share of the cross of Jesus and the sorrows of His church.

4. Our Lot

"As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man" (Proverbs 27:19). While his sufferings may have been preeminent, yet he was also the forerunner in that path of affliction which all the saints have walked. One of his earliest messages to the churches of Asia was, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Still it is indeed sadly true, as so finely expressed in the world's oldest poem, "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). "For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely sparks fly upward" (5:6-7).

And yet how light our sorrows seem compared with his. After the catalog we have just read, some of us must feel ashamed that we have ever murmured or complained. But trial is always hard, and sometimes the lesser afflictions are more difficult to bear than the greater ones. Let us recognize this fact at the very outset and go forth expecting trial, and we will not be disappointed when it comes. If, on the contrary, we go forth expecting sunny skies and paths of roses, we will indeed be ill-fitted to meet the realities of life, and defeat and disappointment will face us at every turn. God has woven the strands of sorrow into the web of human life, and they are as necessary for our discipline and our usefulness as the golden threads of gladness.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Elaborate on 2 Cor. 1:3: "The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

Ps. 27:10 Ps. 103:13 Isa. 49:15 Isa. 66:13 Acts 9:31

Show how suffering is a normal part of the Christian walk, and yet it can be beneficial both to us and our fellow believers as we receive it from God's hand and for His purposes.

Ps. 91:15 Rom. 8:17, 18 1 Cor. 1:4 1 Cor. 1:6 1 Cor. 4:12, 13 2 Cor. 4:17, 18 2 Cor. 7:6 Gal. 6:2 Phil. 1:29 Phil. 3:10 Col. 1:24 2 Thes. 1:4, 5 2 Tim. 1:8 2 Tim. 2:12 Heb. 2:10 Heb. 10:32 1 Pet. 4:13, 14 1 Pet. 5:6 1 Pet. 5:10

Numerous conditions and circumstances can cause great disappointment and discouragement, bringing a person to the point of despair, wherein he loses the desire to keep going on. Paul states: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God, (2 Cor. 1:8, 9) ... in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." (2 Cor. 1:10) **Give an example of an experience in your life that caused deep distress—perhaps even despair; yet it had the benefit of causing you to seek the Lord, be drawn closer to Him, and depend more on His precious promises. Did the disappointment and despair lift at this time? Were you able to say, "I count it all joy ...?"**

2 Corinthians 1:15-20

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (1:20). God never forgets His word. Long ago He promised a Redeemer, and although He waited 4,000 years, the promise was at last most surely fulfilled. He promised Abraham a son, and although a quarter of a century of testing intervened, that promise at last came literally true. He promised Abraham the land of promise as his inheritance, and although 400 years of trial intervened, at last the land was possessed. He promised Jeremiah that after 70 years the captives should return from Babylon, and on the very hour the action answered to the word. He promised Daniel that after 69 prophetic weeks, that is 483 years, Messiah should appear, and at the very day the promise was fulfilled, and the most extraordinary evidence which we have to offer to the doubting Hebrew today that Jesus is his Messiah is the literal fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel at the exact date. The Lord Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended. Just as true are all His individual promises to the believer. Not the smallest letter or the least stroke of a pen shall fail until all shall be fulfilled (see Matthew 5:18). "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (24:35).

Some very beautiful and striking things are taught us in this passage about the promises of God.

1. Their Variety

The literal translation of the pronoun "all" (1:20) here is not only universal but particular, and has been rendered "all the promises of God, how many soever they be." It carries the idea of a great number and variety, and yet notwithstanding their number and variety, every one is pure gold. When men talk much, the intrinsic value of their words depreciates. People of brief speech are usually people of surer performance; but God, although He has spoken to us more than 40,000 words of promise, never wearies of making good each one.

How many and varied they are. There are promises of salvation, and they are more than can be numbered. There are promises of cleansing and sanctifying and keeping, and they cover every possible spiritual condition. There are promises of healing, and they meet every physical need. There are promises of comfort for the sorrowing as tender as the breathing of a mother's love. There are promises of deliverance for the tried and tempted that cover every danger of life's pathway. There are promises for our homes, our friends, our work, our financial and temporal needs, and all possible conditions of life. They are repeated in every variety of phrase and fitted to encourage our timidity and inspire our faith and lead us out in confidence and prayer, and every one of them can be depended upon. Some of them take hold of us at one time and some at another. God has a thousand hands, but the touch of a single finger will bring us into the embrace of His everlasting arms.

2. The Surety

"They are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20). He has guaranteed them. The promises of God form a great checkbook and every one is endorsed by the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His word and honor are pledged to their fulfillment. Indeed, they are all given to Him primarily as our federal Head and Representative. In the everlasting covenant, He undertook to fulfill the conditions of redemption and received in return all the promises of God. He has met those conditions, He has earned those promises, He has fulfilled that covenant; and now, for His sake, we can claim every one of them just as if we had fulfilled the conditions ourselves.

3. The Reassurance

"Yes." Why is this added? "For no matter how many promises God made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (1:20). Does it perhaps mean that God not only assures, but reassures? Not only does He give His promise in the Word, but He sends His Holy Spirit to whisper it personally in our hearts and awake within us the spirit of confidence and trust.

As a man passed with his little child through a dark tunnel, the little one kept turning anxiously to the father and asking again and again, "Will we soon be through? Is it all right? Is there any danger?" And the father kept reassuring the anxious child and repeating his comforting "Yes." It is thus that the Father of mercies speaks in our troubled hearts. "Yes," he says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with lovingkindness (Jeremiah 31:3). When the apostle was troubled about his mysterious "thorn in the flesh" he asked the Lord again and again about it, and the beautiful record he has given us of the answer is, "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you' " (2 Corinthians 12:9).

It is thus that the Father repeats His loving words and breathes renewed consolations into the anxious and troubled heart until like the soothing of a mother with a sobbing child, we sink to rest in our Father's arms.

Perhaps, also, the "Yes" means the Lord Jesus Christ is God's answer to all other promises. Everything that God has told us is fulfilled in Him. He is the substance of all blessing and the answer to all our need, and therefore no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ (1:20).

4. The Response

"Amen" (1:20). The "amen" is our answer to God's "yes." It is an act of faith by which we make the promises our own. When you receive a check from the bank, it is of no value until you first write your own name upon the back of it, and thus personally appropriate it to yourself. Then it becomes payable. So every promise of God must be subscribed by you and receive your "amen." It is our privilege to put our name in the promise. The pronouns "my" and "me" have a high place in the experience of faith and deeper Christian life.

This "amen" is also through Jesus Christ: "through him the 'Amen' is spoken" (1:20). It is He who prompts and sustains and inspires our faith. We can never appropriate the promises ourselves, but must take Him to work in us the effectual prayer and the faith which takes all that He is waiting to give. Not only does He give us His precious blood and His perfect righteousness, but His own faith too, and in Him we are able to claim all the fullness of His grace.

5. The Glory of God

Our appropriating the promises redounds to the glory of God, and we honor Him most, not by showing Him how much we can do, but by showing how much He can do in us and for us. Every time we claim one of His promises, we illustrate to the heavenly powers as well as the world around us the resources and sufficiency of our God, and we shed more glory upon His name and the victorious work of His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God wants us to be living witnesses, proving to the world not only His almightiness but His dependableness, so that as others see what He has become to us, they will learn to trust Him too.

(Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

What is "this" confidence Paul speaks of in 2 Cor. 1:15?

What is the meaning of 2 Cor. 1:20?

2 Corinthians 1:21-24

The apostle next proceeds to show the stability of God's grace and gracious work in the hearts of His people.

1. Its Stability

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ" (1:21).

The salvation He offers us is not a state of probation, but an everlasting insurance. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Therefore He purposes not only to forgive our past transgressions, but to establish us by working out in our inmost being all the fullness of His grace. The process of establishing includes all the provisions of His Holy Spirit and all the deep experiences of trial, temptation and victory through which He calls us to pass and which He has planned for each one of us according to our special conditions and needs for the purpose of strengthening, establishing and settling us.

2. Spiritual Power

"He anointed us" (2 Corinthians 1:21). This includes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is the first step in establishing us: to put into us His own Spirit and thus supply us with the resources of His power and grace in spite of all our weaknesses, temptation and failures. Not only does He save us from the curse of sin, but He commits all the resources of His infinite grace to see us through to the glorious end.

Some years ago, a millionaire bought a large tract of land in the neighborhood of a village. For some years the land remained unimproved and the value of the real estate in the neighborhood hung in the balance. Was he simply speculating and holding it for the future, or was he going to make great improvements, or would he someday sell it again? Nothing was certain. But one summer gangs of workmen moved upon the place; engineers, masons, carpenters, painters and landscape gardeners began the process of transformation. A splendid mansion rose from the highest point of land; roads were laid out, trees and flowers crowned every picturesque approach, and at last his own family moved into the splendid villa, and it was known that he had made it his home. Then, indeed, was its value assured, and all the property in the vicinity rose in sympathy to the highest point. He had committed his fortunes and family to this transaction.

Something like this happens when God moves into a human heart and the Holy Spirit anoints us and brings the living Christ to dwell within us and make our heart His home. Henceforth we are no longer the victims of every wind that blows nor at the mercy of our own capricious and feeble purposes, but we are established, strengthened and divinely enabled and we know that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

3. Security

"He ... set his seal of ownership on us" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). The seal is the mark of authenticity and authority. And so when the Holy Spirit seals us, He makes it certain that we belong to God, and He also makes it certain to us that God's grace in all its fullness belongs to us. Not only so, the seal brings the mark of reality. You can feel its sharp imprint; you can see the image which it cuts into the sensitive wax. It is something tangible and real. It speaks to every sense.

So the Holy Spirit makes divine things real. He puts an edge on our spiritual consciousness. He makes vivid to us words that had been before but sounds. He wakes up in us spiritual senses that take hold of God just as truly as the ear takes hold of music and the sense of smell of sweet perfume. Divine things become intensely actual, and Christ a living, bright Reality.

Once more, the seal reproduces the image and brings actual resemblance. So the Holy Spirit gives to the heart into which He comes the very likeness of Jesus Christ, conforms us to the image of God and reflects in us the very spirit and qualities of our blessed Savior, reliving His own life in the disciple and gradually forming us to His will and character in everything.

All this is intensely real. The salvation which brings such results is not a dream, a fiction, an uncertainty. The God who does such things is a God on whom we can depend, and the salvation that fulfills such expectations is indeed a blessing that satisfies.

4. Continuance and Permanence

There is one thing more required to complete this picture of security, and that is the future. How long will it last? The answer is, He ... put his Spirit in our hearts" (1:21-22). This word "earnest" (1:22, KJV) means a pledge of the future; nay, more, the very germ and embryo of that future already planted in our hearts. The Holy Spirit in the believer is to his future inheritance what the bulb you planted last autumn is to the glorious blossoms of the Easter lily or the little dry seed to the golden harvests of the summer. The "earnest" is the sample, as well as the guarantee, of the full harvest; the handful of soil, telling us that all the broad acres are yet to be ours.

This has both a spiritual and a physical side. Our spiritual life now is the "earnest" and pledge of all that heaven will be to our soul. But there is another touch of grace which the Spirit brings to our body when He heals and quickens our

suffering frame. This is the pledge of that physical resurrection which by and by is to come to all our mortal frame and lead us into the glorious life of the age to come. All this we anticipate here and now, and by the earnest we know that we shall not be disappointed in the larger unfolding.

Was it ever better told than when the little child described the story of Enoch? "Enoch used to walk with God every day. One day they took a longer walk than usual, and at the end God said to Enoch, 'You are far from home; just come in and stay,' and Enoch went in and stayed."

Is not such a God dependable? Is not such a hope like an anchor, sure and steadfast? God help us to receive it, to prove it to the uttermost, and then to commend it to all around us.

(Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

2 Corinthians 2:1-11

The apostle tells us in this chapter of his glorious victory over himself. He had been wronged and grieved by the conduct of the Corinthians; some of them had grossly sinned and even gloried in it and defied his authority and discipline, and others had supported them in it. But instead of the least resentment we find nothing in the apostle's spirit but the sweetest gentleness, self-restraint and forgiveness. He tells them about his grief and his tears; there is no resentment but only sorrow. There is no weakness in condoning evil, he has dealt with the sin with utmost faithfulness and now he is ready to deal with the sinner and equal tenderness. It is most touching to see his anxiety lest the erring one should be unduly discouraged and "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:7). And so he begs them to confirm their love unto him and offer him the forgiveness of Paul as well as the Savior's.

It is a great blessing to be able to forgive and forget. Unforgiveness is one of the unpardonable sins, and when the enemy succeeds in causing someone to do wrong, the sting which he inserts in your heart—in your hate and vindictiveness—is far more poisonous than the outward blow by which he sought to do you wrong.

There is no heart battle harder than a battle with our sensitiveness and our sense of wrong. Many of us have found it the very turning point of our life. Some cruel wrong, some injury that the natural heart could never forgive, has ranked there until we felt we should lose our souls if we did not gain the victory. But mere human effort is unavailing here, and the heart gives up the struggle with a sense of utter helplessness and despair. But this is just where His grace overcomes and where the love of Jesus in us can accomplish what our love and our self-control never could. God has sometimes to let such tests come to us to show us our helplessness and bring us to His feet.

I once knew a brother minister who had been unkindly treated by some members of his flock and had fallen into a spirit of deep resentment. His own heart became clouded and separated from God, and he fell into a spirit of bitterness that almost threatened the salvation of his soul. Much prayer was offered for him. At length the answer came in a most remarkable way. First, there fell upon him a spirit of prayer for his bitter enemies, and he found himself irresistibly pouring out his heart to God for them. Then he was prompted by a deep desire to return to his people, whom he had left for a time under a sense of injury. As he finished his morning service, the first persons to greet him were the two brethren that had so grievously wronged him. To his surprise they hastened forward with the most cordial welcome, and the reconciliation that followed was deep and lasting and evident to all concerned as the work of the Holy Spirit. The moment his own heart had gotten right, God had made all other things right.

It is ever so. As it is the Lamb in the midst of the throne that is victorious over all His enemies, so it is the Spirit of the Lamb in us that conquers Satan and all his emissaries. Let us be less concerned about people and things, and only seek to be right ourselves, and then we can safely trust our interests, our reputation, our enemies with Him who has said, "I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life" (Isaiah 43:4).

"In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). The apostle only saw two forces, the power of the devil on the one hand and the person and honor of the Lord Jesus on the other; and, in comparison with these two opposing forces, the injustice of the enemies and his own personal wrongs all sank into insignificance.

It is Satan that inspires every case of spiritual declension, every separation of friends and flocks, every ecclesiastical controversy, every mutual injury and resentment, and when we yield to vindictiveness or impatience, we are but pleasing him and playing into his hands. His deep design was to destroy the soul that he had led astray, and his most powerful weapon was discouragement and despair. If he could only lead this man to give up hope and to consider himself rejected and lost, then his point would have been gained. The apostle therefore was deeply concerned lest "he ... be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2:7), and thus Satan gain the advantage over him.

The great adversary loves to hide his hand and work in disguise. He tries to make people prominent in our thoughts and judgments, so that in their misconduct we shall overlook the greater plotter who simply uses them as pawns on the great chessboard. Let us recognize him and we shall always find that he cannot bear the light of exposure, and the moment we see his hand our victory is assured.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

If Paul and the church had continued to pursue their current course of punishment and unforgiveness toward the offender, how could Satan have taken advantage of them?

Acts 15:2 2 Cor. 11:3 Eph. 6:11 Gal. 6:1 1 Tim. 6:3, 4

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

This triumph was not a selfish one. He was representing his Lord, and the spirit that he was manifesting to others was just an exhibition and revelation to the world of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Therefore he says, "We are ...the aroma of Christ" (2:15). His love, His patience, His gentleness, His forgiveness were just making the Spirit of his Master more real to men. That is why God has placed us here to represent the Lord. And just as Christ's gentleness and sweetness were revealed by the anguish of the garden and the cross, so God has to bruise us in order to bring forth from our lives the holy fragrance of divine love and patience. It has been forcibly said that all things must be crushed before they can give out their highest qualities. The most exquisite violins are not the whole violins but instruments that have been broken and then repaired, and the fracture has left a fine touch of sweetness and sadness in the tone that could not otherwise have been brought out.

"We are... the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2:15).

A good deed is not lost even when it fails to benefit the person intended. Its sweet fragrance comes back to God, and its memory will linger with the erring one even though it failed to save. God wants us to leave upon the minds of men the sweet eternal recollection of divine love. Not in fiery anger will He at last condemn them, but doubtless with a look of pity and a word of compassion will He bid them depart and feel, as they do, that the fault was all their own; that God was never anything but love to them, and that their sin and fault were without excuse. Therefore, God would have us represent Him in the spirit of sweetness and tenderness even to those whom we fail to save.

The apostle's advantage implies not merely that he has won a triumph in his present trial, but that God is always causing him to triumph, and that he is going into every conflict with the confidence of victory. There is a strange power in prestige. There are armies that never look for defeat; there are trumpeters that never learn to sound a retreat; there are soldiers that always expect to overcome. Such soldiers, Christians should ever be. Our blessed Lord has overcome for us, and He has promised us that we shall be more than conquerors, too. His victory assures ours, and He bids us to go into every trial expecting to come off victorious. Are we doing so? Is our life one of victory, or are we letting circumstances, discouragements, people and things bear us down and rob us of our immortal crown? This is very foolish and sinful.

If anyone who reads these lines has been yielding to discouragement, may God bid you rise and put on the garments of praise and take up the shout of victory.

It is said that Norman McLeod when a lad was greatly discouraged one day, and said to his mother that he wished he had never been born. He had the good fortune to have a Scotch mother, who had little sympathy to spare for such people, and she quietly turned to him and said, "Why, Norman, you are born, and it seems to me the thing for you to do is to find out why you were born and get to work as soon as you can to accomplish the purpose for which God brought you into existence." The rebuke went home, and the discouraged boy rose up and went forth to live a life of glorious manhood and worldwide blessing to his fellow men.

Will we do likewise? Christ has purchased our triumph at great cost. Let us go forth in His strength to meet every adversary as a conquered foe, and to shout our watchword all the way to the gates of glory, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ" (2:14).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

"We Christians have the unmistakable "scent" of Christ" – J. B. Phillips **How is it that we can be "the savor (or aroma) of death unto death" to those who are choosing to live without Christ, and "the savor (or aroma) of life unto life" to those who are being saved? (2:16)**

Rom. 1:20 1 Cor. 1:18-19 1 Cor. 2:14 1 Cor. 15:2 2 Cor. 3:5, 6 2Cor. 4:3-7 2 Cor. 5:5-7 Heb. 11:7

2 Corinthians 3:1-3

There is nothing more delicate and difficult, even for the most sensitive and sanctified Christian, than to speak of his own work. The writer has never forgotten the impression produced upon him when first listening to George Muller as he told the story of the Lord's dealings with him. There was no reserve; there was no false modesty; there was no withholding of any important fact or testimony; but there was absolutely no self-consciousness, no shadow of vainglory, no trace of his own shadow. One would think in listening to him that he was telling of the work of some other servant of the Lord. He had that perfect humility that does not think meanly of itself, but simply does not think of itself at all.

We have a fine example of the apostle's spirit in his testimony in the present chapter about his ministry.

“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?” he asks. “Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (3:1-3).

His credentials are the lives that have been transformed through the ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. What better monument can any Christian worker desire? It is said of the famous Sir Christopher Wren that he was rescued as a foundling child on the very site of that glorious St. Paul’s cathedral that he afterwards built in the city of London. At the close of an honored life his dust was buried beneath its foundations, and by his own directions a plain slab covered his tomb with the simple inscription on it, “If you seek my monument, look around you.” That splendid building was his sufficient monument. His work was the memorial of his life. Are we transcribing ourselves, or, better, our Master’s image on the hearts and lives of men? Paul did not mean that he despised letters of introduction. They possess a certain value, and we all need to be prudent in guarding against impostors. But he had something better. His work was his highest witness. Can we say it is ours? True character will always discover itself to the world, like a spice ship sailing into the harbor, by the fragrance it diffuses all around it.

It is said that a missionary was sent to an obscure Hindu village to receive a score of new converts into the mission, of whom the report had come they had all become true Christians. As one by one they were examined, the missionary was delighted with their knowledge and experience, and they were all accepted. At last there came a poor, deformed and stammering fellow, who seemed to have little knowledge or character, and the missionary was about to reject him when the natives all exclaimed, “Why that is the man from whom we learned all we know of Jesus. It is he who brought us Christ, and how can you accept us and reject him?” Truly he needed no letters of commendation after that. They were living epistles witnessing to his work and his worth. It is impossible that we can possess true spiritual qualities without impressing our own influence upon other lives. “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20). “Others . . . produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown” (Mark 4:20). Let us apply the lesson faithfully and searchingly to our influence in our families, in our Sunday School classes, in our social relations, in our work for God.

There needs not for such the love-written record,
The name and the monument graven on stone;
The things we have lived for—let these be our glory,
And we be remembered by what we have done.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Give another example of a person who had the result of his/her ministry shown by his work. Then let us each ask ourselves, “Are we willing to faithfully carry out the work to which God has called us, even if there is no present apparent recognition by others?” What is the one recognition that every Christian should desire?

Matt. 25:21

Corinthians 3:4-6a

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). The use of “competence” used in this passage expresses the whole volume of testimony and experience—insufficiency, all-sufficiency and efficiency. First he had to realize his own insufficiency. This is where every Christian worker must begin, and this is where he must stay, realizing to the end of the chapter that his strength is all imparted and divine.

But the mere sense of insufficiency will discourage and crush. And so we must move on and learn to say, “Our competence comes from God” (3:5). We must see in the Lord Jesus our infinite divine resources in the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and all the equipment we need in every kind of ministry. Then it is false modesty to say we are no good; we have but one talent, and therefore it is not worth trying to use it. True humility and faith will finish the apostle’s climax. “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant” (3:6).

But, even then, we must still remember that our efficiency is not our own, but must be continually drawn from the ever-present Christ by a life of dependence and faith. How exquisitely true are the superb lines:

My hands were strong in fancied strength,
But not in power divine;
And bold to take up tasks at length,
That were not His but mine
The Master came and touched my hands;
And might was in his own;
But mine, since then, have powerless been,

Save His are laid thereon.
And it is only thus, said He,
That I can work My works in thee.

(*The Christ in the Bible Commentary*, A.B. Simpson)

Today we find most everywhere that the world teaches that self-improvement, self-reliance and self-confidence are the goals to achieve if we are to survive. **From the following Scriptures, explain how God's Word takes the opposite course for our lives to be formed in His image.**

2 Cor. 3:5, 17-18 2 Cor. 4:3-7 2 Cor. 4:16-18 2 Cor. 5:14-21 2 Cor. 6:4-10

2 Corinthians 3:6b-18

In the remaining verses of this chapter he contrasts the gospel with the old dispensation and shows its incomparable superiority.

1. The one is the letter; the other is the Spirit.

The law is a mere set of tasks and penances which affect only the outward forms of life. The gospel reaches the inner heart of things and purifies the spirit, the heart and all the foundations of life.

2. The one is a ministry of death; the other of life.

The law can only condemn; the gospel can quicken. The law can tell us what we are not to do; but the gospel imparts the power to do things.

3. The one is the ministry of condemnation; the other of righteousness.

The law shows us where we are wrong, but cannot make us right. It is the mirror that reveals to us the defilement upon our face, but as has been well said, no man would think of trying to wash his face in a mirror.

4. The law was transient; the gospel is permanent and abiding.

It was but a parenthesis in the revelation of God's plan, like the clouds that gathered round the brow of Sinai and then passed away and left the sunshine of heaven to gather upon its head. When we accept the gospel we feel by a deep intuition that we have reached our true resting place and we need seek no further for God and truth and heaven.

5. The law is a mere mechanical and external attempt to reform conduct and cultivate character.

The gospel is a vital process by which we are transformed through the vision of Jesus Christ into His own image by the Holy Spirit. This is brought out in a most beautiful figure in the last verse of the chapter. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (3:18).

The figure reminds us of the difference between the old and the new process of engraving. Our cuts used to be slowly carved by hand on blocks of wood, and were tedious and expensive. A few years ago the process of photoengraving was discovered by which, in a moment, the image was transferred to a metal plate, and then in a few minutes a penetrating acid cut away the metal and left only the lines of the picture, thus literally engraving in the solid metal by light and chemical action. It is thus that God paints His pictures; not by a clumsy process of our poor striving, but by the flashlight of the Holy Spirit and a vision of the face of Jesus Christ, transferring the picture instantly, like the photograph on the film, to our heart and conforming us to His likeness. No wonder Paul gloried in such a gospel. He felt that a great secret had been revealed to him for lifting human lives into glorious transformations. "The mystery," he said, "that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).

When that mystery was first revealed to some of us we felt we must go and tell everybody we had ever known, and we expected them at once to bow to its glorious light and accept its message. Dear reader, have you looked upon that Face until its light has shone back into your own, and you have been "transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18)?

Two very fine figures begin and end this chapter. The first is the figure of the epistle, and the second the figure of the photograph. The Christian is described first as a book, and secondly, as an illustrated book. Each of us is a volume telling forth the story of Jesus, and on every page His face should shine so that the world shall not see us, but Him, and shall so see Him in us that each shall want to make the experience his own.

(*The Christ in the Bible Commentary*, A. B. Simpson)

Explain in your own words 2 Cor. 3:6: "who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life".

1 Cor. 3:5-7 Eph. 3:7 Jer. 31:1-4 Jer. 31:31 Jer. 33:14-16 Rom. 2:28-29 Gal. 3:10 John 6:63
Rom. 8:2

2 Corinthians 4:1-4

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Corinthians 4:3, KJV). A better translation of this remarkable passage is, "it is hid by the things that perish." The word "lost" means perish, and the preposition "to" in the Greek has also the force of "by". The sentence, therefore, would read, "If our gospel be hid it is hid by the perishing things of earth." The idea is that Satan weaves a beautiful blindfold and holds it before our eyes to keep us from seeing "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4).

I will never forget the first impression given to me in my boyhood of an execution. I did not witness it, but the description was repeated to me by one who had. He said the unfortunate man was blindfolded and then led along the scaffold, not seeing where he went, until suddenly the fearful drop fell, and, without a moment's warning, the man was hurled into eternity. What a picture of the way the devil is blindfolding men and then taking them from beneath their feet the sands of time, and plunging then into ruin and despair. Oh, will we learn the lesson which our message brings, not only for the minister of the gospel, but for the hearer of the gospel, too, and come "with unveiled faces" (3:18) to the light of His love and the grace that will so gladly save us if we will only allow it?

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Physical blindness is more apparent than spiritual blindness, but both are realities in life. **Regarding spiritual blindness, however, would you agree that the minds of the lost sinners are blinded by Satan? Also, that fallen man finds it easier to believe lies than to believe truth? Carefully read verses 3 and 4 again as you reply.**

Prov. 2:3-12 John 1:40 Matt. 7:7 Matt. 7:13, 14 Rom. 1:18-23 2 Cor. 4:4 1John 5:9-12 Matt.
13:14-15 Prov. 21:1-2 Ps. 119:36-37

2 Corinthians 4:5–2 Corinthians 5:10

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Corinthians 4:11)

Unlike many false religions, Christianity does not depreciate or degrade the human body. The very paragon of the first creation, God has no less dignified it in the new creation. His own Son did not deem it beneath Him to become incarnate in our mortal frame, and in that body He has been resurrected and glorified as the Head and Pattern of our future life. The provisions of Christ's redemption include the body as well as the soul and spirit.

While it is only the steed that carries the traveler across the desert journey of life, yet the steed is most necessary to the traveler, and the failure of the one may involve the destruction of the other. Christ and His apostles, therefore, recognized most distinctly the place of our physical life in the scheme of redemption, and both by their teaching and example they leave us in no doubt about God's provision for our physical healing and the strength that we need in these earthen vessels to uphold us until our work is done.

Man has always been seeking some Fountain of Youth, some Elixir of Life from which he might draw supernatural supplies of strength for his decaying powers. But all these have failed, and from age to age still

Our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

But Paul must have discovered some new and divine secret of superior strength or he never could have told that story that we have already read in chapter 1:8, of the deliverance that came to him in Asia when he was "under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." The story of his life is full of hardship, privation, exposure and suffering sufficient to have worn out a dozen lives.

The man who could give this catalogue, "I have . . . been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received . . . the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea" (11:23-25), and yet live to a good old age in the full vigor of unwearied work and still have strength enough to have gone on indefinitely had not his noble life been suddenly closed by martyrdom. Such a man must have had unwonted sources of physical strength and endurance, and his physical life was as much a miracle as his spiritual victories and missionary

achievements. In this fourth chapter of Second Corinthians he tells us the secret of his strength. Unlike Samson of old, from whom this secret had to be wrung by treachery, Paul glories in the telling of it, for it is an open secret for every brother of his suffering race.

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (4:7). He means that the strength imparted to him is not in the form of bone and brawn or any material conditions which could appeal to our outward senses. It is not that his body was exceptionally robust, for, indeed, it remained frail to the end; but rather that a principle of vitality was imparted to it, so that the paradox was literally true, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10).

We know that even in the natural world many elements that are extremely common and simple become the channels of tremendous forces. Radium comes from one of the commonest material elements, pitchblende, which might perhaps be called a kind of tar. The magnet which lifts the heaviest bodies, does not derive its strength from its material weight or form, but from a hidden force that pulsates within the cold clay and lifts the most massive weights as though by celestial fingers. In the arsenal at Woolwich, you can see these magnets lifting vast projectiles and pieces of ordnance as though they were toys.

The electric current which carries our trains and our cars and moves our factories does not need massive iron girders to convey it, but runs along a little wire which a child might bend. The power is not in the material, but in the invisible current behind it. The human body does not derive its strength from mere structural form. A giant seven feet high, weighing 300 pounds, falls like a mass of stone if life becomes extinct and requires several men to carry him; but animated by the principle of life, he can not only carry his own weight, but as much more besides.

Now, in the spiritual realm there are forces far stronger than electricity, magnetism or the vital force, and what the apostle means is that such a force has been brought into touch with his weak body; and while he still remains weak in himself, he has found back of him and within him a new source of strength which makes him equal to every pressure. It is the "treasure" in "jars of clay," and it proves to the world that the "all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

He tells us in plain terms just what this power is. It is not an electric current; it is not the power of mind or will as Christian Science would teach us; but it is the power of a divine Person, the life of another added to his own, "Jesus' . . . life . . . in our mortal body" (4:11). Truly, this is a mystery, how one life can be added to another, and doubtless none will comprehend it unless they have in some measure experienced it. But a moment's reflection will show us how reasonable it is. The Lord Jesus Christ is a living Being in human form. They saw Him rise from earth to heaven with all the organs and members of a literal body, and yet with such supernal power in that body that He could spurn the fetters of earth and the forces of gravitation and rise without an effort into space. Now, He is still living in that glorified humanity somewhere in the center of this universe, and from that exalted place He is still in touch with His people here. The Holy Spirit is the mighty Medium who conveys to us His power and life, the divine Engineer, if we may use the figure without irreverence, who makes and maintains the contact between the mighty Dynamo yonder and our weak natures here on earth.

It is not thought strange in our modern scientific progress when men convey the power of Niagara Falls hundreds of miles along electric wires to run machines in distant places. It is not thought strange that the sun, 93,000,000 miles away, can send down its radiating life to quicken the forces of nature and create the verdure, the bloom and the manifold fruitfulness of earth. Why should it be thought strange that Jesus Christ, from the center of the universe, should be able to impart to souls and bodies that are in vital touch with Him, His own overflowing life and make His promise true both in our bodily and spiritual experience, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19)?

If we look at a single scene in the apostle's life, we shall see the operation of this secret. At the gates of Lystra a cruel mob has hurled him beneath a heap of stones and left him for dead after they have done their worst on his mutilated body. But we read in the simple narrative, "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe" (Acts 14:20). What was the strange power that raised him up from seeming martyrdom? The answer is the simple, striking expression of our text: "Jesus' . . . life" (2 Corinthians 4:11). Paul's life had been beaten out but there was just enough left, a single spark, to form the point of contact with that other life that could not be beaten out, the life of his indwelling Lord; and as that life thrilled through his paralyzed powers, he rose up in new divine strength and quietly went forward in his work.

George Whitefield has left us a similar testimony of a day when he was supposed to be dying some miles from Newburyport while the congregation there was praying in tearful intercession that God would restore his life. Suddenly, he tells us, a strange new life began to breathe through him and pass through his frame, gradually rising from his extremities until it reached his heart and lungs and brain, imparting a quiet, peaceful glow of conscious strength and rest. Dispelling all pain and weakness it prompted him to rise and dress, to call his carriage and drive many miles to Newburyport where the church was waiting to hear each moment of his end.

His coming seemed at first almost like an apparition, but when they saw that God had really raised him up and listened to his testimony, the power of God came down once more and multitudes were saved, and for many years the good evangelist continued in the strength of God to preach the gospel and to finish his work.

There is a prevalent idea that the power of God in a human life should lift us above all trials, conflicts and struggles. The fact is, the power of God always brings a conflict and a struggle. One would have thought that on his great missionary journey to Rome, Paul would have been carried by some mighty providence above the power of storms and

tempests and enemies. But, on the contrary, it was one long, hard fight with persecuting Jews, with wild tempests, with venomous vipers and all the powers of earth and hell; and at last he was saved, as it seemed, by the narrowest margin and had to swim ashore at Malta on a piece of wreckage and barely escape a watery grave.

Was that like a God of infinite power? Yes, just like Him. And so Paul tells us that when he took the Lord Jesus Christ as the life of his body, a severe conflict immediately came; indeed, a conflict that never ended, a pressure that was persistent, but out of which he always emerged victorious through the strength of Jesus Christ.

The language in which he describes this is most graphic. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (4:8-10).

What a ceaseless, strenuous struggle! It is impossible to express in English the forcible language of the original. There are five pictures in succession. In the first, the idea is crowding enemies pressing in from every side, and yet not crushing him because the police of heaven cleared the way just wide enough for him to get through. The literal translation would be, "We are crowded on every side, but not crushed."

The second picture is that of one whose way seems utterly closed and yet he has pressed through; there is light enough to show him the next step. The Revised Version translates it, "perplexed but not unto despair." Rotherham still more literally renders it, "without a way but not without a byway."

The third figure is that of an enemy in hot pursuit while the divine Defender still stands by, and he is not left alone. Again we adopt the fine rendering of Rotherham, "Pursued but not abandoned."

The fourth figure is still more vivid and dramatic. The enemy has overtaken him, has struck him, has knocked him down. But it is not a fatal blow, he is able to rise again. It might be translated, "overthrown but not overcome."

Once more the figure advances, and now it seems to be even death itself: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus." But he does not die, for "the life of Jesus" now comes to his aid and he lives in the life of Another until his work is done.

The reason so many fail in the experience of divine healing is because they expect to have it all without a struggle, and when the conflict comes and the battle wages long, they become discouraged and surrender. God has nothing worth having that is easy. There are no cheap goods in the heavenly market. Our redemption cost all that God had to give, and everything worth having is expensive. Hard places are the very school of faith and character, and if we are to rise over mere human strength and prove the power of life living in these mortal bodies, it must be through a process of conflict that may well be called the birth travail of a new life. It is the old figure of the bush that burned but was not consumed, or of the Vision in the house of the Interpreter of the flame that would not expire—notwithstanding the fact that the demon ceaselessly poured water on it—because in the background stood an angel ever pouring oil and keeping the flame aglow.

No, dear suffering child of God, you cannot fail if only you dare to believe, to stand fast and refuse to be overcome.

1. It is by faith. "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak" (4:13). We can only retain the life of Christ while we trust Him.

2. It must be moment by moment and day by day. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (4:16). It must be a habit of receiving, a constant dependence. It is not one or two remarkable experiences of healing, but a lifelong drinking in of strength from Christ even as the plant continually draws its nourishment from the soil by 10,000 rootlets. It is here that we must learn to maintain the habit of physical union with Christ and vital dependence upon His strength, breath by breath and step by step.

All this is but the earnest of something better by and by. Therefore the apostle adds, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (5:1). And then he adds a little later, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (5:5). The apostle means that the life of Jesus in our bodies now is but the beginning and the pledge of that glorious life which is to come to us at the resurrection and the kingdom above. Just as the bulb you plant in autumn has in it the promise of the Easter lily and the acorn is but an oak in miniature, and the seed carries in its bosom the embryo of the golden harvest, so the touch of Christ upon our bodies now carries with it the pledge and the very substance of all the glorious immortality which is to be ours in the age to come.

What a sad morning that was when our first parents went forth weeping and ashamed from the gates of Eden and knew that the Tree of Life was henceforth closed to them as the source of physical immortality. What a glad moment that would be if a glorious angel should come down from heaven and plant it in our gardens once more.

Something better, we are permitted to bring in this glorious message of the supernatural life of Christ. Not only are we permitted to transplant from the soil of heaven the Tree of Life, but He, who is the source of life itself, has come down, not only to walk among us for a little while as an example of the life divine, but to dwell within us as the perennial foundation in our entire being of that life which, although exposed to conflict and testing and suffering now, is pressing on through storm and wind and tide to that glorious hour when:

His gracious hand shall wipe the tears
From every weeping eye;
And pains and groans and griefs and fears
And Death itself shall die.

Explain how the concept of “bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” helped Paul when he was troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. Was Paul’s focus on the *treasure* (not on the vessel)—because he knew that God would guard the vessel so long as Paul was guarding the treasure? (see 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:20)

Rom. 8:36, 37 1 Cor. 2:5 1 Cor. 15:31

What did Paul mean in 2 Corinthians 5:1 when he said he had building not made with hands? Did he recognize that God permits, controls and uses trials for His own glory—and that God is glorified through weak vessels?

Mark 14:58 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 53-54, 57-58 Gal. 2:20 2 Cor. 6:10 2 Cor. 12:7-10

One reason Paul persevered in carrying out the Lord’s work is because he feared the Lord, who had given him the Spirit as a guarantee of his inheritance (Eph. 1:14). Then he goes on to say in 2 Cor. 5:10 “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” **What tells us that Paul was speaking only to believers? See 2 Cor. 1:2. For what reason are believers judged by the Lord? (1 Cor. 3:11-15) Will unbelievers also be judged by Christ?**

Job 14:17 Ps. 9:7-8 Matt. 16:27 Matt. 22:13-14 John 12:47-48
Acts 2:19-21 Acts 10:42 Acts 17:30-31 Rom. 14:10-12 2 Tim. 4:1, 8 Heb. 9:27 1 Pet. 4:5-7 Rev. 20:11-15
Rev. 22:12 Rom. 2:5-9
2 Pet. 3:7 Rom. 13:12 Matt. 25:31-33

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

The apostle has given us his testimony about trial and victory, about his ministry and his own physical life. He now comes to the theme he loves best of all, the gospel of our reconciliation, the great salvation for which God had made him an ambassador to men.

“Therefore, if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation” (5:17); the old has gone the new has come! All this is from God. Paul’s remedy for the world’s need was no mere scheme of social reform, educational progress, ethical culture or fine arts. He had seen the failure of mere culture in Greece and Rome, and had turned away from the world’s noblest monuments of art with disgust and horror as he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry. The Augustinian age of Roman literature was only just closing, but it had failed to lift man higher than the earthly plane of cultivated selfishness and moral degradation. No higher school of ethics was ever known than the teachings of Moses and the Jewish law. But Paul had found the utter worthlessness of the righteousness of the law and the powerlessness of the highest ideals to lift man above his fallen nature. And so he came to his fellow men to tell them that our fallen race must have, not an evolution, but a revolution. Humanity is too far gone for self-improvement or any principle of recuperation. There must be a new creation. “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3).

This was the first principle of his great message of salvation. Dear friend, have you seen its utter and imperative necessity? You are trying to be good with a bad heart. You are trying to serve God with a nature utterly depraved and fallen. You are trying to bring a clean thing out of an unclean. As well might you try to develop a dove out of a hawk, or a fawn out of the groveling swine. The best gift that Christ has brought to fallen man is a new heart and an automatic salvation that works spontaneously from a living principle that loves the good and hates the evil because of the law of the fitness of things as strong as the law of gravitation and the will of God. We all know how in our modern industrial life the old clumsy methods of doing things have been superseded by automatic machinery that simply needs to be started and then it works out all the complicated processes of our manifold manufacturing enterprises by a law inherent in itself. This is God’s great secret of the new life. He puts in us a vital principle and sets in operation an automatic process that makes it as easy to be humble and holy as once it was easy to be wicked and vile. Have you come to Christ for this great gift, a heaven-born heart, a new nature, a spirit born from above? You cannot develop it by education. You cannot create it by willpower. It is the gift of God. It is eternal life begun on earth and made perfect in the skies. And it comes to every yielded soul that recognizes its absolute necessity and accepts it from Jesus Christ as the gift of His Grace. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (5:18-21)

The new creation which we have just described cannot begin until a previous process of reconciliation has been effected. There were barriers in the way which had to be removed before the life and love of God could become operative upon the hearts of men. So, before God could reach the human heart with the renewing influence of His Holy Spirit, it was necessary that the great work of preparation should be accomplished. This is described by the apostle as "reconciliation." It includes three stages.

1. Revelation

God had to be revealed to man in His true character and beneficence. Our sinful hearts and the lies of our adversary, the devil, had so distorted our conception of the Father that it was impossible for us to love and trust Him. To the natural man, God is an object of terror and not of love. This is because they do not know Him, for to know Him is to love Him. It was necessary, therefore, for God to reveal Himself as a Father, a Friend and a Restorer. He did this through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (5:19). That life of gentleness, unselfishness, sacrifice and ceaseless service was just an object lesson of God. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And when at last He hung upon that cross, "He himself bore ... in his body" (1 Peter 2:24) the sins and the curse of men, a spectacle was presented of the Father's heart toward the sinner, which, when rightly understood and accepted by simple faith, is fitted to put to shame our unworthy thoughts of our loving Father and inspire our hearts with confidence and love. Instead of an avenging fury, waiting to destroy us, we see Him taking our sins upon Himself, and by a plan of mercy as marvelous in its wisdom as in its grace, satisfying every claim against the righteousness of the law and opening the way for our forgiveness and salvation. This was the first object of Christ's coming, to bring God to us. The second is to bring us to God. But He must first come down and show us the Father and then go back and take us with Him to the Father.

So sublimely beautiful is this conception of Christ's work that in many minds it has crowded out altogether the other and equally important aspect of His work as a sacrifice for sin. Many can only see the benevolence and heroic aspect of His life and death as a sublime example of love, and they leave out the deeper meaning of the precious blood. Both are true; and let us not in our zeal for the doctrine of the atonement forget the other aspect of Christ's work as a revelation of a Father's heart toward His rebellious children.

The apostle's conception reminds us of the familiar story of the Scottish maiden who had left her mother and her home and had fallen into the depths of sin, partly through severe Scottish discipline which had shown her the harder side of that mother's justice, rather than the gentler side of her love. When she found her child was gone, her whole nature changed, and her love sought far and wide for the wandering daughter. At last she devised the ingenious idea of hanging up her photograph in many of the dance halls of the great city, with a loving message and her own autograph at the foot of the picture. One night the eyes of the lost one suddenly fell upon the picture and the message inviting her home, and a new vision of her mother came to her heart. She saw her now, not as the severe parent, restraining, disciplining, punishing her rebellious child, but with a heart of love, breaking with sorrow and waiting to forgive. As she recovered from her swoon, she cried, "Take me home," and the rest of the story can better be imagined than told.

Jesus Christ came down to this world of sin to hold up before God's rebellious children the picture of the Father's face and the vision of the Father's love. We love to think of all this in connection with Jesus, but let us not forget that other Face behind the Savior, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (5:19).

2. Propitiation

More was needed, however, than the revelation of God's love. There were real barriers to overcome. There were tremendous facts of sin, righteousness and law; and only infinite wisdom could have devised a way to meet all these contradictions of the problem and enable God to be at once "a just God and a Savior" (Isaiah 45:21, KJV).

This is where propitiation comes in, and the apostle has not left it out of his gospel. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). But this was not a whitewashing of humanity; this was not an erasure of the records in God's eternal books; but it was a mighty settlement in which every claim was met, and every attribute of God was satisfied. Here is the solution of the problem, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us" (5:21). There in the most explicit terms is the doctrine of the atonement, God's great settlement for the sins of men. Jesus Christ, a Man, the Head of our race, and thus fitted to be our Representative, takes our place, assumes our liabilities, meets our penalties, satisfies all the demands of infinite justice and law and then passes this all over to every man who is willing to accept it as the ground of a settlement with God and to choose Jesus Christ his Attorney for this settlement. This last is indispensable. While His atonement is sufficient for the race, it only becomes efficient for every one who personally commits himself to it by an act of appropriating faith.

3. Justification

The result of all this is the justification of the sinner. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). The position in which all this places us is "righteous." We are not merely forgiven and our guilt overlooked, but we are "justified." We are put in the same position as if we had never sinned, or, as if having sinned, we had made the full settlement for our sin which Christ has made for us. If you have ever been in the

position of a debtor and know the humiliation of being repeatedly dunned for the claim, you know something of the difference between offering your creditor an apology or a check, asking from him either his forbearance or his receipt. There is nothing that more fully establishes your sense of manhood than to be able to meet your creditor and look in his face without embarrassment as you hand him a settlement of his account and ask him to please write out a receipt in full. This is the happy situation which God has prepared for every saved soul who accepts the atonement of Jesus Christ. Your sin is so completely settled by Christ Jesus and His righteousness so effectually imputed to you that you become "the righteousness of God" (5:21). Looking in the face of earth and heaven and hell, you can say with humble heart and yet triumphant faith, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died . . . is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:33-34).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Listed below are Scripture verses that describe what we experience in receiving Christ's death for us—and a second column of statements that properly should apply to one of the Scriptures, but right now they are out of order. **Draw a line from the verse to the proper statement.**

1 John 4:19	He died that we might live His life for Him
2 Cor 5:14	He died that we might live through Him
2 Cor 5:15	We love Him because He first loved us
Rom 6:4	He died that we might die
Rom 7:4	He died that we might live for Him
1 John 4:9	He died that we might not sin but bear fruit for Him
2 Cor 5:15	He died that we might not live unto ourselves

2 Corinthians 6:1-18

We have had Paul's testimony about salvation, the supernatural life of the body, victory over trial and other important experiences. In the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians we have his testimony about holy living. There were special reasons why this should be emphasized in Corinth, because some of the members of that church had been guilty of flagrant offenses against purity, and their conduct had been condoned by many in the church. It was therefore necessary that a most emphatic protest should be made by him for practical righteousness and holy living. But this is just as important in every other age and place, and the apostle's message is of permanent application. Let us gather out of this paragraph the principal elements that constitute the life of practical holiness.

The life of practical holiness means separation from evil association.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

"Therefore come out from them
and be separate, says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

The idea of separation is fundamental to the Church of Christ. The very word for church in the Greek language means called out. From the first God has always kept His people separate from the ungodly world. The principle of contagion through association needs no proof. No sensible man or woman would continue to live in the same house with a smallpox patient, and no wise Christian will presume on fellowship and intimacy beyond the absolute necessities of life with those who are necessarily the fountains of moral and spiritual defilement. When Balaam could not curse Israel, he succeeded in destroying them by drawing them into unholy intimacy with their enemies.

The prohibition of this chapter applies to our whole practical life. It takes in our personal friendships and affections which we should not allow to become bound up with the ungodly, for it is in the heart that all the evil first begins. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

It embraces the family and prohibits intermarriage between God's children and the ungodly world. One reason why the Hebrew race has been preserved distinct among the nations for thousands of years, and is steadily today recovering its place of supremacy, is that the true children of this race refuse to allow intermarriages beyond their own people. No

Christian man has a right to marry an ungodly wife; no Christian woman has a right to marry an ungodly man; and no Christian minister has the right to solemnize the marriage ceremony between such parties.

Further, this applies to the business of life and forbids partnerships between children of God and ungodly men. Such combinations are almost sure to involve you in compromises and make you a consenting party to wrongs that you yourself would never think of doing in your private business. God was much displeased with one of His servants of old, who was faultless in every other respect, but it is said of him that "he allied himself with Ahab ... Jehu the seer ... went out to meet him and said to the king, 'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you' " (2 Chronicles 18:1, 19:2).

Little wonder that Jehoshaphat's partnerships failed, that his ships were lost, his investments a failure and his very life narrowly saved.

The Church is equally forbidden to allow herself to be compromised with the world either by admitting an ungodly member, by adopting worldly methods of finance, or by allowing secular control, social ambition, worldly amusements or fashionable extravagances to mar her sacred purity and compromise her testimony against this present evil world.

The apostle tells us that such yokes are always unequal. The adversary will get the advantage of you if you allow yourself to be drawn into any sort of partnership with him. He can afford to do things that you cannot, and at the end of the partnership you will find yourself in the situation of the too confiding foreigner who was persuaded by a sharp American speculator to invest his money with him in an enterprise where the American had all the necessary experience and the foreigner's money was considered an equivalent in the partnership. At the end of the year our friend was very glad to get out and in referring to the affair he said: "When we started he had the experience and I had the money, but when we ended he had the money and I had the experience." The enemy is too keen to fail to get advantage of you at every point. You may think that you can influence your ungodly husband by marrying him, but you will find it all the other way. You can lift people up only by keeping on a higher level. If you sink to theirs, they will surely drag you still further down. God help us to be true to our separation.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Believers have true fellowship, true communion, with each other for their principal and common interest in the redemption of the lost. Unbelievers, on the other hand, cannot be united, because their causes and interests vary widely, their goals are not common, and attempts at unity only end in destruction of one party or the other. **In the following categories, then, relate what the Word of God teaches, regarding any affiliation with unbelievers: Marriage Business Friendship Social organizations House of worship People in need**

1 Cor. 5:9, 11 Eph. 4:1-3 Eph. 4:26-32 Eph. 5:6, 7, 11-18

2 Corinthians 7:1

To live a life of holiness there must be cleansing. "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Sanctification includes a good deal more than mere outward separation from evil persons. The worst evil is in our own hearts, and that must be removed by the deeper work of the Holy Spirit. But in this we must ourselves cooperate. There is a step for us to take first, and then there is the work of God. We must consent to the work of cleansing. We must pass sentence upon our sinful heart and give God the right to cleanse it. Then His grace will come in and accomplish the work, but not until we first of all have given Him the right of way. God will not take one step till we have handed ourselves over to Him unreservedly and pronounced the sentence of death upon our carnal nature and our sinful heart. Therefore we read constantly in the Old Testament of God's command to the people, "consecrate yourselves and be holy" (see Leviticus 11:44; 20:7-8), and at the same time of God's promise that He will sanctify them. Both are true. We must cleanse ourselves by putting away all known evil, renouncing every sin and yielding ourselves unreservedly to God to cleanse every sin and fill us with the Holy Spirit.

All kinds of defilement are mentioned. The first is of filthiness of the flesh. This includes not only the indulgences of the body in disobedience to the divine law, but it also means those passions and desires which have their seat in the soul and find in the body the instrument of their unhallowed indulgences. The word for flesh here is not the usual word for the body, which is *soma*, but it is the word *sarx*, which always carries with it the idea of the carnal nature and the fleshly heart.

Then the apostle speaks of the filthiness of the spirit as well as the flesh. We may be outwardly free from immorality, but our minds and hearts may be filled with vile imaginations and unholy desires, and this God counts sinful and unholy. True holiness includes the thoughts, the emotions, the sensibilities and tastes and all the faculties and powers of our being. You may not yourself be guilty of immorality, but you may feed your eyes upon it on the stage in some prurient play. You may follow its sensuousness in the modern novel, and grovel in all the unrestrained depths of insinuating vice. You may have your spirit softly fanned by its fetid breath in the insidious poetry of romance. So saturated is much of this with the very spirit of darkness that Lord Byron gave express commands that his most famous poetical romance should never be allowed in the hands of his own daughter. Too well he knew the fatal blight which it would bring to her modesty

and purity. Many of the new philosophies are permeated with an unhallowed spirit. Theosophy, Christian Science and most of occult teachings current with a certain class, who have caught the craze for higher culture, are of this nature. A sensitive spiritual conscience will find itself barred at the gateway of all this class of literature and be conscious of the very breath of hell the moment it comes under its influence. May God give us a quickened conscience and an obedient will to detect every form of defilement and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

There are sins of the flesh, and there are also sins of the spirit (attitude). The prodigal son was guilty of sins of the flesh, but his "moral" brother was guilty of sins of the spirit—he could not even get along with his own father (see Luke 15:11-21). **God has given us His most gracious promises; does that strongly indicate to us that we have some spiritual responsibilities? Is it enough for us just to ask God to cleanse us? Do we find that too often we are dealing with symptoms and not causes—we keep confessing the same sins because we haven't gotten to the root of the trouble and cleansed ourselves? Could there be some pet sin that feeds the old nature? (Rom. 13:14).**

2 Cor. 7:1

2 Pet. 3:14-18

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

The world is full of sorrow. It comes both to the sinner and to the saint, but oh, how different it comes to each.

There is no comfort for the sinner's sorrow. There is no profit in his pain. Like the fire which consumes the dross, so the flames of suffering burn his heart to ashes and leave nothing but the bitter dregs and the burning lye.

What can we say to comfort the heart that has no God, no Christ, no hope beyond and no faith in an overruling Providence here? Is there any task so trying as to stand at the funeral of one who has died without the Savior and speak to a sorrowing household, who are equally destitute of His love and to whom that parting is forever? One can understand the terrible force and meaning of the apostle's words, "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

The Christian's trials are a wholesome discipline intended to teach him precious lessons in the school of holy character. Our trials are but "the Lord's discipline" (Hebrews 12:5) as the apostle beautifully calls it, but the sufferings of the ungodly have no such issue. True, they are intended to arouse the conscience and transform the life, but they are unheeded and unblessed. Then God at last gets tired of inflicting pain that does no good, and we hear Him crying in the pathetic language of the prophet, "Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted" (Isaiah 1:5). How sad that so many have to suffer bereavement, disappointment, loss and failure and after all be like the one of whom Jehovah says in Isaiah, "I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways" (57:17). If our trials only taught us any good, they would not seem so hard, but to suffer in vain and find it has only embittered and hardened the heart, this indeed is the very sharpness of grief.

One of the sources of the worldling's sorrow is the painful reflection upon his past and the stinging memory of opportunities lost, of loved ones wronged, of sin and suffering that never can be repaired again. There is no more bitter drop in the cup of retribution than to have God say to a soul, "Son, remember" (Luke 16:25). To go alone with our own heart and retrace our wretched steps through all the chambers of memory, and see in the full light of experience the consequences of our sin and folly and know that it is irremediable, this indeed is the "worldly sorrow [that] brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

One of the sweetest comforts of the Christian is the thought that he is saved both from his past and future. The promise of the Lord is, "The LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 52:12). That is, God will take care of your future and your past. But the ungodly have no such overshadowing Presence. The past remains in all its grim reality and fraught with all its future fruition, and, before, there is foreboding, fear and the thousand anxieties that all the world's philosophy is unable to still.

Conscience is the dread accuser of the wrongdoer, and conscience, without the restraint of divine mercy, is a terrible tyrant. There is no punishment more severe than that which we have power to inflict upon ourselves. To see your worthlessness, to know that you are wholly bad and helpless to make yourself better, to condemn yourself in utter disgust and self-despair has no healing virtue in it, no help for you and no balm to alleviate the pain. It is but the beginning of the eternal fire. People sometimes think because they call themselves hard names and inflict severe penances they have somehow made atonement for their evils. There is nothing in this. It is but the scorpion which spends its life in stinging others and then ends its life in stinging itself to death.

Chagrin and humiliation because of the deserved punishment of sin is another form of the vain suffering of the world. Many people are quite comfortable about their wrongdoing until it is found out. Then it looms up in lurid colors and the keenest suffering comes from wounded pride and the sense of humiliation before others. But there is no uplifting power in

this. It does not reform the criminal to degrade him and expose him. It only destroys the last lingering spark of manhood and drives him into deeper despair. God does not thus try to reform and save, but rather blots out the very remembrance of the evil and lifts us up again into confidence and hope.

The climax of the world's sorrow is despair. One of the illustrious statesmen of this land a century ago is said to have ended his life by repeating in tones of deepest anguish over and over again the one word, "remorse, remorse, remorse." But that remorse did not bring true repentance or take away one particle of the deep depravity of his soul. It is but the beginning of the worm that never dies and the fire that never shall be quenched.

We have several instances in the Bible of people who said, "I have sinned," and yet it did not save them. Pharaoh cried out, "I have sinned" (Exodus 9:27), but it was only because he wanted to escape the judgments of God which his sin had brought upon him. Saul said more than once, "I sinned" (see 1 Samuel 15:24), but it did not save him from going back and repeating his sin until at last he perished in his infatuation. Judas brought back the price of the Savior's blood and threw it at the feet of the Pharisees, crying, "I have sinned ... for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4), but Judas went headlong immediately afterwards to self-destruction.

We have many instances also of people that were sorry, but it did not make them better. Herod was very sorry that he had to behead his much respected friend, John the Baptist, to please an infamous woman and a bold, heartless girl, but he did it all the same, and brought upon himself the curse of innocent blood. The young ruler that came to Christ was very sorry that he could not accede to Christ's terms and part with all his earthly treasures and follow the Master. "He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (19:22). But his sorrow did not bring him back or lead him to true decision for God. He is sorry still, no doubt, for his fearful mistake, but his sorrow is that of the lost.

Sentiment will not save you; tears will not wash away your sin. The question asked of one who was bewailing his evil course may well apply to every one who reads these lines: "Sorry, are you, for what you have done? Well, are you sorry enough to stop?"

True repentance means more than a gush of emotion. It is a change of will, an altered attitude toward sin and God. Is that your attitude?

There are many kinds of godly sorrow besides true repentance.

1. There is the sorrow that God comforts, the trials that bring Him closer to us and reveal Him to us as "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). That is a beautiful promise in the Psalms, "He will be like rain falling on a mown field" (72:6). The grass has just been cut down by the gardener to prevent it going to seed and drying up at the root, but it is bleeding at every pore and the gardener pours water on it or the rain falls in healing showers and the wounds are assuaged and the roots refreshed, and, lo, it springs up again. So God loves to visit the wounded heart, and it is never until we have suffered that we really know Him in all the tenderness of His love and understand such promises as this, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13).

2. There is trial sanctified. The gardener mows that grass for its good and the Father chastens us "for our good" (Hebrews 12:10). That richly laden vine would have no fruit if it had not been cut back by the pruning knife, and so we shall some time thank God for our hours of deepest trial and the radiant memories of life's retrospect.

3. There is also suffering with Christ. The highest form of human suffering is fellowship with Jesus Christ in His burdens. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:29).

4. Then there is the sorrow for the sins of others. This is one of the sublimest heights of Christian love, to take on ourselves the load of another's wrongdoing and make intercession like Him who "had no sin [was made) to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and still bears upon His bleeding hands the names of sinful men in intercession before His Father.

This is why God sometimes has to let us know the bitterness of having some loved one go astray that we may know the Father's sorrow over His wandering child and the shepherd's grief for the poor lost sheep.

5. There is sorrow for our own sins. There is a place for repentance in every Christian experience. There must be a definite conviction of sin, a calling of things by their right names and a turning away from all evil and giving God the right to cleanse and destroy it. Then God not only forgives but cleanses and takes away from us its memory and power.

But this is not the terrible and hopeless sorrow of the world. It comes through a different process and from a different source. It is born of faith and love and not of doubt and fear. The truly contrite heart is sorrier for its sins after it knows that they are forever forgiven.

How beautiful are the Bible's pictures of repentance. Look at that woman weeping at the Savior's feet and bathing them with her tears of love, while the Master says "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47).

Listen to Zacchaeus standing among his acquaintances and declaring, "I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (19:8). What could be more beautiful, more inspiring, more encouraging than that kind of sorrow for sin?

Look at Peter turning his face toward his Master in the moment of his profane denial. He catches, not a withering look of anger, but a pleading glance of sorrow and love, and breaking away from the multitude he hurries out to hide his tears of uncontrollable anguish and sorrow for the wrong he has done his Savior.

Listen to the prodigal hastening home and crying upon his father's chest, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (15:21).

This is repentance, and it is almost the most beautiful thing in the world. No wonder that God says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17). "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

6. There is the sorrow that comes from a deeper sense, not merely of our actual sins, but of our sinfulness and lack of entire conformity to the will of God. As the light of self-revelation comes to the heart and we see ourselves as God sees us, there comes a deep, intense longing for purity and entire conformity to God. How finely this comes out in the 51st Psalm, which was David's cry when he saw his own heart in the light of his terrible fall. It was not that he was afraid of punishment, but it was the sense of having grieved God and lost spiritual purity and blessing.

How keenly Job felt this when the searchlight of God was let in upon his soul and he cried, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6).

How beautifully the Lord Jesus describes this in the fifth chapter of Matthew in the opening paragraphs of the Sermon on the Mount, where He pronounces the blessing first on those that are poor in spirit, that is, the souls that have seen their spiritual shortcomings, and then adds a similar benediction on those that mourn, that is, that mourn because of their spiritual poverty and are deeply affected by their shortcomings and failures. On such, the Lord says, there rests a great blessing, and to such surely comes the divine consolation.

7. Finally there are the fruits of godly sorrow. In the following verse the apostle describes the fruits of true sorrow for sin. "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter" (2 Corinthians 7:11).

"What earnestness [this godly sorrow has produced in you]," that is, what watching against the recurrence of a similar fall. "What eagerness to clear yourselves," that is, what honest, earnest efforts to undo any ill effects of our wrongdoing upon others. "What indignation," not against others, but against ourselves. "What alarm," that is, what godly fear and vigilance lest we should be again entangled. "What longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done," that is, what earnest resolve, by the grace of God, to retrace our steps over the same ground and recover all that we have lost.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

It is true that Paul did at one time regret having written the letter regarding the incestuous person, but now he no longer regretted it, because he found that the sorrow which that letter brought about was the sorrow of true repentance, rebounding in good, not injury (vs. 8, 9). It was not the sorrow of the world, but true godly sorrow, as was evident from its effects (vs. 10-12). **Explain the difference between worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow, and give the end results of each of these.**

Num. 21:7 2 Sam. 24:10, 17 2 Chr. 29:6 Job 13:23 Ps. 32:5, 10 Ps. 41:4 Ps. 51:1-4, 7-12 Prov. 17:22
Matt. 6:19-24 Matt. 19:22 Matt. 26:75 Luke 7:47 Luke 15:21 Luke 16:25 Luke 18:22-26 Luke 19:8 Heb.
12:5, 10 Jas. 5:1-3

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

The eighth and ninth chapters of this epistle unfold the scriptural principles of Christian giving with a fullness and clearness nowhere else to be found.

The subject of giving to God is here placed on the very highest plane, not as a secondary and merely incidental quality and exercise of religious sentiment, but as one of the cardinal graces of the Christian life. He commences his argument by referring to the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia as evidenced in their giving to God and their suffering brethren, and he places giving on the very same exalted level as faith, knowledge and love, so that one cannot be deficient in this grace without lacking the very essential qualities of the Christian character and life.

But while it is one of the graces of the Spirit, it is as free and spontaneous as every true fruit of the Spirit must be. It is not to be a mere matter of duty but of glad and heartfelt choice and even delight. "Their overflowing joy," he says, "and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.... Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (2 Corinthians 8:2-4). Ordinarily we expect to see a solicitor begging the people to give, but here we see the people begging with much entreaty that the apostle will accept their gifts and help them to distribute them to their needy brethren. Again in the next chapter we have a fine passage, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7).

It is a joy so great that it runs over in divine enthusiasm and hallelujahs of praise. Here we are distinctly taught that our giving is to be prompted not by our calculations of how little we can spare but by the impulses of our heart. Hence it is according to the purpose of the heart that our giving is to be gauged. The old proverbial exhortation that we should "give till it hurts" falls far short of the divine philosophy. Here we are taught that we should give till it doesn't hurt; and if we give enough to really reach and kill the core of our selfishness, it will slay the thing that hurts and make it a divine and eternal

joy. The old farmer who gave five dollars, and after he had left the altar felt so bad and was so strongly tempted to go back and get his five dollars and give one for it, took the right course when he grasped his old selfish nature by the throat and marching boldly back said to the collector, "Here, give me that five dollars," and handed out a 10-dollar bill instead, then turned on himself with a look of infinite scorn and triumph and exclaimed, "Now, old nature, squirm." He gave till it hurt and gave till it ceased to hurt. The people who give so grandly in these days for missions do it because of the overflowing joy that fills their hearts. It has ceased to be a sacrifice, for even sacrifice is swallowed up in love.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

How did the Lord who was rich beyond human measure, become poor (2 Cor. 8:9), and why?

Ex. 19:5 Deut. 32:9 Matt. 8:20 Eph. 1:7-8 Phil. 2:5-9 Rev. 3:18

In our own lives, what can bring about a giving spirit and a readiness of mind to serve the Lord cheerfully?

Ps. 37:4 Ps. 86:11 Prov. 23:15, 16 Matt. 6:11 Luke 6:38 Rom. 8:32 2 Cor. 9:7 Eph. 2:10 1 Thess. 5:16-18 2 Thess. 2:13, 14 1 Tim. 4:15, 16 1 Tim. 6:18, 19

How do we become partners with those who go to other parts of the world to sow the seed of the gospel in fields we personally could never visit?

Ps. 50:14, 15 Ps. 98:1 Ps. 105:1, 5, 42-45 Ps. 107:1, 2, 15, 22, 42, 43 Prov. 3:9, 10 Prov. 19:17 Luke 6:38 1 Thess. 5:18

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

"Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does" (10:3). There are conflicts in the name of Christianity which are not able to make this claim. When we try to serve God with an unsaved and unsanctified heart; when we endeavor to develop character by culture; when we try to build up the kingdom of God through social influence, intellectual power, skillful organization and financial methods without the Holy Spirit and the supernatural power of God, we are attempting to fight the battles of the Lord by the arm of flesh. And we will find it true, " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6).

The warfare in which we are engaged is the fight against sin, Satan and the world. The battlefield is very often within our own heart; the foe is invisible and the conflict is secret and all unseen by mortal eyes; but nonetheless is it intense and decisive for the issues of heaven and hell.

Indeed, it requires far higher qualities to stand true in the spiritual conflict than even upon the bloody battlefield, and "better . . . a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

The Strongholds

Our text speaks of the "strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4), which we may "demolish" (10:4) in this great warfare. The figure suggests the story of Canaan and the great strongholds captured by Joshua and his armies from the enemy. There were three especially that seem to be types of our spiritual conflicts. One at the commencement of their campaign, one at its next critical stage, and one at the end. Each of these involved a great advance movement.

The first of these was Jericho, and it had to be captured before they could enter the land at all. And so there is in every Christian life a stronghold at the very gateway of salvation, some besetting sin, some inveterate habit, some insuperable barrier. The second was Hebron, captured by Caleb after the land had been subdued. This represented the new advance movement to the choice possession of the land and may well stand for the strongholds that face us as we enter upon the deeper life.

There is always some crisis to be passed, some Hebron to be captured, some idol to be slain, some fight of faith to be won before we come into our inheritance of perfect love.

The third was far down in their national history long after Canaan had been won and when David had at length established his throne in Hebron. It was the stronghold of Jebus, afterwards known as Zion, and its heroic capture by Joab won for him the place of commander in chief of David's armies.

In like manner, there often remains late in our spiritual history some remaining stronghold which has not been captured from the foe. Perhaps it is a sick body, perhaps it is some victory over our circumstances; perhaps it is the salvation of some soul that has long remained obdurate, and when this is won our kingdom is complete.

Is God calling you, beloved friends, to some of these decisive battles, and waiting to cast down before you these strongholds of the adversary?

The Captives

Once more our text tells us of the captives of this conflict. "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Here the conflict seems to be confined to the battlefield of our minds and hearts. The foes to

be subdued are our wandering, wayward and sinful thoughts. Surely everyone who has known much of the fight of faith has found that there is nothing more necessary or more difficult than the subjection of our thoughts and imaginations. All evil begins in some mental conception or some impulse of the heart. Impure thoughts, vain thoughts, wandering thoughts, anxious thoughts, remorseful memories of the past or corroding cares for the future: how great a part these things play in the tragedy of human life! God has victory for us over our thoughts. He is able to keep our minds stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3, KJV). He is able to give "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), and "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Aggressive Warfare

Finally, there is the aggressive warfare against evil in others. "And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience" (2 Corinthians 10:6). But there is a limitation to this, "once your obedience is complete" (10:6). We cannot attack the sins of others till we have taken the plank out of our own eye. Our own spiritual and mental victory are essential for our influence over others. Therefore God has to keep back many a life from its highest calling until it has slowly achieved self-conquest.

May God help us to be willing to stand on the silent battlefield of our own hearts and win our victory, and then go forth "strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10), to fight the battles of the Lord and the world.

(The Christ of the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Explain the difference between defensive and offensive warfare in the spiritual battle.

Eph. 6:10-18

How do you know whether you are fighting the battle in the flesh or the spirit?

Rom. 8:2-17

Sometimes deceptive thoughts come flashing into our minds which we realize are not from God due to their very nature. Paul teaches that we are to cast down imaginations and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. **How then does Scripture teach that this can be accomplished?**

Ps. 5:8 Ps. 139:23-24 Ps. 143:10 Jer. 1:7-10 1 Cor. 1:19, 27-30 1 Cor. 2:16 Eph. 6:10-18

How did Joseph react when confronted with temptation?

Gen. 39:7-10

Who was Joseph's "inner" master at all times?

Gen. 39:21

2 Corinthians 10:7-18

There is marvelous power in the weakest of men when governed by a single purpose and filled with the consciousness and the power of God. Weak and contemptible in themselves, they are often the chosen channels through which God pours his living water. Any child could have destroyed Raphael's brush, but in his hand it painted immortal pictures. Incidentally the apostle remarks that some who criticized him bore themselves proudly, because their standard was so low. A five-foot man thinks himself tall when he compares himself with a dwarf! Always compare what is worst in yourself with what is best in others, and you will be kept humble.

Paul was always pressing outward to the fields that lay beyond. These were vast unoccupied regions which he coveted to count as provinces in the kingdoms of Christ. This is the supreme test of a man. It is comparatively easy to build on foundations laid by another Christian worker and to win away his converts. Such conduct is mean and cowardly. Open up new ground and show the stuff that's in you. The apostle was justified in making these affirmations, but he did so in the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

What is our need and our shortcoming if we know we are a Christian (born again) and yet lack confidence to walk and follow Christ as He taught us?

Jer. 39:18 Jer. 45:5 Mark 14:29-31 Rom. 12:1-2 Rom. 12:16 1 Cor. 3:18-23 2 Cor. 1:9-10 Heb. 10:35, 36

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

As the Bridegroom's friend, Paul was eager to bring the Corinthian church to the Bridegroom of souls. But false teachers disturbed the purity and simplicity of their faith, as in Eden Satan perverted Eve. There would have been excuse if these false teachers had given his converts another and a better Savior or a greater Pentecost; but since these were impossible, he was well able to hold his ground, even though they were preeminent apostles in their own estimation. Paul was very conscious of the crudeness of his speech, of which apparently he had many reminders, but he was equally conscious of the direct knowledge that God had imparted to him.

He acknowledges that he had not taken their pecuniary support, which in itself was quite legitimate; but he altogether denies the inference which his enemies drew that therefore he admitted his inferiority to the other servants of the cross. He answers that insinuation by saying that he expressly refrained from accepting gifts because of his desire to rob his critics of their argument that he was evangelizing the world for the purpose of making money. That they should make such wanton suggestions proved that they were Satan's emissaries.

In vivid language, which proves how greatly he had been moved, the apostle contrasts the false teachers with himself. They brought their disciples under bondage, exalted themselves, and lived in self-indulgence. He did not hesitate to unveil their true character and to designate them as emissaries of Satan. Satan conceals his deeds under the guise of an angel clothed in light; and as it is with him, so with his instruments. As their deeds are, so will be their end.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Much false teaching and preaching is being offered today under the guise of Christianity, and they claim that it is truth.

How can we detect when it is false, and yet positively know the truth?

Ps. 119:160 Prov. 2:3-10 Eccl. 3:11, 14 Eccl. 5:1 Eccl. 10:2 John 1:14, 17 John 8:32 John 14:6 2 Tim. 2:15, 16 Jas. 1:5, 6

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

It has been truly said that this enumeration represents a life which up to that hour had been without precedent in the history of the world. Self-devotion at particular moments or for some special cause had been often witnessed before; but a self-devotion involving such sacrifices and extending over at least fourteen years, in the interests of mankind at large, was up to that time a thing unknown. The lives of missionaries and philanthropists in later times may have paralleled his experiences; but Paul did all this, and was the first to do it.

The biography of the apostle, as told by Luke, comes greatly short of this marvelous description. Of the facts alluded to, only two—the stoning and one of the Roman scourgings—are mentioned in the book of the Acts; from which we gather that the book is, after all, but a fragmentary record, and that the splendid deeds of the disciples and apostles of that first age will be known only when the Lamb himself recites them from His Book. But even this enumeration omits all that the apostle suffered after the writing of this epistle, including, of course, the sufferings between his arrest and his appearance before Nero.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

What are some of the reasons why God allows obstacles and suffering to come into the life of a person who is faithfully giving out the message of Jesus Christ, as well as living it daily?

Acts 5:41 Rom. 8:18 2 Cor. 4:11-12, 16-18 1 Cor. 12:26 Gal. 3:4 Gal. 6:2 Phil. 3:8-10 1 Pet. 1:6-9 1 Pet. 2:20-21 1 Pet. 4:12-14 Jas. 1:2-6

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

He gloried in His divine revelations. What a disclosure he gives us of the high honor confided to him by the Lord!

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell (2 Cor. 12:2-4)

And this was no isolated instance, for he lived in the society of heaven. Again and again the Master's presence was vouchsafed for him in the critical moments of his life, and the Lord stood by him with words of encouragement and promise and with His mighty interposing providences.

What an honor men and women count it to be presented to an earthly king, perhaps once in a lifetime, and it is handed down to many generations as a family record! How the ambitious literary aspirants of the day covet the honor of telling of the friendship of a Gladstone, a Tennyson or some distinguished name; but Paul had the privilege of many an

audience with the very Court of Heaven and with the Sovereign of the universe. Indeed, he could always claim such an audience, and by the telephone of prayer connect without limitation with the heart of God. This is the highest honor that God can give to mortals, and "This is the glory of all His saints" (Psalm 149:9).

The apostle refers here to some special revelations from the Lord. God has already spoken to us through His Word, and we are not to wait for private revelations to know His will. And yet He does speak to the individual heart making the things of God intensely real, for "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). Such revelations as God sometimes makes to the waiting hearts of His children are not intended for other ears. The apostle distinctly says that what he heard was not lawful for a man to utter.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Could there be secrets which God tells us for encouragement and insight that are only meant for us? See Deut. 29:29, Deut. 34:10-12, Matt. 13:35. Will God Himself judge these secret things? See Eccl. 12:14 If a Christian truly desires a heart-to-heart intimacy with God enabling him to experience that sweet oneness with God, what first must be required of the seeking one? See Jer. 9:23-24, Rom. 12:1-2 and Phil. 3:8-10

2 Corinthians 12:5-10

The revelations which came to Paul were so extraordinary that there was danger of his mind becoming unbalanced, and therefore God gave, as a balance wheel to him, severe temptations. One particular test was permitted which is somewhat obscure in its exact character. It was "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me" (12:7). It may have been physical, it certainly was partly spiritual, and the effect of it was much humiliation. He asked the Lord for its removal, and he continued to ask again and yet again. But at length the answer came. God would not take away the trial, but would send additional strength through it and would be more to him than if the trial had been removed. Thereupon the apostle accepted it as a blessing in disguise and began to praise God for it, and even to glory in the very infirmities, reproaches and distress which seemed to hinder, but which became the occasion rather "so that Christ's power may rest on [him]" (12:9).

Trial reveals us to ourselves and shows us our weakness and nothingness. Then it reveals Christ to us and shows us His infinite resources until we hear Him saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

Trial develops and brings to perfection the fruits of the Spirit, deepening the soil and cultivating the garden of the great Gardener and bringing forth the sweetness and the strength of His grace. And trial brings to us the power of God and presents to the world the amazing spectacle of a soul elevated above all surrounding circumstances and conditions, in the hardest places and yet able to say, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (6:10).

It is easy enough to be pleasant
When life goes by with a song,
But the man worthwhile is the man who can smile
When everything goes dead wrong.

For the heart is tested by trouble
And it grows with the passing years;
And the smile that is worth all the treasures of earth
Is the smile that shines through our tears.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

What was it that Paul needed to keep uppermost in his mind while he was being afflicted, both mentally and physically?

Job 1:22 Job 5:8, 9, 18-22 Job 23:10-12 Job 33:28-30

Following are statements regarding afflictions, trials and hardships in Christians' lives. **Check the ones you believe are true, and place a question-mark after the ones you may doubt.**

Trials show us God's sympathy_____.
They cause us to seek God_____.
They bring us back to God and His Word_____.

They humble and purify us _____.
They are to be endured _____.
The Christian must not be moved by them _____.
These trials are sometimes intense _____.
They are of brief duration _____.
They cannot separate us from God _____.
Deliverance from them is promised _____.
Christians do need prayer in them _____.
They will be terminated at Christ's return _____.

Isa. 63:9 Hos. 5:15 Ps. 119:67 2 Chr. 33:12 Isa. 48:10 2 Tim. 4:5
2 Cor. 4:17 2 Cor. 1:8-10 Rom. 8:35-39 Jas. 5:13 2 Thes. 1:4-7

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

"The long burst of passionate self-vindication now at last expended itself," says Dean Stanley, and Paul returns to the point whence he diverged at 10:7, where he was avowing his intention to repress the disobedience of those who still resisted his authority at Corinth. "Now," he says, "my folly is over. That I should have indulged in it is your fault, not mine." What a comfort it is that he lays such repeated stress on his weakness! Instead of complaining of it, he used it as an argument with Christ that he should put forth more grace, and as an argument with his converts that the results of his work had been granted as the divine endorsement of his apostolate.

Paul felt that his paternal relation to this church gave him the right to rebuke them, as a father rebukes his children. But he realized that they did not reciprocate his love, probably because they permitted the evil things enumerated in the closing verses. Often moral dullness accounts for the decline and failure of love. Among other things, they had even accused him of getting money, if not directly, yet through Titus. But there were worse things still that needed to be dealt with, vv. 20, 21. Would that we were more often humbled to the dust by the sins of our brethren!

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Paul indeed showed godly patience and endurance continually in dealing with these Corinthians who persisted in ungodly ways, and resisted Paul's authority because of this behavior. Now as God's called Apostle, he demonstrates his right to be their judge and reprover. **Did this ever lessen his love for these people, and did he ever take money from them? Was all of his reproof "before God in Christ?"**

Matt. 7:1-5 Rom. 9:1, 2 1 Cor. 2:12-15 2 Cor. 2:1-4 2 Cor. 6:12-13 Gal. 6:2-5 Phil. 1:9-10 2 Tim. 2:10-13

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Once more Paul refers to the charge that his ministry was characterized by weakness. This deeply wounded him. He admitted that in his personal appearance and speech he might be all that his enemies averred, but he contended that weakness did not count when married to the divine. Was not Christ weak when he was crucified? Yet through that cross he has exerted his mighty saving power upon myriads! Through the weakness of death he passed to the right hand of power and bestowed the Pentecostal gift. Suppose, then, that the servant shared the weakness of his Lord. Might not the divine power work through his poor, weak nature as through the Lord himself? Let us not always be dwelling on our weakness and limitations; did not the divine fire tremble around the poor shrub of the wilderness?

Paul goes on to urge the Corinthians to prove—that is, to test—themselves by reminding them that unless they are reprobate, the Lord Jesus is truly and literally dwelling within them. This is the fundamental fact in a holy life. When we open our hearts, He enters and becomes in us the Life of our life and the Light of all our seeing.

Note the threefold benediction, which maintains the doctrine of the Trinity, v. 14. The love of the Father is the fountain of all; the grace of the Lord Jesus is the channel for all; while the communion of the Holy Spirit brings us into partnership with the aims and resources of God. The salutation of the saints and the divine benediction are the worthy close of this noble letter.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

What a mighty, yet at the same time consoling and corrective benediction this is from Paul. He gave proof positive that his teaching and directing were from Christ (1 Cor. 1:26-30, and 2 Cor. 4:7). And in so doing he warned them to test themselves to see if they were in Christ (without any disqualification). **What warning does this give us today, when sin of every kind is so rampant everywhere? And what danger is there for us if we should go forth proclaiming and witnessing the Word, without our continual check to see if our lives are in complete conformance to it?**

Ps. 26:1-3 Rom. 2:3-4 1 Cor. 4:15-16 Gal. 4:19 1 Thes. 5:21-24

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”
2 Corinthians 13:14